

Christ's Love, Our Calling  
Colossians 4:2-6 – Love takes TIME for our Neighbors  
February 13-15, 2010 by: Pastor Wessel

*Colossians 4:2-6 – 2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 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. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

**Introduction** – Sometimes it seems as though Christians want to isolate themselves and avoid interaction with other people in the world. Why do you think that is? Are you ever tempted to do that?

Maybe it's because with certain people, in certain situations, the temptation to go against God seems especially strong, so in order to avoid temptation, you need to avoid certain people. Maybe it's because people often form their opinions of you based on who you hang out with, so you are afraid that people will think less of you if you spend time with certain people. Or maybe at times your sinful nature gets the better of you and you just don't feel that certain people are worth your time.

When God set aside a people for himself under the Old Testament, he did tell them that they were to keep themselves separate from the ungodly people around them. For us who live under the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, God does remind us that we are strangers and aliens here on earth because heaven is our eternal home and so often the values of people around us focus on everything but our eternal relationship with our heavenly Father.

Having said that, we also remember that God has given us life here on earth and placed us in a community with a wide variety of people. We are surrounded by neighbors and we ourselves are neighbors to the people around us. Jesus taught his disciples about the importance of being a neighbor with the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that story, Jesus didn't talk about which people deserve our love, but he emphasized that, as his followers, we look for opportunities to love those around us, whoever they may be.

### **Love Takes Time for Our Neighbors**

#### **I. Love shows itself with neighborly actions**

#### **II. Love shows itself with neighborly words**

#### **I. Neighborly actions are wise**

A common sentiment expressed in our world is: "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." Get a favor, give a favor. Get a gift, give a gift. It makes sense, right? But Jesus challenges our thinking. Jesus teaches us that if we do good only for those who do good for us, what is so great about that? He says, *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.* (Luke 6:32-35) That's different! Exactly. We are called by God to be different. Why? Because loving those who hated him is exactly what the Son of God did. *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* God did not wait until we had a good relationship with him before he offered us his time, his love, his most precious gifts. *"While we were sinners, Christ died for us."*

If you are going to wait for everyone else to make the first move before you love them, you may be waiting a long time. If you wait for someone else to love you before you love them, you are loving with conditions attached and that love is not Christ-like love, it is merely common sense, survival love. But if you love regardless of who the person is and what they have done, you are reflecting the type of love that God demonstrated for you.

Loving your neighbor is hard. Loving strangers is hard. Loving enemies is even harder. All of it takes time, sometimes a lot of time. How is it possible to love like this? Paul says, *"Devote yourselves to prayer, be watchful and thankful."* God has set up a communication line between us and him where data can be exchanged freely. We offer our prayers to God with our hearts and our lips; he offers his grace to us in his Word.

Through this communication line, the Holy Spirit directs our eyes so that we are watchful and directs our hearts so that we are thankful. Directs our eyes so that we see the need of our neighbor to be served by us and directs our hearts so that we are thankful that *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* That's not just the sinner that I am, but it is every person whose face I see, whose voice I hear, whose steps I hear walking beside me or toward me. They are all sinners for whom Christ died. That means that their needs in the deepest way are no different than my needs. And I know that God has met and will meet all my needs in Christ Jesus and so I have to believe that God has met and can meet the need of the person standing in front of me, whether friend, foe, or stranger.

With this amazing grace of God in mind, Paul says, “*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.*” Neighborly actions are wise. The Apostle Paul on his mission trips was looking for open doors to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. We too look for openings. The opening may be very small, but it will be there. It will be an opportunity to show love to someone, perhaps someone you’ve never even met. Oh, to be at that point in our life of faith in Jesus! It is a blessing of the Spirit to be able to think of our interaction with every single person as an opportunity – an opportunity to love a neighbor, an opportunity to do good, like the Good Samaritan who saw a great need he could fulfill for the man who was beaten up, a man who by some definitions was his enemy.

Any time you take a detour to show love for your neighbor, it may seem inconvenient. It may not be time that you can spare, based on your current priorities. But we pray that God will help us to see our priorities differently, that the opportunity to show love to a neighbor may very well be more important than whatever else we feel we need to do at any given moment. That is part of being wise in the way we act toward outsiders.

Another aspect of it is always being conscious of who God has made us to be. He bought us with the blood of Christ to be his own people. He has given us faith through the Holy Spirit so we see our identity in light of Christ’s empty tomb, our peace. He asks us to think about our everyday, normal life opportunities as we interact with people. He asks us to be aware of the fact that there are so called “outsiders” who are watching and listening and thinking about us and how we represent the one we claim we represent. Whether people are watching because they are curious or because they feel a need to smell out hypocrisy or because they have been hurt and are looking for healing or because they want us to fail, doesn’t really matter. What does matter is that God has called us here together, not to hide ourselves within these walls, but to live our lives outside these walls in praise of our Savior.

Would you acknowledge that you haven’t always been wise when dealing with people outside your friendship zone? Maybe they are store clerks or sales people. Maybe they are neighbors on your block or people at work. Would you acknowledge that you haven’t made the most of every opportunity to show love to them, whether or not they have shown it to you? I know I haven’t been always been wise and certainly haven’t made the most of every opportunity.

So let’s take the misuse of our time and the fear of strangers whom God loves and the guilt of missed opportunities and failed opportunities and hand them over. Hand them over to Christ our Savior. “*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” The opportunity was there for Christ to do the ultimate good for all people and he took it. He could have commanded the angels to come and fight for him; they had fought for God’s people before. But Christ was willing to show unconditional love to a world full of people that had disobeyed him and hated him. He was willing to set aside his comfort for us who were outsiders of the kingdom of God, so that we could become insiders through faith in our Savior.

## **II. Neighborly words leave a good taste**

Days are filled with opportunities to show love to all kinds of neighbors. But when it comes down to it, even though our actions are important, the words that accompany the action can last longer and have a greater impact. How often has a kind word from someone left an impression on you? When we take the time to let someone know why we love them, that Christ’s love for us motivates us to love them, those neighborly words, by God’s grace, leave a good taste that will last an eternity.

When our mouths are ready and our tongues are willing to speak of God’s grace we are ready to show great love for our neighbor. “*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*” We do have the promise that the Holy Spirit will give us the loving words to say to our neighbor. But they won’t be new words. They will be words that reflect the truth of God revealed to us in his word. In many ways, we can’t prepare ourselves to speak good-tasting, neighborly words to the people we encounter. But we do prepare in a very important way. We read the Scriptures. As we understand more and more about what God says about our lives and our world, we know what he says to each person we encounter in our day. And depending on the person, we might end up in a very deep conversation with them about what the Bible says and the knowledge about our Savior Jesus Christ can then dominate the conversation—a joy for us and with the Spirit working, we pray it will be a joy for our conversation partner as well. Our words and our nonverbal communication and genuineness will communicate our deep concern for all people.

I certainly am not expecting that every one of you will be an eloquent speaker, a bold teacher of Bible truths, a person with the answer to every question about the Christian faith. I can’t expect that, because God doesn’t expect it. But he asks us to think about our conversations. A kind, gentle, and caring word that comes from a Christ-filled heart can accomplish incredible good. The Spirit can use a good tasting conversation to open a door that seems shut so tightly our eyes could never see how it would open.

Our words should be guided by our attitude of love for our neighbor, a deep concern for their spiritual and eternal well-being. When they are not, our hope must rest in Christ. He was wise with his words when he soothed souls and when he confronted hypocrites. Even while being crucified, Jesus prayed for his enemies, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” He did not shout out curses to those who were killing him. Even when he was faced with death, his

words were full of grace and left a good taste, so that no one could ever accuse him of anything wrong. May we reflect the love of Christ in all our interactions with our neighbor as God uses us to bring his Word to lost and helpless people. God will open doors for you.

**Conclusion** – Time is a precious commodity, perhaps the most valuable aspect of our lives. As we have reviewed the godly use of our time this we, we remember how quickly time passes and how easily opportunities are missed. Sadly, we will not have perfect wisdom when we use our time. Our priorities will get mixed up and we will spend too much on one thing and not enough on the other.

I think people often think of spending time on what doesn't last, because time is limited for those tasks. But I encourage you to think about spending the most time on what does last. It starts with your own relationship with God your Maker and Savior and it extends to the relationships you have with your family, your fellow Christians in this congregation, and whatever other people you interact with on a daily basis. Focus on lasting relationships when you set up your time table, relationships that endure beyond the curtain of death and reach their greatest happiness in the presence of God's glory in heaven. God bless you so that you take time to love as God has loved you. Amen.