



# Advertising the Church

[4:5, 6]

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*“Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person” (4:5, 6).*

How did the church in Colossae tell its community about Jesus? How did they get the message out? They had no church building, no loud speakers, no billboards, no Christian radio stations, no signs, no bumper stickers, no Yellow Pages, no tracts, no books, no New Testament. They had none of those things we have come to consider crucial in advertising the church in the community. How did they get the message out?

They got the message *in*; then they lived it *out* day by day. That was, and still is, the only credible method of evangelism in the world. Walk, and then talk. You can use television, radio, billboards, and bumper stickers all you want; but if Christians do not live the new life, nobody will buy our message. That is why the resurrection lifestyle is not optional for the church. The way a believer lives drastically affects the church’s ability to penetrate society.

Evangelism and a resurrection lifestyle center around two things of equal importance: your conduct and your conversation. If both do not show evidence of the risen life, then you will be seriously hampered in your efforts to share your faith with others. In Colossians 4:5, 6 Paul gave

two imperatives for Christians: one concerning our conduct, the other concerning our conversation.

## OUR CONDUCT (4:5)

Paul first addressed our conduct: “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity” (4:5). What you do gives credibility to what you say. As Emerson once observed, “Your life speaks so loud, I can’t hear what you’re saying.”

What did Paul mean when he instructed Christians to conduct themselves with wisdom? If we use wisdom, we see our situation as God sees it and then act accordingly. We will consistently apply biblical principles to every facet of our daily living.

We can do that because this kind of wisdom is already available to each Christian. Earlier Paul noted:

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will and in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects (1:9, 10a).

You have been saved. You have been given divine wisdom. You need to be controlled by that wisdom so that you walk according to its dictates.

In the early 1900s, William Houghton was called to Georgia to serve as the minister for a

religious group in Atlanta. A certain man in that city did not think much of Christianity in general and of preachers in particular, so he hired a private detective to follow Houghton for a few weeks to “dig up some dirt” on the man. Later, to the man’s surprise, the detective reported that he could uncover nothing wrong with Houghton’s conduct. The man’s life matched his preaching.

While no one will probably go to such lengths to check you out, folks will still personally take inventory of how you act in their presence. We need to be careful never to behave in a way that would make it difficult to share the gospel with others. If a Christian walks like a fool and then tries to talk, nobody will believe him. Nobody will listen. How do Christians turn their backs on wisdom? The New Testament indicates several ways Christians can walk in foolishness rather than wisdom.

One is for Christians to live selfishly:

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic (James 3:13-15).

When a Christian’s life is marked by envy and selfish ambition, he is acting foolishly. Divine wisdom does not control his behavior. We are to live for others, to seek their welfare before that of our own.

We also live foolishly when we live for money: “But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9).

An inordinate occupation with getting money and the things it will buy takes your focus off what has eternal value. It warps your priorities and thereby confuses your testimony. No one else will understand you when you try to tell them about the need to live for Jesus.

Deliberate ignorance of God’s will is yet another way Christians can follow the way of foolishness. “So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17). When God has revealed what He expects of His children and we do not take time to

carefully study that revelation, then we are certain to act foolishly. To walk in wisdom requires time in the Word of God, time to study passages relating to our particular situation.

Prayerlessness on a believer’s part is foolishness: “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). To face each day without consulting with God for insight and wisdom guarantees foolish living. God is the fountain of wisdom. Fail to spend time with Him, and you cannot help but walk in ignorance.

These are just a few of the ways Christians can be foolish instead of wise. In all of this Paul is concerned that we act properly in our relationship with those who do not yet know Jesus as Savior but who are forming opinions of Christianity based on their observation of our lives. They take note of how we act around them and toward them. Nothing in our conduct should jeopardize our testimony about Jesus.

That is the defensive side to our conduct. There is also an offensive side: “. . . making the most of the opportunity” (4:5b). Paul literally was saying, “Buying up the opportunity.” He was using an expression drawn from the business world of his day. The phrase was used of a merchant who found a great price on a product and purchased the seller’s entire stock. We might say he “cornered the market.”

Imagine holding some stock that hits an all time high on Wall Street. You tell your broker, “Sell!” A couple of weeks later he gets around to it. That would be stupid, would it not? Stockbrokers have more sense than that, or they would not have their job very long. When you call, the time to act is *now*.

When opportunity comes knocking, says the apostle, the time to share your faith is right then. We are to make the most of that opportunity. Life is short. People are dying. Jesus is coming in judgment. We will not have forever to share the gospel. Let us buy up the opportunities while we have them.

Recently I looked into changing some of my insurance policies. In the process, I began to develop a friendship with an insurance salesman in my community. While we were talking premiums, I tried to plow a little ground for Jesus. One morning when I walked into my office I had a note from my secretary that this man had called with

some questions about the church. I tried to return the call, but he was out of the office. I decided to catch him when he delivered my policy. Two weeks later he brought over my policy. As he was leaving, I mentioned his call and his interest in learning about the church. This salesman said: "I was interested *then*, but I'm not anymore. You should have reached me when I called you about it." He turned and walked out.

That hurt. He may be lost eternally because I did not buy up the opportunity. How about you? How many opportunities have you squandered? When will you begin to share Christ with that friend of yours? Every time you have an opportunity, buy it up. Purchase it for eternity.

### OUR CONVERSATION (4:6)

Paul turned his attention to our conversation: "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person" (4:6). "Speech" does not refer to the specific words we use but to the pattern of our speech. God is more concerned with the gist of what we say and how we say it. Right words said the wrong way quickly alienate people.

Two qualities are to mark our resurrection style speech. The first is that *our conversation is to be full of grace*. The Bible says concerning Jesus: "And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; . . ." (Luke 4:22). Jesus is our model. His words were not always pleasing to those who listened to Him, but they were useful. We are to be "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) so that others are blessed by conversations with us.

Deceit, cursing, lying, and flattery should never be found on the lips of a Christian. Neither should boasting, hatred, swearing, gossip, or idle talk. These belonged to your former way of life. Now that we have been saved by grace, our speech ought to reflect that grace in our dealings with others.

Graciousness means to be pleasant and courteous, to speak what is spiritually uplifting, wholesome, sensitive, loving, and encouraging.

*Our conversation is also to be seasoned with salt.* Paul obviously did not mean the pungent, obscene phrases associated today with "salty" language. Salt, of course, is that which gives taste or flavor to our food. It makes our meals palatable.

Paul's point is that the words we dish up for others to feast on are to be made enjoyable.

Plutarch, the Greek biographer and philosopher, wrote that words are the seasoning of life. Paul would agree, if they are the right words spoken at the right time! Our conversation is seasoned with salt when we say what needs to be said, to whom it needs to be said, in a winsome way.

Verse 6 needs to be learned by many in the Lord's church. To hear some talk, you would think that they had been given the ministry of criticism! They criticize people and projects of the church, but seldom, if ever, do they talk directly with the people of whom they are so critical. If you live in violation of this verse, you have something more serious than a speech problem—you have a heart problem. Remember, what is down in the well comes up in the bucket!

Notice the reason our conversation is to be full of grace and seasoned with salt: ". . . so that you may know how you should respond to each person." The tongue is so important. By what we say and how we say it, we either open or close the door to an opportunity many times.

### CONCLUSION

Your mouth is a primary means by which the cause of Jesus is advertised in the community. Listening to you speak, unbelievers form an opinion of the worth of the church. What comes over your lips? Praise, encouragement, affirmation? Or cynicism, bitterness, and hurtful remarks? Does your speech mark you as a regenerate person, transformed by the Word of God? Or does the way you talk around others sound like an unregenerate person? If your speech needs changing, have the courage to admit that before God, and let Him begin to give you a new mouth that will exalt Jesus.

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### *Dare to Fail*

"To take on leadership often means isolation. There comes a time when you must choose an unpopular position. It doesn't take much courage to move ahead on something in which you have complete confidence. True courage moves ahead fully knowing that failure is possible."

Ted W. Engstrom and Edward R. Dayton,  
*World Vision*, October/November 1989