

[masquerade](#) – to operate under false pretense or character; to disguise oneself or to present a façade. To pretend to be someone or something you are not.

Several weeks ago we embarked on a journey through the book of Colossians seeking to unmask the reality and influence of cultural Christianity. Throughout our journey, Paul has taught us how to distinguish the difference b/w the cultural and the committed. Yet like frogs in a kettle, it would seem that the church has been slowly losing her Gospel focus as society continues to pressure the church into a politically correct, “co-exist” submission. If there’s any threat to our faith today, it might be how the influence of culture has infiltrated the church leading believers away from the Gospel into a self-satisfying religious plurality of comfort and convenience.

Colossae was a situation quite similar to ours today. As we slide deeper into a post-Christian society, we’re discovering many of the same challenges this pre-Christian society faced. The church in Colossae was under the constant assault of a religious syncretism of Greek and Roman idolatry, oriental mysticism, and Jewish ceremonialism – and the pressure to conform was immense as persecution for non-conformist was tremendous.

Yet Paul calls the church to a purity of focus and to remain steadfast in the Gospel of Jesus. He challenges them to never confuse their goodness for God's presence, to not lose sight of the truth and sacrifice of Christ, and to not be pulled to some earthly, manmade religious extreme of legalism, asceticism, or mysticism. Then, after laying a doctrinal foundation, Paul directs their attention to what such faith looks like when put into practice in the three most challenging arenas – at home, at work and in our words.

²*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*

³*Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.* ⁴*Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.* 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 w/ salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Most of us underestimate the value and power of words. Yet w/ our tongues, we have the ability to honor or curse God and man. Here's the thing about words – they reflect what's in the heart. They tattle on who/what is on the throne of our lives. Tommy Nelson once said, “The tongue is the bucket that dips into the well of our heart.”

Words are the expression of the reality of a person's soul.

Our words can be a blessing or a curse. We've all had those wonderful experiences of being blessed by another's words and feeling accosted. We've also been known to have used our words to help and hurt others. In addressing the Colossians, Paul makes it clear that the words of the committed are distinctive different from those in culture.

What do your words/conversations say of your commitment?

A few years ago, my wife began to challenge me on this issue. Like most of you I have a problem w/ my words. Sometimes I simply speak before I think, while at other times, when I have room, I will try to get both feet in my mouth instead of just one of them. But to her credit, and more to my dismay, she had me memorize a verse from the book of Proverbs—*"He who guards his lips guards his life, but a man who speaks rashly will come to ruin."* I share this story b/c along w/ the rest of humanity, I'm a fellow pilgrim. I too struggle w/ my words seeking to use them to honor rather than to destroy. And like most people, I'm often horrified at the things that leap off my tongue, shimmy by my teeth, and escape past the gauntlet of my lips only to get airborne like an infectious disease.

I Talking WITH God – PRAYER

²*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful*

The most critical speech of the new man is the language of talking w/ God through prayer. But what is prayer? Prayer is nothing less than having a two-way conversation w/ God. **It requires listening and talking** w/ the premium of listening.

James 1 tells us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. The idea translates to listening first and talking second b/c we have a greater need for him than He has for us.

A Be AUDACIOUS

devote (*proskartereo*) to be courageously persistent; to hold fast and never let go.

Paul encourages the Colossian Christians to be in a constant posture of prayer – not willing to move or be moved unless God tells them otherwise.

In being devoted to praying, we are committing ourselves to listening and responding to God.

The notion of God speaking shouldn't seem too mystical to us b/c throughout the Bible there are countless stories of God frequently speaking to His people. From Adam in Genesis to John in Revelation, God spoke clearly to anyone who'd listen. **Thankfully, the same God who spoke in the pages of our Bible is still speaking today.** He's always speaking; we're just not always listening or have learned His voice.

It is amazing how quickly we learn someone's voice once we have spoken w/ them once or twice. We immediately recognize their voice even w/out caller I.D. Why? It is b/c familiarity breeds recognition.

I have a confession. I'm a bit of a prankster and I enjoy giving others a hard time. A few weeks ago I needed to speak w/ Darlene Ware – when I was overwhelmed w/ the temptation to disguise my voice...

Here's the good news. God doesn't do such w/ us. He wants to speak into our lives and He longs for us to speak w/ Him. He is our good shepherd longing for us to know His voice.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep... My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. Jn. 10:14, 27

So just how does God speak?

- Through His **PRECEPTS** (Scripture)
- Through His **PROMPTING** (Leading of the H.S.)
- Through His **PROVIDENCE** (Circumstances)
- Through His **PEOPLE**

B Be ATTENTIVE

watchful – keeping awake and spiritually alert

The Christian must be alert and active in praying, alive in the fullest sense, never careless or mechanical but intimate, inspired, and expectant – giving fully to it as they seek the true will of God.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God – if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of Him. 1 Jn. 5:14f

What is God's will? Many people have a tendency to pray for the superficial instead of for the eternal. We need to learn to pray in a manner that invites God to move w/ power.

- **LOST** people will be saved. *1 Tm. 2:3*
- God's people will be **CONFORMED**. *Eph. 5:1*
- God's people will serve the **KINGDOM**. *Eph. 2:10*
- God's people will live **HOLY** lives. *1 Pt. 1:16*
- God's people will **LOVE** one another. *1 Jn. 4:7-8*
- God's people will **ENCOURAGE** others. *Hb. 10:24*

C Be **APPRECIATIVE**

thankful – to be appreciative and grateful

All prayer should be offered expectantly and w/ a sense of gratitude for who God is, what He has done and is doing.

II Talking FOR God – PROCLAIMING

Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Paul turns from conversing w/ God to conversing about God

The single greatest priority in the life of any Christian is to share of the hope that is w/in Him.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the H.S., and teaching them all that I have commanded you. Mt. 28:19-20

Go	Our COMMISSION to action
Into the world	Our PLACE of action
Make disciples	Our MISSION

Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Mt. 4:19

If you'll follow God's leading then He'll make you a fisher of men. Being a witness is the work of God in you. It simple – if you aren't witnessing it is b/c you're not following.

A Pray for COMMUNICATORS

Pray for laborers – for the fields are ripe unto harvest.

B Pray for CHANCES

Pray for opportunities to share and for hearts to be fertile.

C Pray for COURAGE

Pray for boldness and insight.

D Pray for CLARITY

Pray for a discerning spirit and a clear presentation.

III Walking the Talk ABOUT God – PERFORMANCE

⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

SAYING – Your walk talks; but your talk don't walk.

What believers **ARE** gives credibility to what they **SAY**. We must live a life that's consistent w/ the testimony we proclaim. Our witness is only as strong as our relationship w/ God and others. As a result, our actions must be consistent w/ our words or else we are hypocrites.

Tell everyone about Christ, when necessary use words.

The single greatest excuse I hear from the lost about why they don't want to become a Christian is b/c of the way people who call themselves Christians act.

If you're not acting like Christ, then Christ isn't your focus. You have a religion, but you don't have a relationship. People who know Christ – show Christ. People who have Christ – give Him away.

Remember – your words – both spoken and unspoken, tell the truth about what you really believe. They tattletale on who or what is really on the throne of your life.

IV Talking TO People – PERSONAL Interactions

⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned w/ salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Ultimately, the Christian life, while a relationship w/ God, must be lived among people. For anyone to have a successful Christian testimony it requires that their words are consistent w/ their actions. So while it is true your walk talks, your words still have much to say. God wants our interaction and conversations w/ others to be full of grace, seasoned w/ salt, and accountable to His Truth.

A Full of GRACE

full of grace – it refers to speaking what is spiritual, wholesome, kind, sensitive, purposeful, and loving.

Don't let any unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only words good for edification according to the need of the moment so it may give grace to those who hear. Ep. 4:29

Our words ought to be put-ups and not put downs. We need to put down the put-downs. No matter if intentional or not, put-downs **DISGUISED** at “put-ups” are still put-downs.

Your hair looks really good for a change.

What is sad is how many people take such pride in their ability to put others down. Being the master of the put-down is not something to be proud of. In fact, in reality you ought to be pitied. Ask God to change your heart and your mouth. Ask Him to help you become a Put-Upper.

B Seasoned w/ SALT

seasoned – a Christian's words should be gracious, but also effective. While salt may sting when rubbed into a wound, it also prevents corruption.

A believer's speech should serve as a purifying influence, rescuing conversation from filth and degradation. It also serves to flavor and invites people to partake and participate.

C Able to ANSWER Others

But in our hearts, set apart Christ as Lord of your life. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that is in you. 1 Pt. 3:15

Believers, under the leadership of the H.S. and in accordance w/ the Word, should speak the right words and the right time to edify others.

A few years ago I flew to Dallas for a doctoral seminar. While on the plane I sat next to a retired Methodist pastor who was raised in a Baptist home. As we spoke we shared in some wonderful fellowship about the Lord, our families, and our ministries. Then something interesting happened. He asked me what I thought about the mess Texas Southern Baptist was in at the time. Right then the conversation changed. As a Christian I was fine, but as a Southern Baptist I was mortified b/c I was embarrassed by the words/actions of so many Baptist who've been behaving so badly.

If you want to be able to speak w/ others about God, then your actions and words must be in alignment about God and you must be in constant touch w/ God.