

51-04-01.wpd —Communicating with God and Man
communication, love, prayer, intercession, witness, caring, relationship
Col 4:2-6

How much we *care* shows up both in *prayer* and in how we *share*.

INTRODUCTION:

–This **text** is about **communication**, and it puts communication *with God* in prayer alongside communication *with others*, especially (but not exclusively) with those Paul calls "*outsiders*." These two dimensions of communication naturally go together because of love– Mat 22:37-40. Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

–**Love communicates!** That's why we have the Bible. [My philosophical journey back into the Christian faith: ...if *God is love*, He would *communicate*, and *being God*, He'd *be the Best Communicator*. So *what would be the best way to communicate with humans?*– John 1:14a, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.] The context of functional human relationships, whether it's between spouses or family members or neighbors or nations is **love**. Why is that? Because God is love, and humans are made in the image and likeness of God.

–**Love** is the theme we need to keep in mind as we look at this passage, because **HOM.idea**. First, Paul talks about prayer....

I. Loving Care Is the Standard for Prayer

A. *Care in prayer* is a form of spiritual devotion– **v.2a**, *Devote yourselves to prayer* [lit.: "*continue steadfastly in prayer*"], and there are two specific attitudes that show that devotion– **v.2b**, *being watchful and thankful*.

[NLT, Devote yourselves to prayer with *an alert mind* and *a thankful heart*.]

1. What does it mean to pray with "an alert mind"?
 - a. Are we "watchful" for people who have needs for prayer? (**Don't** just say, "*I'll pray for you*." **Offer** to pray *with* them.)
 - b. Are we "watchful" for situations that need prayer? [CFO speaker Rolland Brown used to pray through the newspaper headlines and articles.]
 - c. Are we "watchful" for areas of need that God has given us a special care and concern about? [What I notice as an RN: *illness* and *pregnant bellies*, factors that change many areas of a person's life.]
2. What does it mean to pray with "a thankful heart"?
 - a. Do we keep a "*thank you*" list along with our other prayer lists?

(It's usually best to pray the "*thank you*" to God immediately.)

- b. How can we obey the command to "pray without ceasing"? Get in the habit of thanking God for whatever we meet in life, whether *people* or *possessions* or *situations*– **Eph 5:20**, always giving thanks to God the Father **for everything**, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. Care in prayer is a motivator of intercession– **v.3**, "*and pray for us*..." (Feeling able to ask for prayer indicates a healthy relationship.)
1. One prayer priority: "pray... that God may open a door for our message"
 - a. "*If it's God's message, can't He bless it without our prayers?*"
 - b. Such a question shows a misunderstanding of God's salvation plan. Creation, lost by human irresponsibility, was redeemable only by human involvement. That's why God's salvation work required Him to become one of us through *Incarnation*. Each step in human salvation and creational restoration is grounded in the work of a Human, the *God-Man, Jesus Christ*. **AND**, we humans who have His Holy Spirit are responsible for seeing that plan carried out, which is why our prayers are absolutely crucial for the spread of the Gospel.)
 2. How do we pray for the spread of the Gospel? In **v.3-4** Paul enjoins us to pray that "*we*" (all of us, but especially preachers) might "*proclaim the mystery of Christ*" and "*proclaim it clearly*" (free from the *legalism* and *Gnosticism* that Paul attacks in *Colossians* and that still exist in popular evangelical Christian preaching.)

TRANS: *Legalism* is a hard to get rid of, because humans are forever trusting in "right rules" for "right behavior". *Gnosticism*, should easily be rejected as foreign to Christianity, because it denies our very nature as body-spirit beings. **But** both of them are enemies of the true Gospel of *grace* and *hope*, because they obscure its presentation with salvation based on works or a salvation of the spirit alone. God loves and wants to save the "whole body, soul and spirit," which together make up humanity. This is why not only *prayer* but *how we share* must be based on *love*. Love for the "whole" person is to guide our communication with others.

II. Loving Care is the Standard for How We Share

- A. Our directive in **v.5a** is "*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders*" – the way to "*walk in wisdom*" with others is to be cross-culturally wise [a good definition of culture: the whole human adaptation to a whole physical

environment]. To share *caringly* and *effectively*, we have to know where others are at, their *circumstances*, their *upbringing*, their *background*, their *recent life events*. This is why listening is a crucial part of communication. **To care is to be first be aware.**

B. Another directive in **v.5b** is "*make the most of every opportunity*"

1. To do this, we must treat people not just as precious souls to be won for Christ, but as whole beings who are already precious to God. He's already involved in caring for every aspect of their lives (their health, their families, their circumstances, their likes and dislikes, in fact, everything that makes them who they are.)
2. If we are to share *caringly* at "*every opportunity*," we must also be involved in this kind of caring. Why? Because God is love, and He wants us to share his message of love with others.

C. Some final directives in **v.6** will help us to *polish* our skills in this more *human* and *whole* manner of sharing with others— **v. 6**, Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

1. I used to think that studying philosophy and logic would be the way to "know how to answer everyone." It is not.
2. The way that will answer the deepest questions people really have about God is not intellectual but relational. This is why...
 - a. Our communication must "*be always full of grace*" (By His grace God loves and gives of Himself freely, even to those who have formerly been hostile to Him, and He wants us manifest that same kind of grace in our sharing with others.)
 - b. Our communication must be "*seasoned with salt*" [as food is made more appetizing]. People's deepest needs aren't answered by our clever logic or theological insight, but by our testimony of an authentic relationship with God. When our prayers "*open a door for our message*" what people need to hear is that they too can have a real, human-friendly relationship with Him is possible.

CONCLUSION:

–**How much we care shows up both in prayer and in how we share.**

God is love. Love is the basis of our communication with God and with others, because we are made in His image.

Colossians 4:2-6 (NIV)

2Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

3And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

4Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

5Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

6Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.