

Walking in Wisdom

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to pivot now to our sermon series in Colossians, and we have two more weeks left. We've got this Sunday and next Sunday, and then Colossians ends, but then after that we're going! through a summer series in the book of Proverbs, which is going to be fun and exciting and hopefully very helpful as we learn to walk in wisdom in this life. So with regard to Colossians and where we're at, it's kind of the final section, and in this final section, Paul is speaking to the church in Colossae, about life under Jesus's lordship, and that kind of continues on. Today's passage, it turns our attention outwards. Like so far, we've seen life under Jesus's lordship of what it means to live in him, both personally, putting off the old self, putting on the new self, what it means for relationships within the church, between spouses, wives and husbands, and parents and kids, and then like, yeah, Elliot did a fabulous job last week in just talking about that bond servant master thing and kind of how that plays out in our lives today with regard to like work and all that. So that was beautiful and wonderful. Thank you for that, Elliot. Now as we turn our attention outwards, we have to consider what this passage gives to us, and it really gets into our basic responsibilities to spread the good news of Jesus to those outside the church. And there's one little phrase that Paul says that captures what we must seek to be doing. And he says, walk in wisdom to outsiders. This idea of walk in wisdom is kind of at the essence and the heart of what we're trying to get out today. And so today's sermon title is Wisdom for Our Witness, because we need that. We need that lest we fall into like two unhelpful ditches. One unhelpful ditch is that we're just apathetic toward the lost. We just could care less about them, and we think that's somebody else's job to care about. Or number two, we get very zealous about evangelism, and we turn it into a legalistic set of rules and behaviors that all must live up to.

There's one way, right way to do evangelism, and it's my way, and I'm going to show you how to do it, and don't veer from it. But if you do that, what in turn that creates is a moralism that ends up discouraging the hearts of sincere disciples of Jesus, and so we don't want to fall into this ditch. We don't want to fall into that ditch. So how do we avoid that? How do we avoid that and find joy in being given the privilege as disciples of Jesus to bear witness to him, to others?

So Colossians 4, 2 to 6. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison. That I, Paul, may make it clear which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. This is God's word. Would you mind just praying with me before we get into the sermon? Lord, we have heard your word that is true and alive.

It is powerful. Holy Spirit, I just pray that as I speak today, that you would lead and guide me. Lord, let my words be only those which reflect your truth and nothing else. Guard me against foolishness.

[3 : 3 6] Guard me against misleading anybody astray today. Lord, but in all of this, I pray that you would encourage us and strengthen us and give us a vision and an excitement for this amazing calling of being able to bear witness to you, Jesus Christ. We pray that in your name. Amen. So as we begin, I just want to say that first and foremost, thinking in reference to this passage we read, the overarching Christian ethic that Paul offers in this passage, and I do believe one that the rest of the Bible supports is this. All are called to evangelism, but it will look different based on calling and gifting.

Paul doesn't go on to describe in detail here how every Christian must go about talking to others about Jesus. You can go a step further and say that he doesn't put his own calling as an apostle from God. He doesn't put that on the Colossian believers. See, Paul has, he has a robust understanding around calling and gifting and how that works within the body of Christ, the body of

Jesus, the church. And in one sense, he would say, yes, we share in this common calling to bear witness about Jesus to outsiders, to that we may glorify him, enjoy him, and make his salvation known among the nations. That's our like general calling we're all called to do. But he understood that it gets worked out differently through the individual members of the body. First Corinthians 12 is a great passage on that. We're not going to read the whole thing, but in essence, in summary, it talks about the different members where the body is made up of different members, different parts, and how we actually need each other. And the eye can't say to the hand, I don't need you, or the eye can't say to the hand, you need to function exactly like I function. The body needs the eye as much as it needs the hand, and it needs it functioning in their own unique way and for the purpose that they were created to function, for the body to be whole and healthy and strong as it should be. And you see in both

Romans 12 and first Corinthians 12, both things about the different gifts that the spirit gives to the church among its individual members. And it says that the spirit gives them in a variety of gifts to different people, but not just the kind of gifts he gives, but a different measure of those gifts as well. See, Paul, if you look at him, he has this large measure as an apostle. He has this this apostolic gift in like large measure, and also you could look at his life and say, man, he had some a large measure of an evangelistic gift as well. He was like the spiritual version of special forces.

Like he's the guy that was like, hmm, that looks crazy and dangerous. Let's go there. That was him. He's the guy who was dragged out of a city for preaching the gospel to be stoned and left for dead, and he gets up and goes right back in to preach the gospel again. That's Paul, all right? That's who he is.

That was his calling. That's how God made him. Now, an unwise conclusion, if we read that passage, would be like, hmm, I gotta have that same burden and willingness as Paul to sacrifice and spread the gospel in that same way. But that misses the point of God's diverse callings in a church body. Do we need the likes of a Paul and that kind of gifting and that special kind of calling on somebody's life, the kind that can pioneer the gospel into new and treacherous places?

Absolutely. But God doesn't place that calling on someone who is a shy wallflower who may find it extremely intimidating to engage with a perfect stranger. And yet, in their shy gentility, they might still be super helpful.

[7 : 18] They might come alongside someone to carry a burden or meet a friend and hear what is going on and offer them prayer and kindness toward them. They may find it invigorating to sit over a coffee for hours on the end to someone to empathize with their fears and struggles and offer comfort and hope in Jesus Christ. Now, that is an amazing calling. And I would say, if you said that to an evangelist type, an apostolic type, that that's how they must conduct their lives, you know what? To them, nothing would sound more terrible and draining.

They'd take the danger and the stoning and the preaching to crowds way over coffee and tears in a one-on-one setting. And that doesn't make anybody better than the other person. Both people have their unique gifts and strengths and personalities from God, and both are equally precious in God's eyes.

Interestingly, God sees it fit to have more of one kind in the church than the other. That large apostolic evangelistic gift, it tends to be very rare. You don't see a lot of those kinds of people. There's not like a lot of Billy Grahams walking around, right? And often it's because, man, those people, their personality is like way up here.

There are a lot. And if you filled a church with a bunch of those kind of people, the intensity would just be too much to bear for the average person. The apostles, the evangelists, those types of folks, they need those more temperative spirit, just like those more temperative spirit can and should appreciate the apostolic evangelistic gift as it is operating in and through different parts of the church, different members of the church.

And why am I laboring this point, you may ask? Because it's an important foundational truth to build on so we don't discourage God's children and put them into bondage under the banner of evangelism for the sake of just saving a few more people, because that would just lack wisdom.

[9 : 24] Don't try to be what God hasn't gifted and made you to be, and don't let others do that to you. So, now having established that kind of Christian ethic on evangelism, let's pivot to what Paul teaches in this passage about the two ways we are to walk in wisdom as we spread the good news of Jesus.

And we see in verses two and three and verses three to six that evangelism involves two necessary actions that are actually indivisible from one another. The first is speaking to God about people, and the second is speaking to people about God. And the order here is important. I think Paul was very strategic in that he gave the first command before the second, because both are absolutely necessary.

Here's the thing, friends, prayerless evangelism will be as ineffective as speechless evangelism. See, what happens in prayer, what we're doing in prayer is in prayer we connect with God, and we're connecting with God who is working on our own hearts, as we are, in a sense, behold, going to him, beholding his glory, being satisfied and saturated in his goodness and his love. And it's in that place, knowing God and beholding him and seeing him for all that he is, and his grace and mercy and love for us, it strengthens our resolve and our passion for others to know his glory and his goodness and his grace and his love as well. Before we preach the gospel to others, we need to experience it over and over in ourselves all the time.

Then we move out from there. The gospel movement for every Christian goes in this order. We look up, and from looking up, we look in, and then from looking in, we look out. We look up, we look in, we look out. That is the gospel movement of our lives. We look up to see God and all that he is, and then from there, we see our need for God's grace in our own lives, and we're aware of our failures. And so from there, we can start to walk in humility, both for ourselves, but towards others as well.

And from there, we can go out and share the good news with others in a wise and humble way. [11:35] See, prayer is preparation. Now, it's more than preparation. Like, prayer is powerful, and God is doing stuff in the heavenly places that we can't see, and somewhere down the road, all those prayers come to manifest through God's timing and purpose and plan, but prayer is preparation for us too. It fills us with faith and boldness to be a witness.

But you know what else it does? It increases our awareness as well. Paul says, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ. Continue steadfastly. Be watchful in it.

And here's what I think we can take from this, is we pray for people. We pray for people, and we pray for open doors, because we tend to notice what we pray for.

You know, whenever I pray for God's provision for like a church building, right, I start to notice a lot more real estate signs when I drive around town. Right? I start to notice the open door opportunities that are out there.

[12:49] In my 20s, I prayed for job promotion and salary increase. And praying into that, I suddenly started to notice, and my ears were open to hear about the different job postings and job opportunities in my industry, both in my company and in other companies around the United States.

I was looking, I began to be very aware of those open door opportunities. See, what you watch for in prayer becomes what you observe more in life.

And it's good and true that we respond to burdens with persevering prayer, right? But is it not also good and true that we respond to a lack of burden with persevering prayer? See, there are some things that we shouldn't be overly burdened with, right?

Like, we shouldn't have burdens of guilt and shame because of sin. Like, God doesn't call us to carry those burdens. But there are some things that we should be burdened with. For example, in God's household, we are called to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6, 2 says that, right? The point is, not every burden is unholy. And I would argue that a burden for the lost is actually a good one. It is a holy one that God calls us to bear.

[14:05] To have zero burden for the lost doesn't seem right according to the testimony of Scripture, nor does it seem to align with the Father's heart. But also, don't take that to mean you must have this crippling anxiety that crushes you because of this burden for the lost.

Remember, Jesus says, man, take my yoke upon you. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. See, holy burdens don't crush us. They are convictions that compel us with God's love for others.

Holy burdens don't mean crushing hopeless despair, nor do they motivate us by guilt. What they're doing is they're motivating us by love. As you and I pray, as we persevere in prayer, what we're doing is we're getting pulled into the Father's heart.

And if that is true, we're drawing closer and closer to the Father's heart. The Father cares. The Father loves and he cares and loves the lost as well. And we're going to start to pick that up. We're going to start to be burdened for those same things.

Love is the greater motivator. I was recently at a place listening to a guy talk to a bunch of pastors about evangelism.

[15:12] And this particular pastor is like a true blue Southern Baptist guy. And he made the point that in the SBC, they love, they're like, they are the champions of getting the gospel to the globe, right?

But according to the data, they're second in global evangelism, and they have been for decades. And he's like, you know the denomination that's always beating us? He said, the assemblies of God.

And here's the best thing that he could chalk it up to. He's like, look, when we go to a Southern Baptist convention on evangelism, we get all the charts and the graphs.

We get all the data about all the people that don't know Jesus around the world and how much they need him. And if we don't go there, they're going to be going to hell. They may even like during that time show sad faces with Sarah McLaughlin playing behind in the arms of the angels, right?

Just like, but you go to an AOG convention on evangelism, and they're worshiping and they're praying and they're glorifying God and they're trusting in the Spirit.

[16:16] And they're talking about God's love for the nations. And actually that with a person with this Holy Spirit's presence can be an effective witness for Jesus. His conclusion was this.

It seems that knowing the need doesn't motivate as well as knowing God's love. Like guilt never beats gifting, is what he said.

To be watchful in prayer means that we are persevering in prayer. That is the first step in evangelism. That's why Paul put it there on the front end.

Persevere in prayer. Continue steadfastly in prayer. What we, you and I must be doing is going to the Father and speaking to him about people.

There's a card and a pen on your seat. And what I want you to do over the course of this sermon is start to write names down of people you know personally.

[17:14] Maybe they are neighbors, coworkers, family, friends that are unsaved. And I want you to write their names down because at the end we're going to, during communion time, you're going to put them in those silver pails that are on the communion table.

We're going to create a list of all those people and we're going to commit to praying for them. We're going to persevere in prayer for the lost in hopes that God is going to do some stuff. In us as well as in them.

Prayer is a powerful and integral part of evangelism, but it's not the only part of evangelism.

Because we need to be willing to speak to people about God as well.

After all, as Paul said, how will they know unless they hear? Colossians 4, 3-4 and verse 6 says, 2 to Colossians, Paul says, I need to declare the mystery of Christ.

Pray for me because I need to declare the mystery of Christ that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak. And then he goes on in verse 6 and he's speaking to the Colossian believers.

[18:17] Hey, for you Colossian believers, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Few are called and gifted to preach with clarity.

All are called to give a gracious, tasteful response as the opportunity arises. As one commentator puts it, there is a difference between direct evangelism and a Billy Graham style.

And responsive evangelism. Not everyone is called to be a preacher, to go in and mind the depths of scripture, prepare a sermon, and has a natural gift to speak as one ought to.

So that the mystery of Christ can be made clear. Not everyone has that gift. And there's a big difference in expectation that Paul has for himself and for the Colossian believers here.

But yet there still is an expectation. The burden that drives us to prayer is the burden that drives us to be ready to give a response. You know, it's interesting.

[19:24] I was thinking about this as I was preparing the sermon. And all my church experiences, I'm a pastor, son, I grew up in church. All my church experiences, to include ours as well, is that we don't really train on readiness to give a response.

And we typically narrow evangelism to that idea of direct proclamation. We got to be like the people that have the gift to do that, they're the ones out there doing it.

And I think it's to our own detriment. We got to get better at equipping everybody in the seats to be able to give a response and be prepared. And that's good. Because what can happen is you can

miss out when the opportunity arises.

Or we just get so narrow, we think the only way to do evangelism is from a stage or out on a street corner doing it. So I have this experience. I'll share this funny story about my own self. I think I was about 14 at the time.

And again, I already gave in on the inside track there. My dad was a pastor. I grew up in his church. And so I went to service Friday night, Saturday night, and Sunday morning.

[20 : 24] We had three services. I was at every single one of them with my dad. And so by the age of 14, I had a lot of church underneath my belt, right? So around that time, they decided, hey, let's do an evangelistic outreach.

And so one of the guys in the church, he owned a construction company. He had this massive flatbed. And they decided, you know what would be good is, and again, this is early 90s, mind you. Let's get some amplification on there.

And we'll park it in a very busy place. And we will do some worship. And then somebody's going to preach a message. And whoever's there is just going to hear it, right? Probably something that worked well in the 70s during the Jesus People Movement in Orange County, California, right? So they've done that a couple of times. They approached me and say, hey, Jesse, you want it? We called it the truck of truth, by the way, okay? All right. They say, Jesse, you want to come join us for the truck of truth?

You know, I was like, what does that mean? Oh, we just drive around. We do this. You can help us set up. And I was like, sweet. I don't have to sit in a service like my, you know. Sweet. I'll get out there and I'll do that. That's awesome. So we park in this place in Berea, California, at like a busy shopping area where people are just going all over the place.

[21 : 42] And they, guy gets up there and plays some music. And it's not that great. And he's not a great singer. But they're doing some songs. And then he looks at me and says, Jesse, why don't you get up here and evangelize?

I'm like, nobody taught me how to do that. Nobody prepared me how to do that. I was just supposed to do this on the fly. So here I am. I'm like, and I could have just said no, but I just didn't.

So I was like, all right, well, let me try this out. Whatever. And again, before then, I've had like two other occurrences speaking in front of people, which is in a classroom I blacked out both times and couldn't finish.

All right? Wasn't a great public speaker. So I start and I'm like, my name's Jesse and I love Jesus. And, you know, there's sin and the blood and the, and I think somebody was probably walking past thinking like I'm confessing to committing a murder at this point.

You know, they're kind of speed walking past and get, let's, let's get far away from this as much as possible. And so I wrap it up. I probably couldn't have spoken more than two minutes. I thought it was like, you know, 15 minutes and I was dying a thousand deaths along the way.

[22 : 46] And at the end, I concluded, you know, my calling is to sit behind a computer screen for a long time. Now, God has a sense of humor.

But the point is, is they never equipped me and they never trained me. They didn't do any of those things. And their idea of evangelism was get on a truck and speak to a huge crowd. Here, Jesse, go for it.

Good luck. Well, I was not encouraged at the end of that. I was not, let me do that again. I was like, how can I never, ever do that again? And that's not helpful.

We need to up our game, I think, as a church on equipping you for wisdom for your witness out there as you go about your life. Being ready to give a response. And this isn't me trying to say like, hey, you better get out there and do it or else.

There's no motivation by guilt. This kind of equipping what it can do, it can help us grow in confidence. Any kind of training does that. Our boys grew in confidence to speak in front of people because they were given tools of how to write a good speech.

[23 : 50] And then also tools of how to give a good speech. And then they got to practice it over and over again throughout the years. Writing and speaking in front of their class. And they got more and more comfortable because of that.

And I'm not saying that's what we're going for. We're not like, I don't have this big vision for a truck of truth. Okay, that's not what I'm going for here. But if someone asks you, why are you a Christian?

It would be good to be able to give a helpful response. Paul says our speech should be gracious and salty. No doubt when we give a response for what we believe, it is going to stir up some hesitation, maybe even some argument or kickback.

And so we need to be gracious. That grace needs to guide our tongues to continue to respond to those objections with kindness and patience.

But gracious words need to be balanced with salty words. And I don't mean by salty, I don't mean we need to have, we don't need to be witty and snarky with our answers. No, salt's job is to elevate flavor.

[24 : 59] Salt makes the food more interesting and exciting to the palate. And a good response can do the same, all the while being gracious. Grace and salt are this great balance for how we, as Paul says, we ought to give an answer when the opportunity arises.

Now, a good exchange with a neighbor or a co-worker may not end in you leading them in the sinner's prayer. But it could leave them with a tastiness in their heart and soul that says, hmm, I want to eat there again.

I want to learn more about that. Now, if you kind of approach evangelism with like the ABCs of sale always be closing, people were going to feel that. They're going to notice that.

They're going to start to avoid you. I had a friend who got into one of those like businesses that like you recruit all your friends to join and also buy all the products, right? And it's like it always starts with I have this great business opportunity for you, right?

And so he got into this thing and he was in the church and he just started to like filter all through his relationships in the church. And news start to spread pretty quick amongst us that like, hey, this guy, if he looks at you and he starts walking towards you, he is on, he's got one thing going on.

[26 : 14] And so you're like, it would be wise to steer clear. No one, the point is nobody wants to feel like a target. Nobody wants to be somebody's trophy. So let's not use people, let's not use evangelism to build our spiritual resume to impress those inside the church.

Like, look at all these notches in my Bible that I got. But also let's avoid complacency and apathy toward the outsider. Walking in wisdom for a witness means, one, understanding and living within your calling and gifting in God.

It means also that we persevere in prayer for the lost. And also that as doors open, we start to, as we see those opportunities, as those doors open, that we can respond with grace and patience with a compelling flavor that fits the gospel.

And don't always be closing on people, right? It is not your job to force them to be saved. You can give them a good response and trust the Holy Spirit.

See, our calling is to share Jesus while entrusting the saving part to him. Thank goodness that bit is not up to me and you. And it's important not to forget that.

[27 : 27] Because you can have this idea of like, well, gosh, I've shared this with my friend or shared this with my family member a few times and nothing's happened. I must not be doing something right and I must not be sharing it right.

And we can really put a lot of like undue guilt and burden on ourselves of like, man, it's up to me to do this. I just got to figure the right thing out to say and do and be. You know, it's funny.

Over the years, I've seen people get saved in response to sermons that like I wanted to fall asleep at. And I've seen people not respond at all to the most eloquent of presentations of the gospels where like for me personally, I felt like I was being saved all over again if that were possible.

It's this like crazy mystery that God works in. It's a wonderful mystery actually. In what God is able to work through.

Today is one of those days that's more about the method of evangelism and the motivation for evangelism. And it doesn't really get into the message about what the message of evangelism.

[28 : 40] And yet, still, it's not going to keep me from offering it up in the case that God wants to save someone today. And I don't know how anybody in this room could feel any kind of sense of like, oh, wow, God's calling me to believe in him today.

And yet, maybe that's happened during the last hour that you've been in this room. Maybe you have noticed some kind of call on your heart to come to Jesus and put faith in him.

And as the band comes up, I want to say to you, our great hope and our great message of evangelism is this. Jesus died for sinners just like you and just like me.

And sin has consequences. For sure in this life, but also after this life. And without Jesus, after this life, there is no life with God.

And that isn't going to be a good one. Jesus came to make a way. He came to live a sinless life and to die a sinner's death in your place so that you can live with him forever.

[29 : 46] Let me tell you about my own story. Jesus took a pastor's son like me who grew up knowing all the right things about Jesus. But I was full of the sin of self-righteousness, looking down on others, of judging those who didn't go to church, didn't do all the right things as I thought the right things were.

But at the age of eight, he made it very known to me that I needed salvation from my sins. I stood in the presence of a holy God. And when I repented and surrendered, a great fear in his presence gave way to a great love and peace that flooded my soul.

Do you have a story like that? Do you want to have a story like that? Do you want to know Jesus? And if that's you and that is hitting you uniquely, there's going to be a prayer on the screen for you to pray in response to that.

And you can come grab me or Elliot, one of the other pastors here today after the service, and talk with us about all that's going on in your heart and how you're responding to God in this moment.

Now, if you're already a follower of Jesus, as we prepare ourselves to take communion, I just want to encourage us to pray with thanksgiving, like Paul says here.

[31 : 12] We get to pray with thanksgiving. That you are saved by Jesus. That you are, in one sense, the object of God's grace. But you know what?

In addition to that, you are also the medium of his grace to others. In communion, we're doing two things simultaneously. We are declaring Jesus's death that saved us.

Excuse me. And we are partaking. As we're partaking it, we're also proclaiming his saving work until he returns.

And as we come to the table to take the bread and the cup back to our seats, bring that card where you wrote the names on and put it in the silver pails.

And then you can take the bread and the cup back to your seat and take communion when you're ready. Excuse me. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your heart.

[32 : 12] For us, your grace and kindness over us. Your heart for the lost. And we admit, Jesus Christ, that we sometimes can grow apathetic towards those outside the church.

Those who aren't saved. Those who are yet to be saved. And so, Lord, we pray that you would stir in us a heart for that, Lord God. Lord, as we come to your table today, Lord, we come with thankfulness that you are a God who stepped into this story, who stepped into you and put on flesh, became like us in every way and saved a sinner such as me.

And we thank you for that, Lord God. And we, Lord, we want to continue to proclaim that truth until you return. Amen.

Thank you.