

Series: The Welcoming Church	Reference: Colossians 4:5-6	Title: Act Wisely	Date: 09.08.2019
Website Writeup: We only have the moments before us to make a difference in someone. Acting wisely & graciously making sure our conversations are seasoned with salt is necessary to reflect Jesus & see change.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

You split wood with a wedge. A shorter fatter wedge is not as effective as a longer thinner wedge; it may take longer to drive in, but it splits the wood much easier. Think on that as we explore how we interact with others today. The wedges which can be driven into relationships, eventually splitting them apart. Or, the blessing, love & guidance our words can bring instead.

Colossians 4:5-6, ⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Acting wisely towards others is good stewardship of our time. Opportunity's before us in the moment. The past is gone. The future we can't control. Now's the only moment we're able to craft towards godly interaction. Seeing every moment as spiritual & every soul before us as God's loved created being, enables us to appreciate the divinity of every moment & conversation we find ourselves having!

Speech towards others is a metric of our spiritual maturity & godliness. Paul, when writing to the Colossians, instructs them to act wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the time (Col 4:5). What we say has impact. How we communicate with others says something about our spiritual maturity & God's grace in our lives. Godliness, or Christ-like character, is produced through respectful, meaningful communication & when we're careful with what we say & how we talk, we build up the body through loving discussion & dialog. Disagreement doesn't have to equate to hatred, or even dislike. We must be careful with our words, since the wedges we drive in relationship often get stuck, and can be next to impossible to pry loose.

2Tim 2:16-17 says, ¹⁶Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more & more ungodly. ¹⁷Their teaching will spread like gangrene.

There's a lot of godless chatter out there! And it's spreading as we're increasingly connected through social media. But our connectedness has *not* made us more gentle & kind in speech, nor mature & grown up, and remember, we don't just want to grow old, we want to grow up! Our infinite connectedness through technology has not strengthened character & brought peaceful rapport, rather the opposite. We're angrier & shorter with one another. We suffer from information overload & a lot of hearsay, or rumor. We're not even sure what truth is in many situations. There's a satanically

crafted growing distrust of each other & relationships can't operate without trust. Trust is the fertile soil for relationships to grow in, but our trust & unity are being washed away, and relationships simply die on the vine as a result.

Our speech towards each other & any new person we meet should be gracious, restorative & even winsome. When we talk with anyone, our speech should always be gracious & seasoned with salt (Col 4:6). Being gracious means we're not quick to judge others for their actions, but are rather patient to trust the Holy Spirit to convict others of sin & righteousness (John 16:8-10).

Mature believers are like the best forensic psychologists, knowing from the Word of God what modern man is only starting to learn through these areas of study. Scripture has always addressed the underlying & internal motivations which drive aberrant behavior. Christians have always known what Dr. Henry Cloud said, that *"External conflicts are difficult to resolve before resolving the internal conflicts which fuel them."* We seek heart transformation leading to behavioral change. We know people are complicated. Humankind is grand in one sense, but also born broken in its sinful nature. Sin flourishes as it is prodded & formed by various individual & societal experiences. Christians know, there are outward sinful behaviors & we've always looked below the surface to the underlying causes, patient to see behavioral change as a persons heart & mind are filled with the light of Christ.

Modern psychology & sociology are simply erasing the standards of right & wrong to accommodate the individual self's desires, because there's very little hope or power for true change of a person through psychology or law. There's only negotiation, self-restraint, or coercion, which only work for a time & on surface levels. The only option left is to erase boundaries of what's deemed aberrant or sinful; making our own truth, which doesn't work. Psychologist, Dr. Martin Seligman, says we've replaced church, faith & community with a tiny little unit which can't bear the weight of meaning, The Self - we revolve around the self & the more obsessed we are with our selves, the more we neglect our souls (Soul Keeping, Ortberg, pp. 46-47)

In contrast, Truth is *revealed* to the Christian from outside themselves & addresses the whole being in community. A standard revealed to us by God & good for all. Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law & throw out standards, He came to fulfill them. The Moral Law's good & holy since it's what's best for Humankind & reflective of the fidelity & faithfulness of God. *We're purified by the Word of God in our obedience to it, leading to us being able to love our neighbors as ourselves (1 Peter 1:22-23).* It's the transformational power of the Gospel which brings forth the better person & society.

Sometimes our obedience to Truth comes before full understanding, or even agreeing with it. Remember the Faith Train...**Fact:** God's Word & the story of His created order. **Faith:** in the transformational power of the Gospel. And **Feelings:** fall in line sometimes only after we give ourselves over to God. But right now, 'Feelings' drive the train - *"I feel this way, therefore it's my truth."* But individual truth doesn't exist & without an outside agreed upon standard, which becomes very damaging very quickly.

We've always urged transformation into something greater in the church. To what we're created to be, as beings made in the image of God. Reflecting God in, not only outward behavior, but also in the inward heart. And we know it actually starts there, at the root, at desire. What we *desire* is what we come to be.

All this means, with others our conversations aren't contentious, but rather helpful & encouraging. They build up, not break down. As salt enhances the flavor of a meal, so our speech should enhance another's faith. So, before you open your mouth, ask yourself, "Will this build them up, or break them down?" If it's the latter, maybe Thumper's mom was right, "*If you can't say anything nice, don't say nuthin' at all.*" We use our time well when we act wisely towards others.

Acting wisely towards unbelievers gives them an opportunity to glorify God.

Good works in public point others to Jesus. Those who don't know Jesus will speak against, or doubt God, His Church & His people. When we respond to outsiders with faith, honorable conduct, gratefulness, lack of complaining & good works, we help give a physical representation of Jesus' spiritual work in our lives & our spiritual testimony is confirmed by the work of God in us (1 Cor 1:4-6; Phil 2:14-15; 1 Pet 2:12).

On September 20th we're joining together with other Delaware County churches to worship & pray. We'll be collecting donations for the Medical Debt Cancellation program. A good work out in public. Inevitably, a former critic of the church might have to humbly say, "I've badmouthed the Church, but I can't deny my debt's gone!"

Yesterday, we prayed over people openly. Our goal, at the least, they walk away feeling loved, if not healed, or moved toward Jesus! That happened! And people can't deny, you're good folks showing care by spending hours ministering to others! We point people to Jesus when we act wisely towards unbelievers around us.

Acting wisely towards fellow members conquers evil with good. Humility & grace towards each other counteracts evil in the world. I left here last Sunday & went to Hip City Vedge in Suburban Square, cause I'm such a hipster! I ran into a friend, Pastor Brokenborough, who pastors the church across from Linwood Park. I talked with he & his wife for a time. I'm not unaware, others around us saw that interaction between a white pastor & an African American pastor & how we not only respected & loved each other with our words, but enjoyed each others company! Humility is the cure for anger & evil in the world. As we treat one another well, forgiving each other, speaking well of one another & living at peace as a church, we participate with the Holy Spirit to conquer evil with good (Rom 12:16-21)

Living worthy of the Gospel allows us to work together. Practicing the fruit of the Spirit in community changes our lives, but it also changes the church as well. Members of a local church who fight for unity, labor for the Gospel & sacrificially serve together are pleasing to God & demonstrate the Gospel to a watching world.

As it says in Phil 1:27, ²⁷ *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come & see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.*

Or, Col 1:9-10, ⁹ *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom & understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord & please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.*

Or, James 3:13-18, ¹³ *Who is wise & understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy & selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy & selfish ambition, there you find disorder & every evil practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy & good fruit, impartial & sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

These were written for our benefit, transformation & furthering God’s Kingdom. We show others what it means to live worthy of the Gospel when we act wisely towards fellow members. Seasoned with salt, staving off rot. Unsalted conversations degrade & break people down. They’re unloving. They’re sinful in not honoring the complex created being standing before you, nor is it obedience to all that Jesus commanded us.

Reread your emails & Facebook posts before you hit send. Ask yourself, “Are they salty” (in the biblical sense, not the Urban Dictionary sense - the exact opposite). It’s not being untrue to yourself, or disingenuous to be kind & inquisitive of others on the other side of your issues, instead of being knee-jerk & cutting - it’s wisdom.

When a person prefaces their speech with, “*I’m just being honest...*” We know what usually follows isn’t helpful. Some of us need to repent for what we’ve said to others, or how we’ve said it. Again, maybe Thumper’s mom was right, “*If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say nuthin’ at all.*” Transformation can’t happen through closed doors, and wrong words, or attitudes conveyed, shut doors - sometimes to never open again.

As we saw last week, Daryl Davis knew people hated him without knowing him only for the color of his skin. His first experience of that was when he marched in a Boy Scout Troop for a town parade at 10 years old. A small group of people pelted him with debris because he was black, but a whole crowd of whites protected him, which Daryl was quick to point out. He wanted to know, “How could someone hate me, without even knowing me?” Good question.

When he grew up, he invited the Imperial Wizard of the KKK to a hotel room & offered him hospitality. Daryl, unarmed. The Imperial Wizard’s bodyguard, armed. Daryl shook

his hand, welcomed him & prepared food & drink for him (a lot of good happens over hospitable meals). Daryl spoke kind respectful words to him. As a result of this interaction, Daryl was invited to attend KKK rallies with Roger Kelly (the Imperial Wizard). At one of these Kelly pointed at Daryl & said, *"I'd follow that man to hell & back...we may not agree on everything, but he's shown me respect!"*

Since his journey began, Daryl has accepted a "certificate of friendship" from the Traditionalist American Knights of the KKK. He's even the godfather of Roger Kelly's granddaughter. Daryl eventually had the pleasure of receiving Kelly's Imperial Wizard robe as a gift from him when Kelly left the KKK due to the influence of their relationship. Roger Kelly, was a cop. Daryl was a jazz musician.

You may not be infiltrating a dangerous white supremacist movement, but you can learn from Daryl in a polarized nation. Realizing people are complicated, lost & can be transformed. Like Christian Piccolini, whom I also described last week. A lost & vulnerable 14 year old without a racist idea in his head, was drawn into the Neo-Nazi movement only because one man approached him & paid attention. Overnight going from 'Joanie loves Chachi, to full-blown Nazi'. Praise God he left & continues to tell his story. Disrespectful conversations create monsters - respectful conversations dismantle them. You don't have to agree on everything to have relationship. You can seek common ground, unity, be kind, respectful & show honor even to monsters.

It says in 1 Peter 3:15-16, *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness & respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

Ever go into a conversation hornet mad, making statements only to find out they weren't true? It's humbling. Maybe it's as small as you can't find your keys. You assume your wife moved them & say, "Where'd you put my keys!?! You always move my stuff!" To which she replies calmly, "Honey, I haven't touched them." "Yeah, right! You're always messing with my things!" A wedge driven. Trust waning. Later that day, you find your keys, remembering you'd put them there. Time to eat crow, but the wedge may not be easily removed & come with lasting damage.

"I can't believe you voted for Hillary, I guess you don't mind killing babies!" "I can't believe you voted for Trump, you're a racist!" These statements get us nowhere. Remember the relationship. Remember your call. Remember the Gospel.

Wisdom tells us to cool off, wait, sleep on it & ask questions instead of hurling accusations. It's better to preface our questions/statements differently: "Honey, did you happen to move my keys?" "I'm wondering what you meant when you said..." "I heard you said/did X, but I wanted to do you the honor of confirming." And when that person answers, "Yes, said it & meant it!," we still don't attack. We ask further questions of understanding. And by the way, it's not that we think we're going to get right answers, or

convince that person otherwise, it's to make them feel respected, loved & honored. Remember, Daryl disagreed with Kelly in good ways.

Paul could've sat & watched the Jailer in Acts 16 kill himself & said, "Serves him right for putting us in here." Since that Jailer put them in the innermost cell & even in stocks - he didn't have to go that far. Instead, Paul said to a perceived enemy, "Don't harm yourself, let me tell you about Jesus!" Then shared Christ with him.

The unwise barrel in with anger & assumption. But questions or statements posed respectfully, even hard ones, are okay. Questions asked with a sincere desire to understand someone create trust & openness where none was evident. Anger melts in the face of sincere love & interest.

I've begun watching a show about the FBI which explores the whole idea of nature vs. nurture. Are criminal minds born or formed over time? Did Charles Manson pop out a murderous rapist, or was he formed by a horrific childhood? Edmund Kemper, the Coed Killer, who murdered his family members, and a host of college coeds - was he just created a serial killer at birth, or was he a result of growing up with an extremely abusive mother? The answer is both, and maybe modern psychology will catch up someday to that Truth. That it's not just psychological or emotional, it's a spiritual soul sickness. We're all born into sin, and sin seizes opportunities afforded it by our twisted experiences & hurts from others to create monsters in all of us. The only answer is Jesus & the transformative power of His word.

Remember from last week as 1 Pe 1:22 states, ²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Or Romans 12:1-2, Therefore, I urge you, brothers & sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God - this is your true & proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test & approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing & perfect will.

Christ's power to transform & purify us allows us to practice Colossians 4:5-6, 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.