



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jump Start # 1701

Colossians 4:6 *“Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”*

It is hard to find the words to describe this year's Presidential campaign. One candidate has been recorded making lewd and vulgar remarks several years ago. The other candidate is accused of dishonesty and consistently lying. Someone asked me Sunday, "Who should I vote for?" What is taking place reminds me of the game limbo, "How low can you go?" With just a few weeks left, we can only assume it will get nastier and meaner until this thing is over. It's shameful.

Through all of this, it reminds the people of God how we need to act and talk towards others. Our verse is a classic reminder of what God wants from His people. Paul began this thought by stating, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity." Outsiders means outside of Christ. Behave yourself when around non Christians. There is an opportunity every time you are with those who are not Christians. Then our verse today, "let your speech be with grace...so that you will know how you should respond to each person." Others are watching. What you do, what you say, how you conduct yourself can open doors or they can close doors and even lock them for good when it comes to trying to influence others to Christ. Each day, each conversation, allows you to build a bridge toward Christ for those who are "outsiders."

So here are some things to remember:

1. What you do with others is a journey of many steps. Rarely will it be one all important conversation that wins them over to Christ. Most often, it's a thought here, it's a conversation there. Groundwork is laid. It takes time to put all of this together and in the process, they are watching you. They are seeing how Christ works in you. They watch you in good days and they see you when you have bad days. They notice how you handle stress. They see you when you are upset. They hear what you talk about. They hear and see what is valuable in your life. All of these things are steps and you have to keep that in mind.

2. Outsiders will remember when you didn't act very Christ-like. If you have a melt down, if you say things you shouldn't say, if you seem to demand your way, if you are obsessed with materialism, they will notice. They will notice whether what you say and what you are doing match. It's easy to talk a great game, but do you live up to it? Outsiders will remember.

(OVER)

This then reminds us that if we have said things that were wrong, apologize. Don't wait for someone to call you out on this, quickly apologize. I don't buy into this "locker room" talk or "boys will be boys" mentality. First and foremost, God hears what you say. The Ephesians were told, "there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting." It doesn't matter if you are with the "boys." Later in Ephesians, we find, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness...for it is disgraceful even to speak of these things which are done by them in private." Don't even mention these things. There are some things that should not be said.

3. Our words must be seasoned with grace. That seems to be an odd word to be used here, grace. We tend to think of grace only in terms of salvation. We are saved by grace through faith. Grace is God's gift to us. Grace involves pardon and leads to a wonderful relationship with God. We are not good enough nor can we do enough to gain God's favor. Grace is what the prodigal received when he returned home. But this is not the extent of grace. Our words must be with grace.

What does that mean?

We need to speak with kindness. The tone of your voice can be inviting or intimidating.

We need to speak with helpfulness.

We need to speak with thankfulness.

We need to speak with godliness.

We need to speak as the oracles of God.

We need to speak as we would want one to speak to us.

We need to speak with love.

What does this sound like, to speak with grace? You will not always talk about yourself. For some, this is nearly impossible. They must always be talking about themselves. They love to talk about themselves. Speaking with grace will invite the "outsider" to talk about himself and tell his story. You listen. You learn. You engage.

Talking with grace means you realize when to correct and when to keep quiet. Some interrupt every time they hear a mistake. Wrong word. Wrong use of a passage. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. The "outsider" feels like he is sitting in an English class and you are teacher. It won't take much of that before he simply stops talking to you. I have "outsiders" call me Pastor. I'm not a pastor, I'm a preacher. There is a difference. There is a Biblical difference. I know what they mean. In time, if the journey continues, I will show them. But at first, there are much more important things to see and understand than what they call me.

Talking with grace is uplifting. That's what grace is. It leaves us better than we were. Our speech ought to be that way. It ought to be encouraging rather than condemning. We ought to be pointing towards Heaven rather than pointing to Hell. Even very messy lives can find Christ. Build up. Compliment where you can. Be a friend.

Paul illustrated this concept by referring to food that is seasoned with salt. Some foods just need salt. Without salt, it's just not the same. Popcorn is that way. Meat is that way. Too much salt and you ruin the taste, but just the right amount and it's great. That's the way our words ought to be, not just to outsiders, but to everyone. Sometimes we can be so friendly to strangers who serve us in the restaurant, and then be so ugly towards the people we love. Talk with grace to all people. Make it so people want to talk with you, not be afraid of you.

Something else about salt in food, you don't actually see it. It just blends in and does it's thing. But you sure notice it when it's missing. The same goes for graceful talking. Consider the meetings you may be in today. Consider your phone calls and texts today. Work hard to communicate with grace.

When you do this, it will be noticed.

Roger Shouse

