

Colossians: Full Part 1

Colossians 4:2-6

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on September 24, 2023

The Divine Alphabet

In the prologue of his gospel, the Apostle John beautifully identified Jesus as “the Word.” “*In the beginning was the Word*” (John 1:1). Before the creation of any single thing, Christ was eternally continuing as the Word. And as the Word, Jesus is the ultimate communication of God. Before there was time, before there was earth, wind, fire, or water, before humans, God had determined to communicate - to speak – to us. “*In the beginning was the Communication.*” John goes on to write, “*And the Word (Communication) became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14a). Let’s Sesame Street this a bit. When Jesus came to earth, he became the ABCs of God for us. He became the alphabet of Deity. God loved us so much that he spelled out his love for us in Christ!

In Colossians 4, Paul calls us to the fullness in communication with God and to fullness in communicating with the world. Since Jesus Christ is the fullness of God for the universe and we have experienced his fullness, our fullness in Christ should flow back up to the Lord and out to the world. I invite you to open your Bible’s to Colossians 4:2-6 this morning. (read text)

Fullness in Communication with God (v.2)

The final instructions here divide into sections with two imperatives: “Devote yourselves to prayer” in 4:2, and “Act wisely toward outsiders” in 4:5. Paul is calling the Colossians to pray that he (Paul) will have an open door to speak and that they themselves seize every opportunity and know how to answer others.

Devotion to prayer is the very heart of our communication. This means persistence in prayer – continual prayer. Jesus himself told a story about a widow who got her way with a godless, uncaring judge because she nagged him. It was a “parable,” Luke says, “on the need for them to pray always and not give up.” (Luke 18:1). We see this attitude of continued prayer marking the early Apostolic Church in Acts (Acts 1:14; 2:42). The apostles constantly encouraged this, as did Paul when he challenged the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) – full, continued communication with God.

How does someone do this? Are we always carrying on a constant verbal dialogue, whatever we are doing? They have places for people who do this, padded rooms at the puzzle factory! There cannot be unbroken verbal communication with God, otherwise we would never really be present for anything that we did in our lives. But, in another sense prayer is not so much the speaking of words as it is the posture of your heart.

Thomas Kelly wrote in his *Testament of Devotion*: “There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings.”¹

Medieval Monk Brother Lawrence wrote, “The time of business does not differ with me from the time of prayer; and in the noise and the clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were on my knees.”²

Full devotion to prayer is possible in a busy life. “Devote yourselves to prayer.” Or in other translations, “Continue steadfastly in prayer.”

Being devoted to prayer does not mean that your mind goes into devotional neutral while an easy “stream of consciousness” flows between us and God. The habit of prayer demands mental alertness to the dangers of life and the needs of those around us, an awareness that can, at any moment, launch a person into fervent prayer. In Ephesians Paul wrote, “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all the perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.”

We are to be vigilant in this devotion. That is a wonderfully positive position because it means always being thankful. That posture remembers God’s goodness consistently. Joshua returned to Gilgal to gaze on the stones of remembrance (the stones taken from the Jordan when God held back the waters so Israel could cross). Thus, he was refreshed, and his heart rejoiced in thanksgiving (Joshua 4). In the same way, we are to remember our moments or places of remembrance – our stones of remembrance, if you will – and give thanks in our communication with God.

¹ Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*. (New York: Harper, 1941), p.35.

² Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1958), pp.30-31.

Is your communication with God full? If not, it may be because you are not appropriating his fullness (Col. 2:9-10). If your life falls short, take moments now. Lean into that attitude now. When your heart is overflowing, it will flow up to God in communication – alert and with an attitude of thanksgiving.

Fullness in Communication with the World (vv.3-6)

Paul asked first for fullness in his own communication with the world in vv. 3-4. He did not seem to really care whether he was in prison or not – he just wanted more opportunity to communicate the good news of the gospel. It was preaching that got Paul into prison, so he might as well preach more while in prison. Paul burned to communicate the gospel. Do you? Is the communication of the only hope for a lost and dying world burning within you? Even a little? What riles you up more, arguing with someone over stuff or the fact that everyday people you know, and love die without a relationship with Jesus Christ and spend eternity separated from God? If we are not careful, the enemy is tactful enough to use those around us to draw us into spiraling distractions, rendering us all riled up wasting our words on things that are NOT communicating the gospel to anyone, anyhow, anyway, anywhere.

Paul burned for the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 16:8-9 we see him saying of his ministry in Ephesus, “But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” When he left the Ephesian church, he told the elders that every night and every day for three years he had continually admonished each with tears (Acts 20:31). Paul’s desire for opportunities to preach the mystery of Christ is a model for us.

Paul wanted to proclaim Christ’s gospel in a “clear” way. So often the message of the gospel is more of a mist in the pulpit and a fog in the pew. C.S. Lewis once wrote, “Any fool can write learned language. The vernacular is the real test. If you can’t turn your faith into it, then you either don’t understand it or you don’t believe it.” In other words, a lot of people go to church buildings each Sunday for years and years and not have ever actually in their hearts spoken with God or trusted in Jesus. So many folks inside the church buildings are as spiritually lost as a ball in tall grass. They think they are fine because they know some of the code words, but it isn’t real. They don’t have any communication with the Lord, and they are unable to communicate for the gospel in any meaningful way.

Ask yourself, if I had to at lunch today, share the gospel with someone, would I be able to do it? And if that opportunity came to you, would you even say anything or would you go on about your business?

Paul burned to preach the gospel as often as possible as clearly as possible, regardless of wherever he found himself. That was Paul's prayer request: "Pray that I can make this message as clear as possible." You see, Paul understood the main truth for communicating the gospel. Prayer makes all the difference. Perhaps we don't share the gospel enough because we never pray about it and ask people to pray for us to clearly communicate it. Has that ever in your life been a prayer request?

There is a great story that comes from the life of missionary Hudson Taylor. There was a mission church that was particularly blessed in the China Inland Mission, far beyond many others. There seemed to be no accounting for why it was so much more successful because other mission stations were equally busy and buzzing with activity. Hudson Taylor was traveling and speaking in England, and after a meeting a man came up and began to ask him about that particular station. Then he began to ask many personal questions. It turned out that the man had been the college roommate of the missionary at the station many years earlier, and he had committed himself to daily praying for the work there. Hudson Taylor said, "Then I knew the answer."

Each week we engage in gospel work with children, youth, men, women. How often do you ever pray for any of that work to bear gospel fruit? How many times a week are you praying for the gospel presentation in Pastor Jason's youth ministry experience on Wednesday nights? How many times do you pray for the gospel presentation in the midweek children's program? How often each week do you pray that our gospel engagement would be powerful, engaging, fruitful? When you think about the church in your prayers, do your thoughts tend to swirl around your own personal corner of it – what you like, want, need, prefer? Or do you pray that when the praise team steps up to lead us in worship, the message of the gospel would permeate every note sung or played? Do you pray that every time a deacon makes a visit, he has the opportunity to share the message of the gospel? Do you pray that every week in Bible study or home group or Sunday school that the gospel would make an impact? Because in each of those opportunities, there are people who need to respond to the message of the gospel. What are you praying is communicated?

Paul expressed concern for the Colossian's witness: "Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person." "Gracious" speech. Paul is assuming that the Colossians have grace in their hearts – "for out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). As grace flows through the heart, it then flows outward in kindness. Kind and gracious talk is never boring or dull. In fact, it is seasoned with salt – savory, interesting, encouraging. Gracious speech is thoughtful speech, words with content, words with meaning. Words that matter. Gracious speech is joyful. In the classical Greek, salty speech was witty.

English preacher Charles Spurgeon, known as the prince of preachers, as he was one of the greatest gospel communicators of all time, was once criticized by a woman who thought he was too witty. Spurgeon replied, "Madam, if you knew what I didn't say, you wouldn't say that!"

Christians and their gospel are supposed to be interesting. Christ has transformed them from dead to life. They are new creatures in Him. Christians are to contextualize their remarks. That means they are to speak to people where they are, according to their interests and needs.

Full communication is speech that is filled with grace and salt, meeting the other person where he or she is. Let us do this and thereby be sure that we are "making the best use of the time."

Jesus Christ was and still is the Word. That means that he is the ultimate communication to us. Our best response to Him would be to allow our hearts to overflow with communication to Him.

Our hearts must flow back to God in continual, prayerful devotion, vigilance, and thanksgiving. They must flood the world with the gospel in clarity, grace, and salt. This is proper communication for hearts filled with the fullness of God.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY: ALTERNATING MONDAYS at 6:30PM at Pastor Craig's Home. Beginning TOMORROW, September 25th. All men of all ages are invited. See Pastor Craig for details.

Children's Ministry Trip to Orr's Farm. October 7th. Pumpkin patch and other fun things. 10AM to noon. See Pastor Jason for details.

Wednesday Morning Bible Study at 10:30AM. Our study continues in Mark.

Ladies Fall Fellowship: Saturday September 30th, 6-8PM. At Sarah Duckwall's home. Bring finger food and check the craft list to bring supplies for a craft at the Women's Ministry Table.

Baby Shower for Loizos! Sunday October 1st, immediately following worship. If you want to help with food, contact Danielle Smith.

FBC Kids Wednesday Nights. 6-7:30PM See Pastor Jason for details!

LIGHT THE NIGHT: October 31. It is time to start preparing for Light the Night. If you are interested in hosting a Light the Night location at your home, please see Pastor Craig. Next Sunday, we will begin collecting candy donations. We also need 50-60 empty gallon sized milk jugs. Your help with this is greatly appreciated!

Silver Wings Pizza Fellowship: Shirley's Pizza Party, Wednesday Sept. 27th at noon in 101. Cost is by donation. You provide your own water, soda, or tea. This honors the memory of Shirley Parsons who passed away in 2018.)

Come to the Table at Ridge Road: Friday October 6th at 6:30PM. Bring a side or dessert to share. Childcare is provided for free at the church. Sign up today at the welcome center!