

Paul's request for prayer for himself may imply that he anticipates being released.⁷ "Us" here, however, might also refer to Timothy and Epaphras as well and their work for the gospel.⁸ Paul has elsewhere spoken about an "open door" for the gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12), so this is a characteristic way for him to express how God is the one who provides openings for the proclamation of the gospel in new ways and new places. But Paul does not want just to share the gospel; he wants prayer that he will do it "in the way it is necessary for me to speak." In other words, he wants to use the appropriate words for the specific occasion which will make the proclamation a revelation and rhetorically effective for those listening. Paul also reminds his audience here, as he did at the beginning of this discourse, that he is suffering for the sake of the gospel (1:24), only at this juncture he specifies that he is bound in chains.⁹

⁷ See E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 165. Or alternately he could be referring to praying for opportunities to witness while in prison, on which see Phil. 1:12–14. MacDonald, *Colossians, Philemon*, p. 171.

⁸ See M. J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 193.

V. 5 uses the language of a close-knit religious group by referring to non-Christians as "the ones outside" the community. Christians are to "walk wisely" toward non-Christians (this echoes 1:9–10; 2:6–7). This means they are to act in a way that is cognizant of who is watching and of the impact their behavior may have for the gospel. Wisdom in the Jewish tradition involved just these sorts of practical matters in regard to the art of living well on a daily basis, as well as the sort of profound reflections on Wisdom that we find in such texts as Proverbs 8–9 and Colossians 1. The Colossians are exhorted to "buy back" or "redeem" or even "exploit" the time.¹⁰ This might mean to take advantage of all opportunities to bear witness, but it could also mean to make up for lost time, for the time wasted before their conversion. There was definitely a tension in early Christianity between the missionary mandate and the attempt to create a tight-knit Christian community. It is difficult to create a group with clearly distinguishable iden-

⁹ Against Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 263, prison is not necessarily in view here since a person under house arrest might well be chained to a guard. See pp. 68–72 above.

¹⁰ See P. T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Waco: Word, 1982), pp. 241–42.

tity and boundaries and yet have it include all sorts of persons and indeed recruit different sorts of people as part of its missionary agenda. On top of this, to use sociological terms, it appears that the community in Colossae was “high group, low grid.” That is there was not much of a local hierarchal leadership structure that could have dealt with the false philosophy, and yet still the Colossian church was a distinguishable group. Furthermore, Paul is seeking to strengthen that sense of distinctive Christian existence.¹¹

V. 6 indicates that the Christian’s speech is to be “gracious and seasoned with salt” (cf. *Job 6:6*), which means not flat, dull, or insipid,¹² or it could mean witty¹³ or winsome. Perhaps Paul is drawing on a familiar Greek saying found in Plutarch: a speaker can convey “a certain grace by means of words as with salt” (*On Talkativeness 654F*). In light of this, Paul may have winsome speech in view. However, Plutarch also has the following saying: “For wit is probably the tastiest condiment of all. Therefore, some call it ‘graciousness’ because it makes the neces-

¹¹ See MacDonald, *Colossians, Ephesians*, p. 174.

¹² See Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 266.

¹³ See J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: Macmillan, 1879), pp. 230–31.

sary chore of eating pleasant” (*Moralia 685A*). Paul is speaking about rhetorically effective speech. “Gracious and seasoned with salt” “captures the wisdom of ancient rhetoric: ideological substance without personal style fails to convince people.”¹⁴ It also makes clear that Christians must engage in friendly conversation with nonbelievers and must be prepared to know how to respond to each and every outsider, regardless of their remarks or questions (cf. *1 Pet. 3:15*).¹⁵ “This paragraph is a reminder of how much was done by word of mouth. A letter was a comparatively rare vehicle, and its contents and purpose would be correspondingly specialized: the ordinary remarks would be transmitted verbally, especially when there were urgent doctrinal and pastoral matters demanding such writing-space as there was.”¹⁶

¹⁴ R. W. Wall, *Colossians and Philemon* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), p. 167.

¹⁵ See P. Pokorny, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 187–88.

¹⁶ C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 136.