

Words Matter:
A Gospel Perspective about our Words
Colossians 4:2-6

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Text Introduction: We are focused this month on our words. I hope that by now you have been convinced and convicted that our words matter. We have looked at the power of our words in a general sense. James was our teacher. James used some word pictures to help us to understand the power of our words. He used the pictures of a bit in a horse's mouth and a ship's rudder to talk about the control of our tongues. He used the pictures of forest fires and the human body to describe how small things often lead to out of control disasters. James then used the pictures of springs and trees to attest to the truth that contradictions should not proceed from the mouth of the believer.

Last week, Bro. Ray, in my absence, shared with you some Proverbs about our words—God's general and practical word about our words.

Getting a little more specific, this morning, I want to consider with you an important application about our words—a Gospel perspective about our words. In short, if we are concerned about Gospel expansion, we will be careful about our expressions in everyday conversation and Gospel conversation.

Look with me at this text in Colossians 4:2-6.

Text: ² Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the message, to speak the mystery of the Messiah, for which I am in prison,⁴ so that I may reveal it as I am required to speak. ⁵ Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶ Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

Introduction: This section of Paul's letter to the Colossians starts back in Colossians 3:18. Paul, having addressed how Jesus holds all things together has now in this section begun to talk about how the Gospel impacts relationships. He has addressed the relationships of the home, the community, and now, finally here at the end, all relationships. He instructed the Colossians to be careful about their relationships to outsiders for these are the very ones that need to hear and respond to the Gospel. Paul understood that, in part, this was an issue of prayer. Paul knew that, in part, this was an issue of preaching, both his and others, including their preaching. And, Paul also knew that, at least in part, this was an issue of the overall health of the relationships that they had built with those they would be trying to convert to the Gospel.

All of this brings up some interesting perspective about our words. There seems to be two issues in this text. One issue has to do with all conversation. The other issue has to do specifically with Gospel conversations. The point is that there is not a lot of difference in the way that we deal with these two kinds of conversations. Because of this, Paul seems to move back and forth between the two conversations which gives us the freedom to do the same as we examine this text.

I want you to see two major things in these verses today.

Every conversation sets a foundation for Gospel conversations.

The issue in verses 5-6 starts out about all conversations before moving to specific Gospel conversations at the very end of verse 6. Paul's concern is that the words we use in every conversation have an effect when we get to Gospel conversations. In other words, we are always giving a witness about Jesus even when we are not intentionally witnessing. Think about these factors.

Our words matter in preparing people to hear the Gospel.

If your typical conversation is filled with profanity, you are destroying your future ability to converse about the Gospel. If your general conversation is filled with racism, you are destroying your ability to converse about the Gospel. But it doesn't stop there.

In fact to the Ephesians, Paul proclaimed:

No foul language (rotten talk) is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption. ³¹ All bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. ³² And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. (Ephesians 4:29-32)

The writer of Proverbs gave us this word as recorded in Proverbs 18:19.

An offended brother is harder to reach
than a fortified city,
and quarrels are like the bars of a fortress.

If we are partakers of the Gospel, we are partners of the Gospel.

You might be inclined to say, "But I'm not a preacher." You may not be vocationally a preacher, but you are a partner with all who preach, and we are all to be witnesses.

So, since we are family, when you speak, whether you want to or not, you speak for all of us.

Therefore....

Words not only have power, they hold eternal potential.

What if something you say is the very thing that keeps someone from responding to the Gospel? Was telling that joke worth it? Was that Face Book post worth it? You ask, "Does it really work this way?" I'm not willing to take the chance that it doesn't.

Paul noted that we are to "make the most of the time." Literally, Paul used an expression that means to buy back time. How do we buy back time? We use it wisely the first time.

But, there is a second implication.

Every Gospel conversation should follow basic Gospel convictions.

Our words matter not only in preparing people to hear the Gospel, but our words matter in presenting the Gospel.

This is also Paul's concern.

Our presentation of the Gospel should be . . .

- Filled with Compassion

"Be gracious" You have heard before the great definition of evangelism: "We are beggars telling other beggars where we found bread."

- Flavored for Practical Understanding

What is meant by "seasoned by salt?" It is a term that describes flavoring our words for purposes of understanding. While filled with compassion, our presentation must be filled with truth. It is not compassionate to not tell people the truth.

If people don't know what you are talking about, they cannot respond to what you are talking about.

I have been reading a book called *When Heaven Touched Earth* by Roy Fish. The book is about The Spiritual Awakening of 1858. The book really is a testimony to how prayer touched off that revival, but in it Fish tells this rather fascinating story about a preacher named Jabez Swan, a pastor in New York in those days. He was troubled by the lack of fruit that he was seeing in his ministry. He went away alone to pray about this for several days. Out of that prayer retreat he came away with what he believed to be a clear word from God. The word was that while he was judged by most to be a good preacher, the issue of his preaching is that "he was preaching beyond the understanding of his hearers."

Paul prayed that his preaching would be "salty"—flavored in such a way as to be understood by those who hear so that the Gospel could have a response.

- Fitting for each individual Person

"So that you may know how to answer each person"

So What?

Do your words help or hinder others to respond to the Gospel?

Henry Blackaby said, "What an incredible witness it is to a lost and fearful society when the Christian acts like a child of God."

Let us do so with our words.