

**Text:** Colossians 4:5-6

**Title:** Wise Conduct and Gracious Speech

**Truth:** The believer must walk and talk in a way that honors God.

**Date/Location:** Sunday January 17, 2016 at FBC

## Introduction

The previous verses have addressed specific matters of personal conduct, conduct in the church, life in the family and home, and toward God in prayer. The last general instruction in the letter (before greetings and final words) has to do with our conduct toward those who are outside the church.

## I. Wise Conduct

- A. Walk. You are probably familiar with how this word is often used by Paul to express how life is to be conducted, how we are to behave. It is always made more specific by following words. In this case *wisdom*.
- B. Wisdom. This refers to the godly application of Scriptural knowledge to specific situations in life. It has been well said that wisdom is different than knowledge, for you can have a lot of knowledge and little wisdom about how to use it.
  1. God wants us to know His mind on things, thus we must know the Bible.
  2. Then, because Scripture does not spell out for us the step-by-step in every situation, we have to take that Word and apply it. There is a worldly kind of wisdom which takes principles from the world and skillfully applies them (in the view of unbelievers) to do worldly things. We are NOT talking about that.
  3. Paul already emphasized that he tried to conduct his ministry in wisdom (Col. 1:28), and he prayed that believers would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (1:9), and he told them to permit the word of Christ to be at the center of their church services, wisely teaching and admonishing one another from the Bible. Paul mentions worldly religious wisdom in Colossians 2:23.
- C. Toward outsiders.
  1. This refers to unbelievers, those outside the church. The Bible is assuming here that if you have read this far in Colossians and the Bible, you understand that Paul is speaking to professing believers and

there is a “code of conduct” that derives from God’s righteousness. He is not speaking to unbelievers to try to get them to behave “up to par.” That is impossible apart from God’s work in one’s heart, eliciting a response of repentant faith in Christ.

2. If we are to have wise conduct toward outsiders, it goes without the Bible saying that we should have the same toward “insiders.”
  3. Christians need to have wise conduct toward outsiders, not only to avoid being drawn into their unbelieving philosophies and practices, but to draw them into the fold of the faith.
- D. Redeeming the time. What does this mean? Saving it? Buying it? It means making the most of every opportunity that time affords. In other words, it is not some strange idea about buying abstract time. It speaks of what we choose to do with the time we have toward outsiders. There is a menu of choices we have when it comes to interacting with unbelievers, and some of those choices are bad, and some are not sinful, and others are very good in that they can accomplish something for the sake of the gospel. See Daniel 2:8 for a negative example of this idea.
1. Ephesians 5:16 says a similar thing, and adds the reason “because the days are evil.” The times are perilous; they present every opportunity to do evil, but we are to make the most of it to do good for God.
  2. Following as it does Paul’s prayer request that he would speak the gospel clearly, an important element of how we redeem time is that we use it for the sake of the gospel.

## **II. Gracious Speech**

Part of walking is talking. The Bible gives us instruction on that too.

A. With grace. Grace does not refer to attractive or wishy-washy or indirect speech. It is completely compatible with speaking truth authoritatively like Jesus did (Luke 4:32). It refers to God’s kind of grace, a disposition or attitude toward someone that is filled with benevolence, favor, help, goodwill, and care. So much human speech is filled with the opposite of those things. Let our speech be like God, in that He extended loving favor toward us that we did not deserve. Our talk with all people should give an aroma of the same kind of grace.

B. Seasoned

1. To season means to add condiments to something. It results in a different taste of the thing seasoned.

2. Our speech therefore must have a different taste than it did before salvation. Is your speech like bad breath, or does your speech taste like a food you cannot stand to eat? Speech has to have a different effect after salvation than it did before.
3. Speech comes from your heart (see Matthew 12:34, Luke 6:45, and James 3:11). Because of this, seasoning of our speech has to happen well before it is served. You cannot just listen to this sermon and say, “I’m going to make an extraordinary effort to sprinkle some salt on my speech as it exits my mouth, at those moments, and then I will be doing what God wants me to do.” You can try, but it will never work, because it is putting the salt on too late, after the speech has already been cooking in your heart for a while. Seasoning is not like sprinkling salt and pepper on something the moment before you gobble it down. It is like marinating and pre-seasoning or salting for preservation and storage. It has to be prepared like a good meal. To drop the metaphor, you must prepare your heart to put out the right kind of speech. It has to be salted in your heart long before it comes out. That will affect its taste as it exits your mouth.

### C. With Salt

1. The Greek dictionary by Bauer suggests the definition of salt as “interesting and fruitful.” This is not even close to correct.
2. Some of us talk like our speech is seasoned with a salt that stings, like salt when it is applied to an open wound. But the good sense of salt is that it is a preservative. It is pure, not corrupt (so our speech, Eph. 4:29). It keeps things from rotting. Believers are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). Without righteous people, the world rots. But if believers begin to be “watered down” so that they live no differently or “taste” no different than the world, then what is the benefit of their existence to the world? Nothing!

**Applications:** In your marriage, with your children, avoiding gossip, etc.

### D. Purpose: To know how to answer each one

1. The ‘how’ does not emphasize the content of the answer (‘what’), but rather the manner of the answer. This verse is not teaching specifics on *what* to say in any situation—that has to be gleaned from other passages of Scripture as you learn godly wisdom. This verse instead teaches a general approach in our speech as we interact with other people. And yes, it is true that *how* we say something is just about as important as *what* we say!

2. Because of the surrounding context, the command probably emphasizes our speech toward outsiders, that is, people who are not members of the church, unbelievers. That doesn't reduce our responsibility in speech toward believers—it actually heightens it!
  3. There is a way that Christians OUGHT to speak to others. It is necessary for believers, in other words, to talk right. Check out James 3, Romans 3:13, Heb. 13:15, and 1 Peter 3:10, and Colossians 3:8. There are many other passages of Scripture that deal with our speech, and I encourage you to sit down and find more of them, really study them carefully, and ask God to help clean up your speech. I'm not just talking about swear words that sometimes "accidentally" pop out from your heart and what's left of its worldliness, but also harsh, cutting words, or sarcastic speech, or other unloving forms of communication that hurt people or reflect an attitude of ungodliness.
  4. The idea of answering to each one indicates that our speech cannot be boilerplate, cut-and-paste text. It has to be tailored to each individual and situation in a wise way. Our answers should address their questions. We should be ready to respond to particular inquiries about our faith (1 Peter 3:15). If we can't, we need to get a little more salt in our diet!
- E. Because salvation gives us a new heart, it should also quickly affect our speech. When we recognize the close connection between our heart and our mouth, we will desperately want to have our speech be righteous and life-giving rather than sinful and damaging.

## Conclusion

Six months ago we started our study of Colossians. We're not quite done yet, but we have traveled through the majority of the letter.

We have learned about the right Christian knowledge, regarding the preeminence of Christ and the reconciliation that He offers; about the mystery of the gospel; about our completeness in Christ and that we must eschew the worldly principles of legalism and asceticism.

We also learned about the right Christian walk, which includes first of all a heavenly mindset, putting off the works of the old man, and putting on the works of the new man. These good works include conduct in the church and family and work and prayer and witness to the outside world.

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