

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for Nov. 30: Christians are heaven's ambassadors on earth_112403

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Christians are heaven's ambassadors on earth

♦ *Colossians 3:18-4:18*

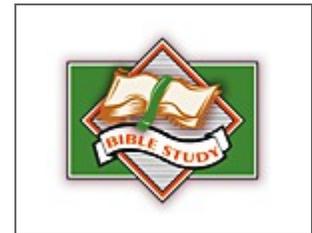
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What does a Christian look like in the 21st century? Paul's word to the Colossians paints a picture of a Christian—a person of prayer; witness; wisdom in daily life; and graceful speech that remembers God's servants are salt and light to the world. John Calvin describes it, “For the church is like a city of which all believers are the mutual inhabitants, joined with each other by a mutual kinship; but unbelievers are foreigners.” As a citizen of a city, the Christian is one fulfilling obligations of honor and duty to please the leaders of the city, according to Calvin. In the case of the Christian, he or she desires to serve Christ as a heavenly citizen while on earth.

Prayer

Paul encourages the church to “keep close company with prayer” (4:2). Described another way, Paul asks the church to “busily engage in prayer” with watchfulness. Paul's hint here is that the Christian life possesses danger. Prayer combats that danger. Prayer awakens the spiritual life so that grace touches the soul and gratitude flows from the lips. Speech and words are important to Paul. Therefore, he simply says what Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). What is in the heart comes out, either good or bad. The Christian prays God's grace, and gratitude results.



Paul longs for the Christian to have speech always seasoned with grace, like salt flavoring meat (Colossians 4:6). Prayer prepares the heart for what may need to come out later in conversation with another person. Prayers of grace sprinkle gratitude and also give the Christian an answer for speaking to others when necessary (v. 6). Christian speech honors Christ, flavors the world with the spice of God's grace and delivers words of purity for individual edification.

Testimony

Paul knows the importance of words carefully chosen to give witness to the cross (v. 3). Paul desired prayer for an open door (v. 3). The prayer was for the removal of hindrances to preaching (in Paul's case, he was in prison) and a prayer of opportunity for the good news of the gospel to go forth. Paul anxiously longed for the testimony of the cross, grace and God's peace

to be told. He wished for the mystery of Christ to touch hearts and change lives (v. 3). Paul felt a moral obligation to announce the gospel (v. 4). The necessity was to make clear what Christ came to do—save, provide eternal life, love and grace the soul unto salvation.

Paul names fellow servants for Christ who also give witness to the gospel—Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Marcus, Barnabas, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nymphas and Archippus. For the testimony of God's grace to be delivered, there must be zeal or enthusiasm, comfort, encouragement, a public reading of the Scriptures and faithfulness in service to Christ. Each person Paul names possesses these kinds of qualities and fruitfulness for witness that comes through Christ.

Wisdom

The Christians were to walk in wisdom (v. 5). Paul probably has in mind the philosophers and sophists of the day who gave their philosophies on speakers' corners in major cities. They shared their philosophic words about life as peripatetic walkers, those who walk in circles. Paul's gospel was more than a philosophy spoken in public places; it was a word of salvation that transformed soul, heart, mind, duty, conduct and life itself. Paul wishes for the Christian to speak and to conduct himself or herself in wisdom face to face to those outside of the gospel.

Paul sees Christ's servants who give testimony as heavenly citizens who speak and live as kingdom citizens on the earth. The witness for Christ and the cross comes in the daily traffic pattern of normal life in the city. The witness invites foreigners (“outside the gospel”) to become citizens of Christ's kingdom through grace and salvation. The witness anticipates the heavenly city where Christ dwells and heaven as the eternal home of Christian citizens when they leave this earth.

Praying, giving testimony in words for Jesus and displays of wisdom to the world, requires “redeeming the time” (v. 5). The idea is to set free the use of time by freeing it from worldly waste. It also means to “buy back at the market place” and involves conserving time like you would money and placing supreme value on it. Furthermore, the word indicates using time wisely and for God's glory. This does not mean the neurotic obsession with time, but the valuable use of time for witness, rest and service to please an audience of One (Christ).

Grace-filled speech

Paul feels a spiritual obligation to speak the good news of Jesus (v. 4, “ought”). Paul never strays far from the cross, the resurrection of Christ and the ascension of Jesus. Christ ascends, and the Holy Spirit comes to fill believers with God's grace. Christ lives in the Christian's heart by grace and peace, mercy and truth, thus supplying graceful and peaceful speech. Grace overflows from the heart that Christ has graced.

Question for discussion

- ◆ What should identify citizens of heaven living on earth?

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.