



Colossians 4:5–6

5 Be wise in the way you act towards 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.

Reflection

As the end of the year draws near, it's hard not to begin to look back on the year that was. And for the Christian in Australia, with

the latter part of the year dominated by the postal vote on same sex marriage, it has been a year in which we have been reminded of just how offensive the Christian faith can be to outsiders. In countries like ours that enjoy freedom of religion, and promote tolerance amongst people from all manner of cultural and religious backgrounds, Western Christians have by-and-large enjoyed a good run. But as we've seen in the popular media this year, and as many of us have felt on social media, a change is in the air. The heat is being turned up on any Christian brave enough to publicly engage on God's design for human marriage, let alone the broader issues of human sexuality, sin, judgment, heaven and hell.

No-one likes conflict. And yet as Chris-

tians we have to acknowledge that what we believe is at best foolishness to unbelievers (1 Cor 1:18) and at worst is highly offensive to those outside of the faith (cf. John 6:61; Matt 15:12). We're called to share the good news of Jesus Christ but in order to do so we have to begin with the bad. And the bad news is offensive in the extreme. You're more sinful than you ever imagined. God's good design for humanity has been marred almost beyond recognition in you. You're foolishly rebelling against the most powerful person in the universe. There's nothing you can do to earn God's favour, no effort you can exert, no law you can follow – you are utterly and completely unable to save yourself. Even giving up the wicked things you've come to love won't do it. Judgment is certain, hell is just and fair, and without out-

side help, hell is where you are rightly and eternally destined. To those who are perishing the message of the cross, is at best foolishness, but increasingly in our culture, it is offensive in the extreme.

Which is why passages like today's one from Colossians 4:5–6 are crucial in coming to understand and respond to this cultural shift. Listen to Paul's words to the young Colossian church also under threat in their culture,

5 Be wise in the way you act towards 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.

As offensive as the Christian worldview can be to those around us, we have the words of eternal life, how can we keep them in? We are the light of the world, and we are called by Jesus to let our light shine before others, not to hide from the public eye. The prize is worth the risk, the offense caused and conflict navigated worth the persecution, because eternal life hangs in the balance. And yet with the stakes so high Paul commends wisdom. Exactly because of the potential for offense in the surrounding culture and exactly because eternal life is at stake Paul says,

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know how to answer everyone.

There's wisdom and tact here. But there's also an eagerness to share the gospel at every turn. 'Make the most of every opportunity', Paul says. Be on the lookout for opportunities. And when you see them, pounce on them; be fully prepared, and when they arrive make the most of them. But don't do so in a superior way, or a boring way, or using language filled with Christian jargon that is undecipherable in our post-Christian culture. Rather,

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

This is no small ask. In fact, it will involve a

radical reorientation for many of us. There are three points here: grace, salt, and answering everyone. Briefly, each in turn.

Firstly,

Let your conversation be always full of grace,

In speaking with those outside of the faith, our conversations must always be filled with grace. Jesus says that out of the overflow of the mouth the heart speaks. And so if we are to engage, for example, in the online community there mustn't even be a hint of hate, or acrimony or vitriol in our language. Instead our conversation should be always full of grace; gracious listening, gracious disagreeing, and gracious speaking of the truth in love, gen-

tly and respectfully giving reasons for the hope that we have.

While the Bible only contains four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – it is often said that there are actually five. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and you ... You can insert your name at the end of the list as the fifth gospel. In reality, the only gospel that most people will read, is the fifth gospel – you. And if they find your conversation always full of grace, and see Jesus in you, then the prospects of them reading one of the other gospels and giving their life to Jesus dramatically increases. So firstly,

Let your conversation be always full of grace,

And secondly, let your conversation be,
seasoned with salt,

Salt in the ancient world was highly prized, bringing flavour to, and preserving food. In classical Greek idiom the idea here is conversation filled with flavour, liveliness, interest, joy, humour and wit. In our conversations with those outside the faith Paul is encouraging us not to be dull, superior, sanctimonious or boring, but to be lively, challenging, insightful, passionate and wise. Be the life of the party for Jesus. Read widely, think deeply, delve beneath trends in our culture, politics and international relations and to it all apply a Christian lens, a Christian worldview, offering a Christian perspective and Christ's love to anyone and everyone you have the op-

portunity to enjoy a conversation with.

And finally, the ‘anyone and everyone’ part.

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

... so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Elsewhere Paul says,

I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel,

He's expressing the same sentiments here. Knowing how to answer everyone implies lots of prayer and lots of practice. It means reading widely, training yourself in evangelism and apologetics, meditating constantly over the Scriptures and their intersection with human life, and living life constantly considering the perspectives and backgrounds, objections and misunderstandings of people from outside of the faith,

... so that you may know how to answer everyone.

... so that by all possible means [you] might save some.

Think & Pray

This is such a timely word for Australian Christians heading into 2018 and beyond. So with the time that remains today consider the way that you are acting towards outsiders and especially your conversation. Are you being wise in the way you approach the relationships that God has given you with those outside of the faith? In your speech are you measured, gentle, respectful but also eager and willing to make the most of much prayed for opportunities as they arise? And what about your day to day conversation? Is your heart in a place with God that means your conversation is always filled with grace? Are your words always well-weighted and carefully chosen, yet free-flowing, and filled with a lightness and joy in Jesus that is contagious? Proverbs 15:23,

A word in season, how good it is!

And if your speech isn't like this, if you don't know how to answer everyone, then consider what you might do to raise your game. How much television are you watching? Are your past-times mind numbing or thought-provoking? What might you read, or listen to, or take a course to learn, that might open up opportunities in conversation for the gospel?

Pray along these lines today asking God to fill you and I with his grace and his Spirit to the blessing of our conversation and our friends. And pray that 2018 might be the best year yet for the gospel of Jesus Christ in Australia.