

## LIVING OUT YOUR FAITH

### Colossians 4v5,6

Living in a multi-cultural society has its challenges. On the radio this morning I heard that the population of Switzerland are divided on whether minarets should be allowed in their country. The 400,000 Muslims living there, mostly from former Yugoslavia, are campaigning for this but are facing growing opposition, not on religious grounds but because the minaret represents a non-democratic system. This week the *Daily Telegraph* (26/11/09) carried this story.

*“David Suchet, the actor, has claimed that Christianity is being marginalised in Britain because people are more concerned about not offending other faiths. The 63-year-old, most famous for playing the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, said Britain risks losing the importance of Christianity in our multi-cultural society. Suchet, who has played the Agatha Christie character on ITV for 21 years, was confirmed as a Christian about two years ago. In an interview for Woman’s Weekly magazine, he said: “I do feel that Christianity is being marginalised by other religions in Britain. I won’t tell you the name of it, but a charity I work for got turned down for Government funding recently, because it was a Christian charity, even though it had been funded by the Government for several years. Don’t misunderstand me. We should embrace all religions and marginalise none. But we seem more concerned with marginalising Christianity, and not offending other faiths. We are in danger of losing the importance of the Christian faith in our own country.”*

And it’s not just other faiths; we also have Professor Dawkins and the British Humanist Association to take account of. Last weekend the *Times* (21/11/09) picked up something amusing about their latest poster promoting atheism.

*“The two children chosen to front Richard Dawkins’s latest assault on God could not look more free of the misery he associates with religious baggage. With the slogan “Please don’t label me. Let me grow up and choose for myself”, the youngsters with broad grins seem to be the perfect advertisement for the new atheism being promoted by Professor Dawkins and the British Humanist Association. Except that they are about as far from atheism as it is possible to be. The Times can reveal that Charlotte, 8, and Ollie, 7, are from one of the country’s most devout Christian families. Their father, Brad Mason, is something of a celebrity within evangelical circles as the drummer for the popular Christian musician Noel Richards. Now a web designer and photographer, Mr Mason has been supplementing his income for years by providing photographs to agencies who sell them on to newspapers and advertising campaigns. He said: “It is quite funny, because obviously they were searching for images of children that looked happy and free. They happened to choose children who are Christian. It is ironic. The humanists obviously did not know the background of these children.” He said that the children’s Christianity had shone through. “Obviously there is something in their faces which is different. So they judged that they were happy and free without knowing that they are Christians. That is quite a compliment. I reckon it shows we have brought up our children in a good way and that they are happy.” Gerald Coates, the leader of the Pioneer network of churches, which Mr Mason and his family used to attend before they moved to Dorset, said: “I think it is hilarious that the happy and liberated children on the atheist poster are in fact Christian.”*

In the introduction to this series we saw that the believers in Colosse faced many of the issues we do. Theirs was a multi-cultural, pluralistic society. You could find

religious beliefs of all kinds: animism, astrology, Greek gods, Roman gods, mystery religions and Judaism. There was a whole mixture of ideas and philosophies and lifestyles. Some advocated strict abstinence from sexual activity and emphasized fasting, others encouraged immorality and indulgence.

So Paul writes to them: **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders.** The word “outsider” can be used in a hostile or demeaning or defensive way, but this is not the spirit of the New Testament. William Temple was Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940’s. One of his often quoted statements helps us here: “*The church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.*” There are some exclusive religious groups who look on everyone outside their circle as somehow contaminated and so they keep themselves apart. Jesus doesn’t fit this mould. The emphasis of the New Testament is that we are to live out our faith among people and reach out to them. This authenticates our faith - not retreating into a Christian ghetto.

So how are we to do this? Paul has been mindful of this question throughout his letter but now he adds a few short instructions about living out our faith - what we do and what we say, both in the everyday and in those exceptional moments when something unexpected comes along. **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**

## **1. What we do and what we say in “the everyday”.**

Let’s be honest, the everyday is not as exciting as the out-of-the-ordinary. One is memorable the other merges into the past with other unexceptional things. But this doesn’t mean that the everyday is less important. The opposite may be true: the way you act and the way you speak on an everyday basis is vital in demonstrating the authenticity of your faith.

The text talks first about *what we do*.

**v5: Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders.** Literally, “*walk in wisdom*” i.e. behave like this on a daily basis. It is referring to down-to-earth, practical wisdom rather than being some wise philosophical type. Imagine you are on one of the big TV reality shows thrown together with people of different backgrounds and beliefs and personalities – maybe in the ‘*Big Brother*’ or ‘*Shipwrecked*’, or Sir Alan Sugar’s ‘*Apprentice*’ or in the Jungle in ‘*I’m a Celebrity..*’ Each of these is an intensely magnified version of the everyday. As a Christian – how would you walk in wisdom? You would need to be in tune with the Holy Spirit; your Christian values would be crucial; you might need to ask for God’s specific help. “*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him*” (James 1v5)

**make the most of every opportunity:** this can be translated “**making the best use of the time**” (ESV) (literally *ransoming* or *redeeming* the time). If this is the meaning here then it reinforces the importance of every hour of every day. As a Christian, how you live your life 24/7 is being observed – at home by your family, at school and college by other students, at work by your colleagues, at the match, social club, art class or the gym by your friends.

It’s the same with *everyday speech*:

**v6: Let your conversation be always** (a consistency word) **full of grace:** the best way to demonstrate that you are a Christian with your lips is not necessarily by preaching. But does this expression, **conversation full of grace**, just mean talk that is attractive or is it saying more? Maybe it points towards conversation *affected by* your experience of God’s grace e.g. forgiving or even blessing someone who curses you, rather than cursing them back!

**Seasoned with salt:** i.e. salt enhances flavour – there is nothing bland and dull about this kind of conversation. But salt also prevents corruption. When God’s Spirit touches your lips you will be radically different in the way you speak - no bad-mouthing, gossip, lying or coarse language. Today people speak in many ways – e mails, texts, tweets and on social networking sites. The same principles apply.

It’s no accident that Paul writes about *both* how we act and how we speak. The two are closely linked; they constantly overlap. Our actions can be let down by our speech and our words can be shown to be empty by our actions. It’s little use talking about God’s mercy if we ignore someone’s cry for help.

## **2. What we do and what we say in exceptional moments**

Consistency in the everyday is the foundation upon which you can respond in the moment to the unexpected and the exceptional. So, what about when something out-of-the-ordinary comes your way?

We have already looked at **v5: make the most of every opportunity** in the sense of making the best use of the time. But there is another possibility here. The Greek word *kairos* (time) carries the meaning of *significant* time: The phrase **make the most of every opportunity** conjures up a picture of a market place; suddenly you see something you have been seeking for ages – and there it is, before your eyes and at a bargain price. You mustn’t hesitate! Quick, snap it up or it will be gone. It is “a market-opportunity”. That’s what the apostle is saying. Do you sense the urgency?

Be ready, be alert to respond in the moment to every one-off opportunity; moments that may never be repeated. e.g. someone who is usually very private suddenly opens up to you and is reaching out for your help. But you have an appointment and it’ll make you late: *sounds like the parable of the Good Samaritan doesn’t it?*

The same is true with speech. **v6: Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.** In the midst of ordinary, everyday conversation, be ready for those out-of-the blue moments when someone asks you about your faith. In fact you can go further and pray for such moments - for what some people call "divine appointments". *"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 and respect.."* (1 Peter 3v15) You can be ready to answer on different levels.

- ⌘ Be ready to share how you became a Christian and what difference Jesus makes to your life. Practising telling your story in 2 minutes.
- ⌘ Be ready to give someone a piece of literature. Some people write their own story up and have copies to give away. Or you may prefer something else.
- ⌘ If online communication is your thing and your up-front about being a Christian – be ready, because you might find yourself handling questions and comments about your faith.
- ⌘ Invite people who show interest in your faith, to *Alpha* – it is the ideal setting to look into the Christian faith and ask their questions.
- ⌘ Know how to lead someone to faith in Christ. There are some simple tools available – '*Journey into Life*' has been around for years, but there are others.
- ⌘ Be clued up so that you can talk intelligently about some of the questions people have. Nicky Gumbel's 'Questions of Life' and 'Searching Issues' will help you think the issues through.
- ⌘ Be able to explain a Christian worldview i.e. how we make sense of the world. The answer people give to three big questions is a good indication of their worldview: Where do we come from? What's gone wrong with the world? What can we do about it? Check out our website ([www.countychurch.co.uk](http://www.countychurch.co.uk) see *Discover the basics/Looking at Christianity/Check my Worldview*)
- ⌘ When you are approached by someone with an IQ as high as Mount Everest you can direct them to Christian writers gifted in apologetics. (Please note: *apologetics* is not apologising for your faith – it is a reasoned defence of the Christian faith.) Ravi Zacharias' books are worth recommending; also, Charles Colson's '*How Now Shall we Live?*', John Blanchard's '*Does God Believe in Atheists?*' and Tim Keller's '*The Reason for God.*'

There is something in our text today for both the cautious and the adventurous.

Some of us read about acting wisely and it appeals to our over-cautious disposition. Others read about making the most of every opportunity and it appeals to our have-a-go temperament. If you identify with the adventurous side – take note of this: **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders.** If you know you err on the cautious side – take note of the words **make the most of every opportunity.**

Most of us can be more invitational than we have been. Many of us have been over-cautious. Find out if any of your friends might be interested in Alpha in the New Year. Or start by inviting someone to the Christmas Musical – that can't be too dangerous!

**John Wilthew. November 2009**

## Message Summary

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## Colossians 4v5,6

The believers in Colosse faced many of the issues we do. Theirs was a multi-cultural, pluralistic society. So Paul writes: “*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders*”. The word “*outsiders*” can be used in a hostile, demeaning or defensive way, but this is not the spirit of the New Testament. We are to live out our faith among people and reach out to them. So how are we to do this? Paul gives a few short instructions about living out our faith - what we do and what we say, both in the everyday and in those exceptional moments when something unexpected comes along. “*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone*”.

**1. What we do and what we say in “the everyday”.** The everyday is not as exciting as the out-of-the-ordinary but the way you act and speak on an everyday basis is vital in demonstrating the authenticity of your faith. First, what we do: **v5:** “*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders*”. i.e. pragmatic, practical wisdom. “*make the most of every opportunity*”: this can be translated “*making the best use of the time*” (ESV) If this is the meaning then it reinforces the importance of every hour of every day. As a Christian, how you live your life 24/7 is being observed. Second: everyday speech: **v6:** “*Let your conversation be always full of grace*”: does this expression just mean talk that is attractive or is it saying more? Maybe it points towards conversation *affected by* your experience of God’s grace e.g. forgiving or even blessing someone who curses you, rather than cursing them back! “*Seasoned with salt*” i.e. salt enhances flavour and prevents corruption. When God’s Spirit touches your lips you will be radically different in the way you speak. It’s no accident that Paul writes about *both* how we act and how we speak. The two are closely linked. Our actions can be let down by our speech and our words can be shown to be empty by our actions.

**2. What we do and what we say in exceptional moments:** Consistency in the everyday is the foundation upon which you can respond in the moment to the unexpected and the exceptional. So, what about when something out-of-the-ordinary comes your way? **v5:** The phrase **make the most of every opportunity** conjures up a picture of a market place; suddenly you see something you have been seeking for ages – and there it is, before your eyes and at a bargain price. You mustn’t hesitate. Act quickly! The same is true with speech. **v6:** *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.* In the midst of ordinary, everyday conversation, be ready for those out-of-the blue moments when someone asks you about your faith. (1 Peter 3v15)

- Be ready to share the difference Jesus makes to your life.
- Be ready to give someone a piece of literature.
- Online - you might find yourself handling questions and comments about your faith.
- Invite people who show interest in your faith, to *Alpha*
- Know how to lead someone to faith in Christ.
- Be clued up so that you can talk intelligently about the questions people have.
- Be able to explain a Christian worldview
- Direct others to Christian writers gifted in apologetics.

**Finally:** There is something in our text today for both the cautious and the adventurous. Some of us read about acting wisely and it appeals to our over-cautious disposition. Others read about making the most of every opportunity and it appeals to our have-a-go temperament. If you identify with the adventurous side – take note of this: **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders.** If you know you err on the cautious side – take note of the words **make the most of every opportunity.**

## Questions for Groups

1. What do you think of William Temple's words "*The church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.*"
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to spend time with people who are not believers out of the work context?
3. How can we make sure that people who come among us, especially unbelievers, don't feel like outsiders?
4. In what different ways should our Christian faith show in our normal everyday life at home, at work etc?
5. Can you think of a recent opportunity to demonstrate God's love in action that you (a) snapped up, and (b) missed?
6. Can you think of a recent opportunity to share your faith with someone that you (a) snapped up, and (b) missed?
7. Could you:
  - a. Share your story in 2 minutes?
  - b. Lead someone to Christ?
  - c. Explain a biblical worldview?

Go on then!

8. Is there someone you can invite to our Christmas Musical or Alpha?