

Christ-Sufficient Testimonies

Colossians 4:5-6 *Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*

As a youth, I once had a bookmark I kept in my Bible. On the bookmark was an illustration of a judge sitting behind his judgement seat, with the gavel in his hand. Underneath the illustration were the words: 'If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'

The essence of that statement is this: while Christianity is an internal reality, it must have external manifestations. It must come out. And it must come out publicly, so that others can see it.

Up to now, Colossians has shown us how finding sufficiency in Christ affects us internally. That is, how believing and knowing and acting in light of Christ's sufficiency affects our minds and characters, how it affects our relationships within the church, how it shapes our worship and goals as a church, how it affects our relationships within our families, how it affects our prayer life. For a brief moment, Colossians mentioned our work ethic, but in some ways, that is still internal – working with God as my audience. Now Paul faces us squarely outwards, and gives us instructions as to our public testimony.

We know this because Paul uses the words 'those who are outside'. Outside of what? They are outside of the church - those who are on the outside of salvation. He uses this phrase in I Corinthians 5 to speak of judging believers as opposed to unbelievers:

1 Corinthians 5:12 *For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? ¹³ But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."*

One of the qualifications of an overseer, that is a pastor or an elder, is - **1 Timothy 3:7** *Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

So this Scripture is going to deal with our interactions with unbelievers.

There are at least two reasons why this is critical.

1. The name of Christ – we are His ambassadors

2 Corinthians 5:20 *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*

Ambassadors for Christ! What a thought. Every person we meet is meeting a representative of Christ on earth – a diplomat from Christ's kingdom. Ambassadors, however, live different lives from the average person. An ambassador lives on foreign soil, and always represents the interests of his home country to the foreigners. If an ambassador became so enamoured by the country he was living in that he decided to take up citizenship, he would lose his position. The point of an ambassador is to have someone loyal to their home country, accurately portraying and representing the interests of the home country on that foreign soil. That's what you are if you are a believer.

When you love this world, when you treat it like it is your home, you do not do justice to your privileged position.

2. The salvation of unbelievers – living epistles

Someone has said, 'A few unsaved people will read the Bible, but all people will read you.' Your life is the only Bible some people will ever read. Your example, your actions are the only Gospel some will ever hear.

Paul says of the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 3:2** – '*You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;*'

Now, in light of that, the Bible gives us some instructions as to how to interact with unbelievers, and they are surprisingly simple. These Scriptures do not exhaust all that makes up a Christian's responsibility to others, but what they do is summarise a Christian's testimony in one sentence, and then call us to give attention to two practical areas.

So here is the summary:

Walk in wisdom.

Walk, meaning the way you live, the pattern of your life, the overall conduct of living. Conduct your going and your coming, your rising and your sitting, your speaking, listening, buying, selling, driving, watching, working, dressing, eating, drinking in wisdom.

If your life leaves a fragrance, then spray yourself with the cologne or the perfume known as wisdom.

It is wisdom that draws people. We tend to think that people are only going to mock, despise or persecute Christians. And it is true that they often do so to cover their own works of darkness. But what no one can get away from is the beauty of wisdom.

Proverbs 8:11 *For wisdom is better than rubies, And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.*

Proverbs 16:16 *How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.*

Wisdom causes admiration; in some cases, even envy. Wisdom justifies itself. The wisdom of wisdom answers its critics. A wise life acts like a light on a hill - a light that lights the darkness. A wise life provides salt – a preservative, to a world perishing under its own corruption. In a way wisdom reveals heaven's priorities to the world. It gives people on earth a glimpse of how God thinks, of what God values, of what God desires. Wisdom communicates to a people estranged from their Creator what His mind is like.

It is imperative that unbelievers see wisdom – because it may be the only chance they get to see something of Christ.

So that leads us to ask, 'What is wisdom?' What does the Bible mean when it says, 'Wisdom?'

We've come across wisdom a few times in this epistle. Back in chapter 1:9 we saw how knowledge, wisdom and understanding form a three-fold cord in Scripture. We saw in chapter 2:3 that Jesus Himself is where all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid.

A simple definition of wisdom might be 'skilful living'. Wisdom is applying the right means to achieve the right ends. We say God is wise, because God can apply perfect means to achieve perfect ends. The reason He can do that is because He can see all things, their origin, meaning, beginning and end, and their relationships to each other. He sees the proportion of all things perfectly.

You and I get a measure of that wisdom. As we grow in God-given knowledge, we grow in our sense of what is important, what is less important. We learn to give things different weights. The person giving most weight to something relatively weightless, the Bible calls a *fool*. As we grow in our understanding of what is most important, what is least important, we have a bigger sense of 'the

big picture' – how things relate, what must be done, how it must be done, how urgently.

So if we are to walk in wisdom, we need to ask, where does it come from and how do you get it?

James 3:13-17 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

The kind of wisdom that the world needs to see comes from God.

Proverbs 2:6 *For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;*

So, how do we get this wisdom from God?

Firstly, by worshipping Him.

Proverbs 9:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

When you fear God, you are on the road to wisdom. 'Fearing God' is a way of saying 'worship Him'. It is to give Him first place, honour, reverence, love, obedience, trust. It is to seek Him.

Wisdom is not something God gives us to use as a toy. It is something that comes through a personal, ongoing, growing knowledge of God. We grow wiser when we love the One who is the source of all wisdom. We grow wiser when we spend time, and seek to please and honour and obey the One who is perfect in wisdom. Wisdom apart from God is in fact condemned in the Bible. It is the kind of worldly wisdom that Paul says God will shame with foolishness. But the wisdom that comes from seeking to love and serve God is an imbibing of His sweet, meek and perfectly wise mind.

Secondly, by asking Him.

James 1:5 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

If we really want wisdom, we will ask for it. And if we ask for it, God will give it, because if we are asking for the right reasons, God has no reason to withhold it.

Do you remember when God approached Solomon?

1 Kings 3:5 *At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?"*

1 Kings 3:7-12 *Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. ⁹ Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" ¹⁰ The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. ¹¹ Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, ¹² behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise*

and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.

Of course, if we are sincere in this request, we will not expect wisdom to drop into our heads from nowhere. We will accompany the request with a diligent seeking of knowledge from the Scriptures. God grants wisdom, but as Proverbs 2:1-5 teaches us, He grants it if we receive [His] words, And treasure [His] commands within [us], So that [we] incline [our] ear[s] to wisdom, And apply [our] heart[s] to understanding; Yes, if [we] cry out for discernment, And lift up [our] voice[s] for understanding, If [we] seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures;

Wisdom comes to those who seek to know and love Christ, and ask Him for wisdom while searching for it all their lives.

Now, as far as this public walk goes, this passage focuses on two areas that display wisdom to others. The Bible tells us to give attention to two areas where our wisdom must be seen – the use of our time, and the use of our tongue.

I. The way you use your time

Paul uses an interesting word here – 'redeeming' the time. In the original, the word is in the middle voice. What this usually means is the person doing the action also receives the action. So the idea is, redeem the time, for yourself. He does not mean do so selfishly; he means if you do not redeem the time, you will lose.

He is using a word picture. The picture involves buying and selling. We have studied the meaning of redemption before – where someone would buy a slave out of the slave-market, or where a near relative would buy back land that was being forfeited. So here, it is as if time is what is being sold. It is as if you are at a market, and if you do not act, time will be sold away, instead of given to you for your benefit. The moments, and with them, the opportunities, are being auctioned off, and you need to bid or have them be sold off.

You've heard or used phrases like, "I've just let time slip away from me" or "The years seem to just go whizzing by". And the command here is, don't be passive regarding the time which God gives you. Don't be a spectator of your own life.

So if you have to buy back the moments, what is the currency?

Answer: your own zeal and diligence. Your desire to make full proof of your life, leads you to make use of every moment.

Now, that does not mean life is one high-strung activity. The Bible is not asking us to live in a continual state of push. As Solomon says in **Ecclesiastes 3:1** - *To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.*

But this is where wisdom comes in. With unbelievers looking on, how do you use the time given to you?

You see, what you do with time is a very good indicator of what is important to you. As the unsaved behold your life, they see you spending time, just like you spend money. Whatever we spend on, we value. Since we don't have a limitless supply of time, what we spend time on also reflects values.

We all get the same 24 hours. How you slice up that pie says a lot about you. You've got to slice up that pie to include sleep, eating, travelling, working, running errands or doing other responsibilities. At the end of that there will be a small section of free time. How you apportion the slices (as far as

it is up to you) reveals a lot about you. Not only so, but how you maximise, or better economise, the time you are given reveals your view of time. When money is in short supply, we try to save it. If we see time as being in short supply, we will not waste it either.

Do you remember what Moses said?

Psalm 90:2-4 *Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. ³ You turn man to destruction, And say, "Return, O children of men." ⁴ For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night.*

Psalm 90:10-12 *The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. ¹¹ Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. ¹² So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

Do you see how wisdom is asked for again? It is wisdom that guides us to say – ‘This is a waste of time,’ or ‘This, can be done in a more efficient way,’ or ‘This must be delayed,’ or ‘This needs more time.’ It is when you have wisdom – the big picture – the broad sense of what is really important, how it relates to others, how much weight you should put on it, that you come to sense what to give to what activity.

When wisdom guides the use of your time, you will attract the attention of unbelievers. Of course, they want to know how you spend your weekends. They are surprised when you miss certain TV shows or have never heard of them. They might be surprised if you say ‘No’ to working even later. They want to know why your priorities are not their priorities. One of the greatest conversation starters for the Gospel is how you use your time.

When Jesus said the following: **Matthew 6:19-20** *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal,”* He was partly talking about how we use our time, wasn't He? Christians use their time in light of eternity. Unbelievers use their time as if they have 80 years to please themselves. An eternal focus redirects the way you use your time.

You've heard the saying, “Only one life to live, soon past – only what's done for Christ will last.” That is a wise use of time. It is wisdom, and it will draw and attract and puzzle the unbeliever.

What they should not see is the same slothfulness, love of ease and pleasure, and ill-discipline that characterises so many of them. Nor should they see the workaholic, driven, edgy person who hardly has time to talk to a neighbour needing Christ. Instead, they should sense that some entirely different set of priorities guides your life and how you spend it.

2. The way you use your tongue.

Your use of time reveals your priorities. But your tongue reveals something else.

Matthew 12:34 *Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.*

Just like the physical tongue reveals your body's temperature, so your words reveal your spiritual state. What comes out of your mouth has emerged from your mind. You can undo years of a good testimony with a few words. You can build your testimony by leaps and bounds with the right words. In fact, James tells us in his epistle that a Christian who cannot bridle his or her tongue is not

a Christian.

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless.

Wise words correspond to what is meant in the last part of our verses in Colossians 4:5-6 '*that you may know how you ought to answer each one*'.

That's wisdom, isn't it? It is being able to say the right thing every time, because in fact, different people require different answers.

Proverbs 26:4 *Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him. ⁵ Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

How would you answer the following situations: A false accusation, a compliment, an insult, a false rumour, a grumbling complaint, a challenge to the faith, a dirty joke, a profaning of the Lord's name, a genuine question, a facetious question, a sexual innuendo, a boast, a harsh tone, a hurting tone, or a rude tone? We could go on and on. The point is – one size doesn't fit all. You need wisdom to know how to answer every man.

1 Peter 3:15 *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; ¹⁶ having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*

Consider the marvellous example of our Lord, when tempted by the Sadducees and Pharisees. They deliberately wanted to trap Him with words. So they set up problems where if He said yes, He would be wrong, and if He said no, He would be wrong.

Luke 20:21-26 *Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.*

That's wisdom. It's those kinds of answers that cause people to marvel, and they are drawn to the Gospel, to the Saviour.

The Bible helps us understand what wise words are like. They are:

a. Words that build & preserve

Let your words be with grace. Grace.

Ecclesiastes 10:12 *The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;*

Grace is God's kindness to those who do not deserve it. So gracious words are words that bring what is needed, even if those they are said to do not deserve it.

Ephesians 4:29 *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*

b. Gracious words edify. Fools delight to destroy things. The fastest way to destroy something is

usually with our tongue. You'll notice that Paul says the opposite of gracious words are corrupt words. Now in the ancient world, refrigeration did not exist, so salt was often used to preserve food from corruption. That seems to be the idea here. Let your words be full of grace, so that they preserve and enhance what is true, pure, upright, lovely commendable, just, honest. Let your words add the flavour of godliness, let them preserve it against the filthy words of grumbling, murmuring, gossiping, flattering, diminishing, lying, cursing, blaspheming,

Mark 9:50 *Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.*

Edifying, purifying words are wise words.

Proverbs 12: *There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health.*

Proverbs 10:11 *The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, But violence covers the mouth of the wicked.*

A tongue that speaks grace reveals a heart that has received grace. It reveals something new is at work in you. To speak words of grace is to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth and alert people to God's presence.

People can't read your mind, or know your inner motives. They can't see your heart. They can see how you use your time, and they can hear how you use your tongue. Those are both very public and very obvious acts. But both of those public acts are probably the most significant statements about who you are on the inside, what drives you, what you believe, what you love, what you trust in, who you are.

So fear the Lord, and grow in wisdom. Ask Him for wisdom as you seek for it. Wisdom will train your use of time. Wisdom will train your tongue. The result will be life that people can read, and get a fairly accurate pointer towards Jesus Christ.