

**Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (24):  
Watch and Pray (cont.)**

Today we will continue our study of Colossians 4:2 through 6, which we have described as instruction to “Watch and Pray.” We addressed some important aspects of prayer last week. In doing so I had cited a number of points made by the puritan, **Thomas Brooks**, in his work entitled, *The Secret Key to Heaven; The Vital Importance of Prayer*. In this book Brooks set forth 20 arguments for private prayer, that is, for Christians to be faithful in their private prayer life. However, it was pointed out to me after service, that after I had identified Brooks, I thereafter made reference not to Thomas Brooks, but to Thomas Boston. **Thomas Brooks** (1608-1680) was an Englishman, pastoring a congregational church in London. **Thomas Boston** (1676-1732) was a Scottish pastor, serving in Presbyterian churches. Both men were puritans. Both men equally warrant reading. Both ministered in the latter 17<sup>th</sup> century and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both were prolific writers. I have the complete works of both men. I tend to confuse their names in memory and when I quote them, hence the reason for my mentioning both names when I only intended to cite Thomas Brooks. When I went back over my notes and made the correction, I noted 6 places in which I mistakenly wrote “Boston” rather than “Brooks.” If you save your notes, you might make those corrections to avoid future confusion.

Let us continue to consider this matter, “watch and pray,” that is set before us in Colossians 4:2 through 4.

<sup>2</sup>Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup>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-- <sup>4</sup>that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. (Col. 4:2-4)

As we look at our passage again, we first read an...

**I. Exhortation to Pray (Col. 4:2, 3)**

1. First, the apostle gave the command to these Christians to “*continue steadfastly in prayer.*” Christians are to be a prayerful people. We are each to be steadfast in prayer. This means that we are to be always praying, continually praying, remaining faithful to pray.

Christians should lay hold of all opportunities for prayer, and choose the fittest seasons, which are least liable to disturbance from other things, and keep their minds lively in the duty, and in suitable frames. (Matthew Henry)

We are to “continue steadfast in prayer.”

2. But Paul adds to his instruction that Christians should “continue steadfastly in prayer.” While they pray, they are to be “*watchful in it.*” “Continue steadfastly in prayer, *being watchful in it* with thanksgiving.”

What is meant by “watchful”? The verb form is a present participle (γρηγοροῦντες), which conveys continual action.<sup>1</sup> This should be understood as a participle of manner; in other words, “watching” is the manner that we are to be praying. Whenever we are praying, we are to be “watching” as we are praying.

But the question remains, what is it to be “watching” while we are praying? Two possibilities are often presented. First, some argue that we may be watchful in our praying in that we are not to have confused thought while praying, but rather attentive and alert. Probably what is meant, however, is that we are to be watchful in praying in that we are not to grow weary in our prayer and we are to see to it that our praying does not become routine or mechanical. And so Calvin wrote that the exhortation to watchful prayer involved “watching in opposition to coldness, and listlessness.”<sup>2</sup>

Watchfulness in prayer may also suggest being attentive to all the various matters that should be the subject of our praying. The Christian should be attentive of his own needs, yes, but more. He should be praying for both the physical and spiritual needs of his family, his church, his community, his nation, and even the world. He should be praying for the Lord’s protection against the threats and dangers that threaten the well-being of all those for whom we are praying. We are to pray for God’s mercy and grace upon all, desiring the best for all about us. We are to ask for mercy and grace for ourselves that we would act and react in a manner that pleases our Lord Jesus Christ. And of course we are to pray for the will of God be done in all that we ask and believe God in praying. Praying faithfully involves praying while be watchful in our prayer.

Watchfulness in prayer suggests that there are obstacles to prayer that must be recognized, acknowledged, resisted, and overcome. Here would be a good question for us to consider: *What kind of “obstacles” do we, say, as reformed Christians need to overcome?* I wish us to consider some words regarding prayer set forth long ago by the Dutchman, **Wilhelmus a Brakel** (1635-1711). He has left us one of the best systematic theologies that is once again available to us through the publishing house led by our friend, Joel Beeke. The title of the work is *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, which is contained in 4 volumes.<sup>3</sup> Here is one assessment from a very respected reformed scholar and pastor:

“No systematic theology compares to Wilhelmus à Brakel’s *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* for its explicit concern to weld the objective and subjective in theology. Emerging from the Dutch Further Reformation, à Brakel is without equal in exploring both the intricate details of the Reformed theological system whilst ensuring that at every turn theology is done in the interests of piety and the glory of God. In an era when the subjective has either been lost in a sea of postmodernity or viewed with suspicion for its apparent lack of academic integrity, only those who have never read this monumental treatise would dismiss it as guilty of either. An achievement to place alongside Calvin’s *Institutes* and the systematic theologies of Turretin, Hodge, and Berkhof.” — Derek W. H. Thomas, John E. Richards Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary.

### Mental Obstacles to Prayer<sup>4</sup>

**Obstacle #1:** “God is well-acquainted with my needs, anxieties, and desires. Why then do I need to bring them before God in prayer?” **Answer:** It is not to make something known to God with which

---

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word for “watchful” is γρηγοροῦντες (*gregorountes*). Early Christians took this word and made it into a proper name--Gregory. William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. 21 (Baker, 1993), p. 215f.

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (4 vols.) (Heritage Reformed Books, 1992, orig. 1700). Here is a good price for \$100 for the 4 volume set: <http://www.heritagebooks.org/products/the-christians-reasonable-service-4-vols-brakel.html>

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, PDF file, vol. 3, pp. 351-353. [I have all four volumes in PDF format that is public domain that I can give you free, upon your request--Lars]

He is unacquainted; rather, you thereby show that you are also acquainted with them and are sensible of them, as well as that you acknowledge God to be your only helper.

**Obstacle #2:** *“God has already decreed what I shall or shall not have. I cannot change that decree by means of prayer.”* **Answer:** The secret things are for the Lord, but the revealed things are for us. God has bound us to the means and He wills that we believe and rely upon His promises made to conscientious users of the means. God has also decreed already how long you will live. Do you therefore desist from eating and drinking?

**Obstacle #3:** *“Many people do not pray and yet receive everything in abundance.”* **Answer:** These are but temporal matters, with which you are not satisfied. These earthly goods are not a blessing to them, and due to their sins they abuse all the blessings of God to their destruction. Prosperity will be the death of the ungodly. However, the little that a righteous person receives upon his prayer is better than the abundance of many ungodly. The righteous have received it as a blessing and they have thereby been drawn to God. Furthermore, you are primarily concerned with the spiritual, and this the Lord will most certainly grant you upon prayer. You would have more if you would pray more.

**Obstacle #4:** *“I have prayed very much for various matters, but God does not hear me, and I do not receive them.”* **Answer:** Perhaps you—as was true of Samuel—are not acquainted with the answering voice of God. Perhaps you have not given careful attention to what you have received upon prayer; or else, due to unbelief, you have not related that which you have received to your prayer. Perhaps you are too covetous and too bent on having your will, and you do not acknowledge it as long as you have not received everything which your inordinate lusts demand, there being no submission to the manner and the benevolence of that which is dispensed to you. If you take note of all this, you will not be able to say that God has never heard your prayer and that you have never received anything upon prayer.

**Obstacle #5:** *“I lack all that I have heard said in this discourse on prayer. My heart closes up when I wish to begin.”* **Answer:** You are focusing on a measure of spirituality in prayer which exceeds your measure of spirituality, and you want to pray at such a level of spirituality, or else it is nothing. If you are a child, pray as a child; if a man, pray as a man. God also hears the mourning of a dove and the chattering of a swallow; even sighing is not hidden from Him. God does not give because of prayer, but upon prayer. Such is not only true of a very spiritual and fluent prayer, but also for those feeble efforts in expressing desires. He does not despise the prayer of the destitute.

**Obstacle #6:** *“I sin time and again, and therefore I do not dare to come again unto God—it would be as if I were mocking with God.”* **Answer:** When you prayed in a most acceptable manner and when God heard and answered your prayer, God saw all your future sins as if they were presently committed. It is God’s will that we shall forgive our neighbor seventy times seven—this being required in one day. God, however, is infinitely more longsuffering and benevolent than man. Reconciliation has already been accomplished in Christ and you may accept this at all times to your continual justification. You do not have it in your power to keep yourself from sin; your old man is too evil and too strong for this. God permits sin to remain in you for the very reason that you would always be of a humble disposition and to make use of Christ daily. It would be mockery if you did not repeatedly have a heartfelt desire to sin no more, while yet praying for strength against and the forgiveness of sin. Since, however, this is the case with you, do not allow the fact that you sin repeatedly keep you from prayer. Rather, come all the more, since you are in need of forgiveness and strength, so that the grace of God may be glorified all the more.

**Obstacle #7:** *“I fear that I am not regenerated. What business do I then have to pray, since the prayer of the unconverted is not pleasing to God?”* **Answer:** Pray because necessity compels you,

and because you cannot go on without the matter you desire—even if your prayer could not be recorded on the register of virtues. God indeed hears the young ravens when they call to Him. God heard the crying of Ishmael, when he, having been laid under a shrub, would have perished for thirst. You desire to be converted, to be a partaker of Christ, to be holy, and to possess all spiritual benefits. The more you would be a partaker of them, the more it would be to your liking. Such desires and motions are indeed the beginnings of regeneration and life. The Holy Spirit alone has wrought them in you and stirs you up to pray for them. Therefore follow the Spirit, and you will experience that your prayer is pleasing to God, and that He will repeatedly give you all that you need according to body and soul.

And so, let us not erect obstacles to prevent us from praying continually. May the Lord move each of us, even all of us as a church to “continue steadfastly in prayer, being watching in it...”

3. But in our praying we are also to be always thankful to our God. “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it *with thanksgiving*.” This is a word of instruction repeated a number of times in Scripture:

**Ephesians 5:17-21.** “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup>And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup>*giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, <sup>21</sup>submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

**Philippians 4:6-7.** “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup>and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.** “Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>*in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*”

The Holy Scriptures teach that every true Christian is a holy priest before God. Thanksgiving is to be a regular spiritual offering that the Christian is to offer to God as a priest.

**Hebrews 13:15.** “Therefore by Him let us continually offer *the sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, *giving thanks to His name.*”

This is expressed in our worship to God, but is also to be expressed regularly, even daily, to our God in our praying. “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it *with thanksgiving*.”

## II. Request to pray for the Lord’s blessing upon the proclamation of His Word (Col. 4:3-4)

We read of the apostle Paul requesting that this church would be faithful in praying for him that he would be fruitful and faithful in proclaiming the Word of God. We read in **verses 3 and 4**,

*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-- <sup>4</sup>that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

Paul desired that this church would pray for him and for the Lord’s blessing upon His ministry. This is quite an amazing thing, if we contemplate what he was saying and its implications. First, even

though He was the apostle Paul, who the Lord Jesus had personally appeared to bring him tom salvation, and although the Lord Jesus declared directly to him the expansive ministry to which he was to be instrumental, nevertheless, the apostle saw the need for the Lord’s people to pray for him so that these things would be realized through him.

He had been particular in telling them what he prayed for on their behalf (ch. 1). Here he tells them particularly what he would have them pray for on his behalf. Paul knew as well as any man how to speak; and yet he begged their prayers for him, that he might be taught to speak. The best and most eminent Christians need the prayers of meaner Christians, and are not above asking them. The chief speakers need prayer, that God would give them a door of utterance, and that they may speak as they ought to speak. (Matthew Henry)

Here again, we see the divine employment of means that the Lord has ordained in order to accomplish His work in the world. Although the Lord had called Paul, equipped Paul, directed Paul, nevertheless, Paul would need the prayers of the people of God in the church at Colossae in order that the Lord’s blessing would be upon his ministry of the Word. He was essentially telling them, “While you continue in prayer, pray for me and for the blessing of the Lord on the ministry of the Word.”

Paul asked them, actually commanded them, that they pray that “God may open to us a door for the word.” Here the word, “door”, refers to an opportunity that could present itself for the furtherance of the ministry of the Word. The same idea is conveyed elsewhere. We read the following verses:

**Acts 14:27.** “Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that *He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*”

**1 Corinthians 16:8f.** “But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. *<sup>9</sup>For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*”

**2 Corinthians 2:12f.** “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, *and a door was opened to me by the Lord,* <sup>13</sup>I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.”

**Revelation 3:7-8.** “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, *He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*”: <sup>8</sup>“I know your works. See, *I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it*; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”’

We see that though we have the Word of God and attempt to faithfully proclaim the Word of God, it will not accomplish the work of God unless and until He opens a door for the Word that it impact the hearts and minds of the hearers of the Word.

Now it is unfortunate that so many of the Lord’s people do not believe that this is so. They presume that the Lord will bless His Word apart from our praying that He do so. They believe that there is an inherent power in the written Word of God that will secure the redemption of people who hear it, even if prayer to God to bless His word is not practiced.

This kind of thinking is reflected in the way that some people quote this passage of Scripture:

<sup>8</sup>“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

<sup>10</sup>For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,

And do not return there,  
 But water the earth,  
 And make it bring forth and bud,  
 That it may give seed to the sower  
 And bread to the eater,  
<sup>11</sup>So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;  
 It shall not return to Me void,  
 But it shall accomplish what I please,  
 And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isa. 55:8-11)

Many Christians assume from this passage that whenever and wherever the Holy Scriptures are proclaimed or distributed, God will always accomplish some work in people’s lives because the Bible is the Word of God. Well yes, the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, but they are only effectual to the conversion of souls and transformation of lives if and when the Lord chooses to bless that word proclaimed or read. It is the word that goes forth from His mouth that He purposes to use, that it would accomplish what He pleases.

This is why it is absolutely critical that we are always praying for the blessing of His Word that our church seeks to proclaim to the world in which the Lord has placed us. This is why it is so very important that we pray for the blessing of the Lord on our Sunday morning message, the Word of God that goes forth through our Bible studies, or even the Word that we make known to one another within our families. It is critical that we be praying for our radio ministry so that the Lord will answer our prayers and bring forth fruit through His Word.

Paul declared this truth:

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? <sup>2</sup>You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; <sup>3</sup>clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. <sup>4</sup>And we have such trust through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup>who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, ***but the Spirit gives life.***” (2 Cor. 3:1-6)

It is not the word only that accomplishes the work of the Lord, although it is inspired and inerrant. It is the Holy Spirit using the Word of God that results in the transformation of lives. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit when the Spirit chooses to wield it in gaining the souls of men and women.

Now notice precisely the nature of Paul’s prayer request. Paul was in prison in Rome. It was his first of two imprisonments of Paul in Rome. He would be released from prison on this occasion. His second incarceration in Rome (probably) ended with his martyrdom. But though Paul was in prison, he did not ask for prayer specifically: “Pray for me that the Lord would cause me to be released from prison so that I could return to proclaiming the Word of God.” Although he was bound, his chief concern that the Word of God would not be bound, but have free course and be blessed to the advancement of the “mystery of Christ.” Oh yes, if the furtherance of the Word of God could be secured by his release, by all means, let that happen. But whether he was released or not, this was not his primary concern. He wanted the Word of God to be free, rather than him gaining his own liberty.

Now Paul’s prayer request for himself involved two concerns. First, Paul desired that they pray so that he could continue to proclaim the Word of God ***widely***. And second, Paul desired prayer so that he would preach the Word of God ***in a proper manner***. Paul declared, “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 may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”

The Word of God should be proclaimed in a manner that the message is clearly heard and clearly understood. Of course the preacher's making matters clear does not assure that understanding and acceptance of his message is certain by his hearers. The writer to the Hebrews made it clear that some people are unable to understand the Word of God, not because of the preacher, but because they themselves have become "dull of hearing" through their own neglect and failure (cf. Heb. 5:11). Speaking of Jesus Christ, he wrote:

<sup>9</sup>And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, <sup>10</sup>called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," <sup>11</sup>of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup>For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup>For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. <sup>14</sup>But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb 5:1 NKJ)

But aside from those who have rendered themselves unable to understand the Word of God, and we would say, in spite of the degree of clarity the preacher made known that word, there are those who cannot understand the Word of God because God has purposed to judge them. This was true of certain hardened unbelieving Jewish leaders. We read of them in the Book of Acts:

<sup>24</sup>And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. <sup>25</sup>So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, <sup>26</sup>saying, 'Go to this people and say:

"Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;  
And seeing you will see, and not perceive;  
<sup>27</sup>For the hearts of this people have grown dull.  
Their ears are hard of hearing,  
And their eyes they have closed,  
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,  
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,  
So that I should heal them."

<sup>28</sup>"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" <sup>29</sup>And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. (Acts 28:24-29)

Now, what was it specifically that Paul wanted to proclaim widely? He wrote, "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-- <sup>4</sup>that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

The "mystery of Christ" is an expression Paul used elsewhere.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— <sup>2</sup>if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>how that by revelation He made known to me *the mystery* (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup>by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in *the mystery of Christ*), <sup>5</sup>which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*, <sup>7</sup>of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

<sup>8</sup>To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to make all see what is *the fellowship of the mystery*, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; <sup>10</sup>to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, <sup>11</sup>according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. <sup>13</sup>Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

The Lord had called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He was to proclaim the gospel to the Gentile world, establishing churches throughout the Roman world. But his ministry of the word was not merely to bring salvation to individuals throughout the world. Paul was to make known the mystery that had not been fully revealed as to its nature or extent until it was made known through him. This mystery is that all believers everywhere are in one body of Jesus Christ. There was no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile within the body of the redeemed, rather, any and all who are converted through faith in Jesus Christ are of one entity, one body.

Let us now turn our attention to Colossians 4:5 and 6.

### **III. Command to live with view to furthering the Word among unbelievers (Col. 4:5-6)**

*Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*

Christians are always to be concerned for the souls of those “who are outside.” These are unconverted people who need to come to know and call upon the Lord Jesus to govern their lives. It is our responsibility to “walk in wisdom” with regard to them. When we become Christians, our relationship with the non-Christians undergoes change. Our belief is now different from theirs. Our behavior has undergone noticeable change and we are no longer like them. Of course we desire that they would come to know the Savior as we have known Him, but their aversion to the Lord and His ways is there. Their aversion to us as the people of God is also there to a degree. Peter wrote of this:

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, <sup>2</sup>that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. <sup>3</sup>For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles-- when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. <sup>4</sup>In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil. (1 Pet. 4:1-4)

When Paul wrote, “*Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time*”, he was urging the Christians in the church at Colossae to seek to be good and consistent witnesses for Christ while they are in view by unbelievers. We are to redeem the time, look for opportunities to display before others what a Christian is to believe and how he lives before the Lord. **William Hendriksen** expressed Paul’s spirit well:

In the spirit of the principles to which Paul has bound himself and in connection with which he has just now asked the Colossians to remember him and his companions in prayer he now urges them to adhere to a similar way of life... In the days of the early church believers were often slandered by these outsiders. For example, they were called *atheists* because they served no visible gods, *unpatriotic* because they did not burn incense before the image of the emperor, and *immoral* because, of necessity, they would often meet behind locked doors. The apostle knew that the best way to defeat



this slander was for Christians daily to conduct themselves not only *virtuously* instead of *wickedly* but also *wisely* instead of *foolishly*... It was then as it is now: in the long run the reputation of the gospel depends on the conduct of its devotees. It is as if the apostle were saying, "Behave wisely toward outsiders, always bearing in mind that though few men read the sacred scrolls, all men read you."<sup>5</sup>

We should be particularly guarded in our speech. "***Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.***" Our speech is always to be governed by self-control with view to those "outside." **John Calvin** wrote:

He requires suavity (charm) of speech, such as may allure the hearers by its profitableness, for he does not merely condemn communications that are openly wicked or impious, but also such as worthless and idle. Hence he would have them *seasoned with salt*. Profane men have their seasoning discourse, but he does not speak of them; nay more, as witticisms are insinuating, and for the most part procure favor, he indirectly prohibits believers from the practice and familiar use of them. For he reckons as tasteless everything that does not edify. The term *grace* is employed in the same sense, so as to be opposed to talkativeness, taunts, and all sorts of trifles which are either injurious or vain.<sup>6</sup>

May our actions and our speech not only not distance others from Christ because they distance themselves from us, but may our actions and speech serve as attractants to them that they might come to know Him whom we love and serve.

\*\*\*\*\*

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup>but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Rom. 16:25-27)

\*\*\*\*\*

---

<sup>5</sup> William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 182.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. 21 (Baker, 1993), p. 225f.