FULL OF GRACE; SEASONED WITH SALT

Colossians 3:18-4:18
Key Verse 4:6

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

Last week, we studied Colossians 3 with the title, “The New Self in Christ”. We learned that, after having been raised with Christ through faith in his death and resurrection, we must now set our minds and hearts on heavenly things, until we have been fully clothed in the new self in Christ. May God richly bless your struggle to be fully clothed in the new self in Christ! In today's passage, Paul emphasizes that each person has many roles to carry out in his or her life. But whatever our roles might be, ultimately, we are serving God. Those who make a decision to submit to God's will and serve him, whatever we do, can do so with grace and truth. Through this passage, may God bless each of us to discover the spiritual secret of how to be always full of grace, seasoned with salt!

I. Roles in Christian households

First, Family living (3:18-21). Look at verses 18-21. “Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.” According to this passage, in one way or another, wives, children, husbands and fathers must submit to God's will for them in the family, putting the interests of others ahead of their own. To the old self, the traditional roles for family members presented in this passage are a source of irritation. Such severe limitations on one's personal freedom were a part of the justification for the “sexual revolution” of the sixties and seventies. People wanted to do it all: they wanted commitment, but the freedom to explore, they wanted children, but time for themselves, they wanted equality, but no responsibility. In short, they wanted the glory of the old self to be made the center of the new, “liberated” family. But there was a
problem. When the old self became the center of the family, the family had no center, because each person saw him or herself as the center. When everyone became responsible for the family’s direction, no one was, because no one was recognized as having anyone else’s interests at heart. The result was the disintegration of the family, the disintegration of authority and the disintegration of hope, because there was no vision. The “liberated” family was a failed experiment. Now it is universally recognized that a family is a family because each member of the family has a role to fill for the sake of the family. But it is not mere common sense that tells us what our roles in the family must be. Our roles are ordained for us by God, according to God’s divine and perfect knowledge of how and why we were created.

In this short passage, Paul emphasizes the role of the woman by speaking about her first. Everything begins with the woman's decision of faith to submit herself to her husband as her shepherd. It is a mystery of faith. Just as the church must submit itself to Christ as Lord and Husband, so the wife must submit to her husband, for the sake of her future family. Without her decision of faith, the family has no foundation, and there is no way for the work of God to be accomplished through them. Just as Sarah submitted to Abraham, and Mary to Joseph, so each Christian woman must make a decision of faith to submit to her husband as part of her submission to God’s sovereign will for her life.

The role of men in the family is emphasized through Paul's conferring on men the responsibility to love their wives, and to encourage their children. When we study the stories of Cain and Abel, and of Joseph and his brothers in the book of Genesis, it is painfully obvious that sin in men is equated with irresponsibility, while repentance is taking responsibility for oneself and others. In fact, a man is not a man at all until he learns how to take responsibility for others. And contrary to our sinful idea, taking responsibility is not saying with our mouths, “I will take responsibility for you, honey.” (see Ge 42:37) Taking responsibility means making a spiritual decision never to accept failure in fulfilling our roles. To fail to love our wives even one time can be a disaster from which a family might never recover. To embitter our children even one time can be a disaster from which a family might
never recover. We will surely fail, because of our old self which must be put to death. But we must never let go of our decision to take responsibility as a man for our families, as well as for our sheep and for our nation.

When husbands and wives set the spiritual foundation for a house church through their decisions of faith to submit and to take responsibility, then children can be so happy, and they can have hope. But children must not take the spiritual struggle of their parents for granted. Rather, they must learn from their parents’ examples, and struggle in their own lives to submit to authority as well as take responsibility for the unique gifts they have received from God.

Second, Christians at work (3:22-25). Paul writes to encourage slaves to work hard as working for the Lord, not for men. Look at verses 3:22-25. “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.” Of course, we cannot know the trials that slaves endured in the time of the Roman Empire. Slaves were property, with no hope and no inheritance of their own. They had to work hard until they died. Their family members could be sold from their household at any moment. They were human beings, but they had no right to decide for themselves their future. Such a barren life brought great spiritual destruction in most men. They lost all sense or concern for right and wrong. They did whatever was convenient. They learned how to serve without giving their hearts. They were filled with hatred and a spirit of revenge. So many slaves, when they heard the gospel message, understood that God’s message of forgiveness, life and an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God was God’s love and hope for them. They repented of their sins and believed in Jesus as their true Lord and Master.

But their human situation was not better at all after believing in Jesus. So the slaves were tempted by their old self to continue to serve their
masters as they had before – only as much as they were whipped or forced to do so. This slave mentality in serving our human masters is not limited to Paul’s time or the Roman Empire. In fact, the master-slave relationship of Paul’s time continues to be a fundamental issue related to the economic development of any nation. For the worker at Walmart and the stock analyst on Wall Street and the teacher at a High School, the fundamental question is, Who am I serving? Those who serve with a slave mentality are in fact struggling to please their old self and serve themselves. But the greatest economic achievement is possible only for that business or that country whose workers know that they are serving someone or something other than themselves. For example, Walmart is the world’s fastest growing retail chain in the world. Most retail stores treat their workers as expendable and transient. But Walmart spends time to build a sense of community and common interest among its workers, from the least to the greatest. They even engage in saying the Walmart cheer every Saturday morning, whether the store is in Arkansas, Macomb or Hamburg, Germany. But again, it is not merely common sense that gives Christian workers the motivation to give their hearts to their work. Instead, it must be based on a spiritual decision that whatever our job might be, we are in fact working to serve the Lord. Not even Walmart can pay us enough for giving our heart to make that company successful. But we have an inheritance in God that is forever. We have a heavenly reward that is ours by faith, when we run the race of faith from first to last. We do so in faith that the Lord knows our need, and will provide for us in the right amount at the right time. And we know that whatever injustice there might be in our working lives, God knows and God will repay. In his court, there will be no favoritism. So we can be free to work hard and grow as a source of blessing, knowing that in the end our reward will be far greater than any price we may have paid. For the sake of God’s blessing being poured out on our families, our company, our nation and the world, we must work at whatever we do with all of our heart, as serving the Lord.

Third, There is a Master in heaven (4:1). In this verse, Paul emphasizes that human masters must also do their best to provide for their slaves, so that their slaves might be happy and able to do their jobs well. Human masters look like they don’t have to answer to anyone. They
are free to lord it over others, and enjoy the benefits of others’ hard labor. But as the husband is responsible for the family, so the master is responsible for his employees and workers. Jesus warned his disciples about the increased expectations that they would have to meet as shepherds of his flock. In Luke 12:47 and 48, Jesus told them, “That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” In today’s economic and social system, individuals are given greater autonomy and freedom of choice. But in the spiritual world, increased autonomy is directly tied to increased responsibility and a higher standard of expectations. In short, only those who know that they have a master in heaven can overcome the old self and self-seeking desires in order to build up one's family and nation and receive an eternal inheritance from our Heavenly Father.

II. Roles in Christian mission

First, Devoted prayer (4:2). As Paul described in chapter 3, we have many responsibilities and many roles in the world. Sometime, these responsibilities seem to take over our lives, so that we feel like a ship that is being tossed and driven by a storm – who knows where? At those times we might think that we are doing enough just to survive and meet our human obligations. But Paul does not sympathize with us in our daily struggles of life. Look at 4:2. “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” The word devote has the meaning of “commitment” as in, “commit oneself entirely” to some task. To devote oneself to prayer seems appropriate for monks or nuns, but not the laity. However, Paul says clearly, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” Evidently, as much as we must take responsibility for our lives in the world, so we must take responsibility for our spiritual life and spiritual obligations in God. How can we do that? Verse says, “Devote yourselves to prayer.” This verse clearly establishes the essential role of prayer in our spiritual battle to run the race of faith so as to win the prize, and fulfill God’s will for our lives.
What is prayer? First and last of all, prayer is submission to God and God’s will for us. Many view prayer as the time to present to God a laundry list of desires and wants. But that is the prayer of the old self, insisting to God that we are still the center of the universe. We can learn from our Lord Jesus the prayer that pleases God. When Jesus sensed that Judas had betrayed him, and would soon come leading a band of soldiers to arrest him, Jesus did not make plans with his disciples how to fight off or evade the enemy. Instead, Jesus came to God in prayer. And he prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me. Yet not my will, but yours be done.” (Lk. 22:42). Jesus came to God the Father in the midst of a severe spiritual battle, in order to decide whose will might be done; his or the Father's. He prayed all night long until he could submit himself 100% to do his Father's will, and die on the cross for the sins of the world. He did not trust himself in his flesh to do what was right. He threw himself at his Father's feet, until he was sure that he was firmly under his Father's control. Then he could be confident that whatever he did would be the will of God. **We must not be overconfident in the ability of our flesh to obey God. We must devote ourselves in prayer until we can submit to the Father's will and obey God's purpose for us to be shepherds and Bible teachers for this nation and for the world. Through prayer, we can be watchful and thankful always, and not be deceived by the devil’s schemes.**

Second, Proclaiming the mystery of Christ (4:3-4). Paul also asked for the prayers of the Colossians for the sake of the gospel work. Paul knew that the Colossians were not all missionaries or pastors. But he asked that they participate with him in the spreading of the gospel message to the ends of the earth. Paul felt that there were many obstacles to his mission work. Sometimes, he despained because of his chains. But Paul asked only that he might have faith to take advantage of the door that God opened, and proclaim the mystery of Christ clearly, as he should. Paul was literally chained at the wrist to a Roman soldier, night and day. But Paul did not see that the gospel was chained. Rather, he believed that God provided the necessary opportunities for the gospel to go out from him to the whole world. The
prayers of the Colossians were essential to Paul as he served this world evangelization work.

Third, Being shepherds in your daily lives (5-6). Look at verses 4:5-6. “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.” Just as the Colossian believers had the spiritual responsibility to pray and watch, so they had the responsibility to be shepherds for the unbelievers and godless people around them. They could not do everything by themselves. They had to depend on God in prayer. They had to watch and wait. They had to be wise. But when the opportunity came, they had to make the most of it. As we learned in Genesis chapter 2, God made us the stewards of the garden he put us in, to work the ground and take care of it. What is our garden? It is the people around us, most of whom do not know God and do not understand God’s will for their lives. We must be ready through prayer, to make the most of every opportunity given us to extend his kingdom. We must be ready to answer everyone who comes to us in spiritual need (4:6).

How can we serve God's will like that, at a moment's notice? Look again at verse 6. “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” In short, the message of God’s grace and love must be evident in our everyday speech, while the salt of God’s truth must be ready to be applied when it is needed. The Lord Jesus was on his way from Jerusalem to Galilee. But he stopped for a while at a well in Samaria while his disciples went into town to buy food. He asked a local woman who came to the well for a drink of water, but the woman was not happy to give him a drink. Jesus sensed that she was a very unhappy woman. He knew she was a sinful woman. He could have left her alone and waited for his disciples. But Jesus took the opportunity of a private conversation to help the woman realize her spiritual thirst. He asked her humbly for a drink; then he offered her the gift of God. When she confessed her burden of life to Jesus, Jesus touched her spiritual problem of having 5 husbands. But the woman was not offended at all. Rather, she was refreshed by the spiritual truth Jesus showed her, and she came to him in faith to receive the living water,
welling up to eternal life. When the disciples came back, the woman took off like a sprinter to tell her townspeople about Jesus, who was the Christ. Jesus was truly satisfied, and ready to serve all the Samaritan townspeople with the good news of the gospel. This joy can be ours as well, when our conversation is full of grace and seasoned with salt.

We were created by God to fulfill many roles and carry many responsibilities. To live as an instrument of righteousness precisely means to carry out these responsibilities well and in a manner pleasing to God. But how can we overcome our selfishness in order to carry out each duty willingly, full of grace? And how can we have the wisdom to know when to add salt, and how much, to our conversation? Only when we submit ourselves to Christ Jesus as Lord can our hearts overflow with the grace and humility needed to help proud sinners repent and believe. Only when we submit to the authority of God's word can we have the courage and strength to speak the truth to others in love. We are God's servants. But we cannot serve him well unless we learn how to serve him graciously and with a spiritual point. May God bless you to submit to Christ Jesus as Lord, and discover the secret of how always to be full of grace, seasoned with salt. May God bless you as a shepherd, Bible teacher and disciple maker, to make the most of every opportunity to help America become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

III. “Remember my chains”

Paul encourages the Colossian believers to stand firm in their faith, and to submit to all the will of God. He reminds them of their many prayer servants. Mostly, he calls on them to remember his chains. Paul’s chains are the reminder that this world is not our true home. Rather, we are living as pilgrims in a world that is hostile to God and to God's children. But when we live with the hope of the gospel, we can overcome the world. May God bless you to remember Paul’s chains, and to fulfill your responsibilities as God’s chosen instruments of righteousness. May God bless your conversation and life to be full of grace, seasoned with salt.