

### Introduction:

“Now it came to pass that a group existed that called themselves fishermen and there were many fish in the waters about them. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes and the fish were hungry. Week after week and month after month and year after year the group that called themselves 'fishermen' met in meetings and talked about those called to fish, the abundance of fish, and how we might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing meant, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing be the primary talk of fishermen. These fishermen built large beautiful buildings for local fishing headquarters and their plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and that everyone should fish. However, the one thing they did not do, they did not fish!

In addition to meeting regularly these men determined to send out fishermen to places where there were many fish. This sending committee was headed by those who had great vision and had courage to speak about fishing and to promote the idea of fishing in far away streams and lakes held meetings to define fishing, to defend fishing, and to decide what new streams should be thought about. But the one thing the staff and the committee members did not do, they did not fish!

Large, elaborate training centers were built whose original and primary purpose was to teach fishermen how to fish. Over the years courses were offered on the needs of the fish, the nature of the fish, how to find fish, and the psychological effects of fishing. Those who taught had doctorates in 'Fisheology'! But the teachers did not fish! They only taught about fishing.

Further, the fishermen built large printing houses to publish fishing guides. Presses were kept busy day and night to produce material solely devoted to fishing methods. A speakers' bureau was also organized to schedule special speakers on fishing. After one stirring meeting entitled 'The Necessity Of Fishing,' two young men left the meeting and actually went fishing and one of them actually caught two fish! He was honored for his great catch and was scheduled to appear at all the big meetings to tell how he did it. So he quit fishing in order to have time to tell his experiences to the other fishermen!

Now it is true that many of the fishermen sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water and had to put up with the smell of dead fish. Some had to endure the ridicule of some who made fun of these fishermen's clubs because they claimed to be fishermen but they did not fish.

And they wondered about those who thought it was of little use to attend meetings and talk about fishing. I mean, after all, were they not following the Master who said, "Come and I will make you fishers of men"? Imagine their chagrin when someone actually suggested that they were not really 'fishermen.' Yet it did make sense. Can we rightfully call a person a fisherman if year after year he never goes fishing?<sup>1</sup>

Today, I want to talk about fishing. But I hope this can be for us more than just one more class on fishing. I hope it can be a motivation to actually get out and fish. However, for all the sarcasm in this brilliant piece about fishing, I think it is important that we do talk about fishing for men. **Colossians 4:5** says we must walk in wisdom toward outsiders. That means we do want to take some time and consider what is the wise way to approach fishing for men. I have no doubt that every single one of us wants to go fishing. We have our fears, our weaknesses, and our struggles, but we all want to fish for men. By the time this lesson is finished, I hope you don't feel guilty about whether or not you've been fishing, but rather feel motivated to get out and try it. Paul actually gives some great advice about walking in wisdom toward outsiders in the context of **Colossians 4:5**. Let's examine this context so we can fill our spiritual tackle boxes, put on our waders, get out in the water, and fish.

### Discussion:

- I. Base evangelism on a changed life.
  - A. **Colossians 4:2-6** is a great passage all by itself. However, I can't help but notice it comes on the heels of **Colossians 3:1-4:1**. In that chapter, Paul wrote about the changed life of a Christian. The Colossians had pursued immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness. They had lived in anger, wrath, malice, obscene talk, and lying. All of this was because their minds had been set on things of the earth. However, Paul taught them to change. They set their minds on things above and in so doing they put off the old man and put on the new. They began to live in compassion, mercy, kindness, forgiveness, forbearance, peace, and love. No doubt, this was a growth process. But the change was taking place.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from <http://mightyisthelord.com/beacon/2007-11-11-2.asp> (cited on March 20, 2009)

- B. The change would be evident in the practicalities of life. It affected their marriages, their families, and their master/servant relationships. Consider the powerful example of Onesimus in **Philemon 11**, who was one of the Colossians. He left Philemon useless, but returned useful. The gospel changed him.
- C. Without **Colossians 3:1-4:1** in our lives, **Colossians 4:2-6** will not be, not consistently. Sometimes I fear we have missed something when it comes to evangelism. Because we spend so much time trying to get folks in churches that teach error to become Christians, we usually try to motivate ourselves to evangelism with a “we’re right, they’re wrong” approach. Now, I’ve certainly known some people to be very motivated by that. However, I haven’t known many. Too often, the approach becomes merely academic. Further, it has the potential of causing us to spend more time dividing with our brethren because we’ve decided they’re wrong too than it does helping us draw folks in to Christ to be saved.
- D. Don’t misunderstand. Truth is utterly important. Without truth, we cannot be free (**John 8:32**). However, consider that verse again. Jesus did not praise truth saying, “Truth will make you right.” He said, “Truth will set you free.” Truth is not the goal; it is the means to the goal. The goal is freedom. Freedom from what? **Romans 6:18, 22; 8:2-4** say we need to be set free from sin. This is something the Old Law couldn’t do. This is something we can’t do on our own. It is something only Jesus can do when we have enough faith to surrender to Him. Sadly, for too long, I allowed truth to be the goal without allowing it to provide me with progressive victory over sin. Sadly, too many Christians are doing this. In this mindset, we take comfort in being right. In fact, we want everyone else to know we are right, so we spend hours arguing to prove we are right. Yet, sin still holds sway in our lives. Why is it that preachers and elders across the country are dropping like flies to sexual immorality and other sins? They know the truth. They’re right on everything from the plan of salvation to all the things that can be done in a church’s building. What’s the problem? They have allowed truth to become the goal instead of the means by which they are set free from sin.
- E. To be honest with you, I think one of the big reasons more evangelism is not being done is because too few of us feel the benefits of the freedom from the gospel. We’ve learned how to be right. But too few have learned how to be free. When we really let the gospel infiltrate our lives and start living by faith in Jesus (**Galatians 2:20**) and because of that start having the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**), we won’t be able to wait to let our friends who are enslaved to sin know how to be set free. When we enjoy the promises of the Spirit, we’ll want to share the Spirit’s truth with others. If all we have are some checklist rules that make us right and everyone else wrong, when the perfect moment comes up, we might share it. But how often does that happen?
- F. If you want effective evangelism, it will only come based on a changed life. Of course, that brings us to a problem, if you still feel enslaved to sin, whether lust, lying, immorality, drinking, coveting, gossiping, outbursts of anger, drugs, gambling, gluttony, pride, arrogance, or whatever, you will always struggle with evangelism. That change won’t simply come from flipping a switch in your life because you heard this lesson. Instead, let’s get together some time and work through some spiritual principles that will help you be set free. Then you can take that message to your friends, co-workers, neighbors, family...

## II. Empower evangelism with prayer.

- A. Let’s face it; we can’t save anyone. We don’t have the power. That’s why Paul began this section encouraging us to pray (**Colossians 4:2**). He said we should be watchful in it. According to Strong’s Enhanced Lexicon, “watchful” means “to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one.” What a powerful picture. Too often, we view prayer as a checklist item. “I’m a Christian; I’m supposed to pray every day.” Instead, we need to see it as a lifeline. Prayer is what connects us to God and invites His power to work in our lives. We can’t save people, but He can.
- B. Paul demonstrated the need for prayer with regard to evangelism in two ways.
  1. *Pray for open doors* (**Colossians 4:3**): I hear over and over again about all the ways of evangelism that don’t seem to work. I wonder if the problem lies in our prayers rather than our methods. I know we often toss up a prayer for open doors. But, how many of us are devoted to praying for open doors? I think of **Luke 11:5-8**. What if we persistently prayed for open doors and opportunities?
  2. *Pray to speak clearly* (**Colossians 4:4**): Many of us hold back because we are afraid we may make some mistake as we try to teach others. Instead of being afraid, how about we just surrender that fear to God in prayer? What if we pray that God will be with us and help us speak the gospel clearly as it ought to be taught. Then we can simply teach the best way we know how at the time and let God do the work.

- C. The problem for us is we think too much of ourselves. We think we need to come up with some powerful program. We think we need to discover some fail proof plan. When we think conversion will come because we've figured out the perfect way to spread the gospel, we'll never succeed. Only when we surrender our evangelism to God in prayer and ask Him to empower our efforts will we remotely walk in wisdom toward outsiders.

### III. Practice evangelism by making the best use of your time.

- A. We know from **Ephesians 5:15-16**, we are to walk in wisdom and make the most of our time in general as Christians. **Colossians 4:5** uses the same concepts but applies them specifically to our work with outsiders. It says we need to make the best use of our time in evangelism.
- B. The very first point we need to make from this is we can't possibly be making the best use of our time toward outsiders if we are not using any time at all toward outsiders. I don't know how many times I've heard Christians excuse themselves from working with outsiders by constantly saying, "Oh, that won't work." I know we need to be wise. We should spend our time doing what is wisest and most effective. But the first step to that is to do something. Maybe what we are doing is not yet the wisest thing, but it is wiser to do something than to do nothing (cf. **Matthew 25:26-27**). We gain wisdom through experience not through merely declaring something won't work.
- C. Another aspect of walking in wisdom and using our time wisely is to prepare for the opportunity to teach others. Let's face it, not all of us are ready to study with someone right now (**Hebrews 5:12**). We are not using our time wisely if we aren't preparing to be ready. What good does it do us to ask God to send us guests or send us studies if we have no idea how to teach them at all? Use your time wisely by being in the Word and preparing.
- D. Making the most of our time means making sure what we are doing is really beneficial for the outsiders' souls. Trying to win people in with ice cream socials, rock concerts, trips to Six Flags, and the like, is not really helping them with their souls. As the old adage says, "If we hot dog them in, someone else will hamburger them out." God doesn't need us to dress up His Gospel that can free us from our sins. He just needs us to live and teach His Gospel.
- E. Finally, we do need to consider what is working and what isn't. Yes, the first step is to do something. It is better to do something than to do nothing. At the same time, let's quit beating our heads against the wall doing the same things over and over again when they cease working. There was a time when people were converted through Gospel meetings. Those days are long gone. We need to use Gospel meetings differently if we'll convert people. There was a time when we could knock on doors and convert people before they ever even set foot in the building. That isn't happening as much today. We need to use door knocking and home studies differently. Making the best use of our time means changing methods when methods quit working.

### IV. Season evangelism with grace.

- A. In **Colossians 4:6**, Paul concludes this section by saying our speech must always be gracious. He presents a picture of words seasoned with salt. This harkens back to Jesus' statement in **Matthew 5:13**. We are to be the salt of the earth, but if our salt has lost its taste, we are useless and ready to be thrown out with the trash. **Colossians 4:6** shows how we are the salt of the earth. We are the salt of the earth when our speech is gracious. Or as **Ephesians 4:29** says, when our speech builds up and gives grace to those who hear.
- B. To be honest with you, this statement is a bit surprising to me. I expect Paul to say, "Let your speech always be right," or "Let your speech always be true," or "Let your speech always be accurate." He doesn't say those things. He says, "Let your speech always be gracious." Obviously, as already pointed out, if we are going to help anyone else be free, we have to speak truth (**John 8:32**). We've already prayed that we will speak it clearly. But when Paul wanted to highlight the part that makes sure we are walking in wisdom toward outsiders, he emphasized that while we speak the truth, we are to do so in a manner that gives grace, in a manner that is gracious. As Paul said in **Ephesians 4:15** says, we must speak the truth in love.
- C. Sadly, too often, when we are teaching the gospel to others, we aren't offering them grace. Instead, we are trying to put them in their place. We are trying to prove to them whose right. We are offering them judgment and condemnation. We need to be extending grace to them.
- D. Once again, I ask you not to misunderstand. Seasoning our evangelism with grace does not mean soft-pedaling the Gospel. It doesn't mean overlooking sin. It doesn't mean avoid saying the hard things and never call a sinner to account because of his/her sins. That is just enabling people to keep on sinning. Sea-

soning our evangelism with grace does mean checking our motivation. Why are we fishing for men? Are we trying to prove we're better? Or are we trying to help someone experience the grace of God, just as we have needed the grace of God? Are we trying to prove that we are right? Or are we truly trying to help them be free? Do we have their best interests at heart?

- E. Before we consider speaking to people about sin and the gospel though, we should consider *how* we speak about people and their sins. Do we look down on others whose sins are obvious? Do we speak with disdain for folks in sin? Or do we speak with concern and grace? If we mock, jeer, and condescend when we talk about people who are enslaved to sin, we are not showing ourselves to be good. We are showing ourselves to be like the Pharisee of **Luke 18:11-12**. Further, we must not kid ourselves. If we talk about people in a non-gracious way, when we talk to them that lack of grace will come out. We may think we are hiding how we feel, but we really can't. It is like trying to squeeze gelatin in a mold that is too small; it will come out somewhere.
- F. If we will walk with wisdom toward outsiders, we will make grace our motivation and we will season our speech and our teaching with it.

**Conclusion:**

If we are going to fish, we need to be wise about it. We should base it on a changed life, empower it with prayer, practice it by making the best use of our time, and season it with grace. Certainly, as we get out in the water and make the effort, we will gain more and more wisdom. But more importantly, we'll be saving souls.