

Section 11: Testimony: Living it out through communication.

Colossians 4:2-6

4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And 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. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Having seen the importance of grasping 'higher things' and working them out in practice, we now come to see the importance of communicating those values effectively in a number of ways and in different contexts.

For all that the church is involved in the business of communication, it can well be said that we are singularly poor at being able to communicate our message and testimony effectively. Within the church we often have difficulty getting our members on board when it comes to taking forward some of the projects that we propose, or when we try to spread information about what we are doing. The 'intimations' on a Sunday are often not heard or not noted! When it comes to speaking to people outside our church, we seem to fail dismally. We can talk to them very effectively, but that is often not about the Christian faith or the things that matter. When it comes to communicating with God, it is again an area where we feel that we can leave it to someone else because they are good at it or it's not really our thing.

So, what do these verses have to say to us regarding the communication of faith and its practice?

It seems that they advocate some very specific practical activities and attitudes. These can be summed up under the headings of:

1. Consistent Prayer;
2. Missionary Outlook;
3. Taking a chance;
4. Gracious Speech.

We begin with:

1. Consistent Prayer

There is a book by Bill Hybels called *Too Busy Not To Pray*. There needs to be some sort of understanding as to the need for prayer and its place in our lives. It is something that we do as Christians, not just corporately but personally. It is the means whereby we build a relationship with God.

At our Bible Study on Wednesday, we were talking about this whole

idea. It is more than saying your prayers. It is entering into an attitude of prayer, being in the place and *of the disposition* where we are not only able to speak to God about our concerns, but also prepared to hear what He has to say to us. To do that, we need to avoid the 'Martha syndrome' where we don't have time because we are too busy. We need to be devoted, totally given over to; committed.

It means being watchful and being alert, always positive, and proactive. Prayer should be exciting. Prayer is the conduit of God's peace (Phil.4: 7) It is the access point to the power of God. It should be persevering prayer - prayer can be hard work. But it is essential.

There should be a consistent attitude of thanksgiving woven through our prayers. It was George Bernard Shaw who said that most people don't *pray* - they *beg*! We need to ask: What is the overall tone of our prayer? Is it done in thankfulness? It should be. But, it is more when we see it in the light of a

2. Missionary outlook

Prayer is a missionary opportunity for everyone. It is a way in which we can be fully involved 'by proxy' as it were. Paul seeks the prayers of the Colossians as he endeavours to proclaim the Good News. There is a team approach to prayer and Paul isn't slow to ask for prayer support.

Prayer opens doors - especially in people's hearts. Prayer is a "war-time walkie-talkie" rather than a "domestic intercom". It is a weapon to be used in the war of this world, as we engage in a spiritual battle and call upon the power of God to enable us to overcome difficulties and see the good news permeate more extensively.

The specific prayer that Paul craves is for the opportunity and the enabling to '*proclaim the mystery of Christ*'. What is that mystery? It is "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*." It is the unimaginable privilege and prospect that, in experience, Christ - the power of God - can come into the hearts of those who believe Him and impart an enabling not possible otherwise. It is being dynamically united with Christ.

But, there is often a cost involved in taking this message to others. Paul was in chains for the sake of the gospel, because of what was entailed in venturing forth with the message, sometimes where it was not welcomed; and sometimes even strongly opposed. We, too, must remain faithful to the message, and not dilute or change it just to avoid difficulties.

We need to be devoted to, and diligent in, prayer for the clear and the effective communication of the gospel. That may mean:

3. Launching Out

Being involved in communicating the message calls for enterprise and initiative. There is room for thinking strategically and venturing forth deliberately and carefully. For example, in Matthew 10:16 Jesus says "*I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be as shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves*" It is about responding to the wisdom of God and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, combined with a fair measure of common sense and ordinary *nous*. It is about taking opportunities when they present themselves. Although our paid employment is for other than evangelism, notwithstanding, we *are* witnesses, and there will be opportunities to speak to others of our faith in Jesus.

It is to be done wisely, sensibly - and sensitively. But it is not just that it is done: how it is done is also important. Whatever the situation and whatever the motivation, it should always be with:

4. Gracious Speech.

The way we talk should show Jesus. There is a poem which is sometimes read at funerals that says something like: '*Talk of me as you used to talk of me*'. All Christian communication should be with love and with grace - and it should be willingly, not reluctantly. For example, we often talk of Jesus as if it is a struggle and a strain. Grudgingly, we 'shoe-horn' Him into the conversation in a contrived and artificial way whereas it should be one of the most natural things that we do - just to speak of Jesus. Sometimes we are arrogant and aggressive rather than gracious.

Speech should be '*seasoned with salt*.' It should be something that is appetising, pure, wholesome, and helpful; something that draws people rather than something that irritates or repels them.

Everyone is different and we can't expect to say the same thing to everyone and expect that the one size fits all. We need to be able and willing to respond to people in their individual situation and with their particular queries or problems.

Paul elsewhere (in 1 Corinthians 13) emphasises the importance of love - concern for others - as the motive for all effective communication, sensitive to differences, always seeking the best.

The gospel is the same and the message is the same: it is about bringing people to Jesus.

And that effective - and fair -communication is emphasised in his parting greetings in the last section of the book.

We turn to that now.