

Big idea: Live as you are – watched!

FCF: A tendency to become inward-looking

Application: ‘Live as you are’ must be done knowing that the world is watching!

1. ‘Live as you are’ – watched...

The goodness of so much that we have learned from Colossians can be a little overwhelming... Jesus is enough! Jesus as Lord is enough! ‘You have been transferred and so transformed!’ ‘His story is now your story!’ The clear warning of the danger the false teaching that persuades you that ‘Jesus is NOT enough’ The lifting of our eyes, minds, and hearts upwards, to where our lives are stored. ‘Live as you are’. The ‘putting off’ because we have ‘put on the new man’. The goodness of living as ‘individuals IN community!’ And all that is phrased in the plural – this is what it looks like to be God’s mob, his community, the citizens together of the kingdom of God’s beloved Son!

Not only is that overwhelming, but the goodness of living as such a community can be used to distract us, even bring us down a slippery little path into our own collective belly-button. God’s mob can become so focused on the goodness of this, in our community, that we forget the world we live in, the times we inhabit, the fact that we are being watched by the whole world, that we have a message tha this world desperately needs to hear.

And this closing section – simple, concise, and to-the-point – wants us to ‘live as you are’, knowing that the world watches.

PRAY

It is worth noticing the simple structure of this passage – it explains the logic, but also allows us to see how we will pick up the concepts as we work our way through it.

The passage hangs off two commands – one in verse 2 ('be busy'/'devoted') and one in verse 5 ('walk'). Off each command are a series of subordinate clauses, which explain, unpack and extend the exhortation. We are going to divide the passage into 4 exhortations for God's people to 'live as you are', with an eye to the outsider, those watching.

I do not think that this is a complicated passage, nor are its commands complicated. Moreover, in its emphasis on 'word' and 'deed', this is another extended application of Colossians 3:17 – these are the tangible statement that we walk in such a way that everything we do reflects on the reputation of Jesus as Lord. In fact, the Lord Jesus has already made us who we are – this expresses what has already been granted to us (remember Colossians 3:1-4 – 'live as you are'?). The 'complication', if there is any, comes as we try to apply what them in our daily lives – and that complication is not so much the nature of the commands but our unwillingness to take them seriously.

2. A dependent people (vs.2)

Look at verse 2... READ

The language used here is language of being devoted and disciplined and consistently so. The command is very simple: 'be devoted in prayer' (REPEAT).

We know what prayer is. It is, first and foremost, a statement of dependence upon God, as our creator and sustainer. It is an acknowledgement that we are reliant upon him, in all parts of our lives. It is a submission to the Lordship of Jesus, knowing that he rules our lives, having transferred and now transformed us. It is, after all these, a statement of request before God.

God's people are to be devoted to prayer. It is a communal command – this is a mark of the community of God's people. In this, God's people state that they exist dependent upon God. This is no surprise if you have been following along – after all, God himself through Jesus has granted us complete transfer from the domain of darkness, complete transformation ('Jesus story is now our story'), and a whole new identity. In everything, we are dependent as God's people – and prayer expresses this, communally.

Such a command is not unusual for Paul – **just listen to Acts 2:42... READ; Acts 2:46... READ; Acts 6:4... READ; and, Romans 12:12... READ.**

In all of them, there is the same combination – 'devoted' and 'prayer' – the exact same Greek words. This is a mark of God's people: communal dependence in prayer.

And we are even given two elaborations of what such praying looks like – did you see that there in verse 2?

On the one hand, God's mob are to 'stay alert'. I think a better understanding is 'stay watchful' – this seems to capture the general way such a word is used throughout the rest of the New Testament. It is an awareness of the times God's people live – an in-between time, from the ascension of Jesus to the return of Jesus (remember Colossians 3:4?). These are limited times – there is an end-point in sight and coming. These are finite times – God has set their finish, and we are inexorably moving towards it. These are times when the domain of darkness stands stark and clear against the kingdom of God's Son – and we live in opposition. We must be watchful in our prayers.

On the other hand, the prayers of God's people are to be 'with thanksgiving'. This is not an unusual theme in this letter – and it captures consistently the goodness of what God's people have received. Remember how I began at the start with the overwhelming goodness of what God has lavished on his people, through Jesus? The complete sufficiency of the Lordship of Jesus for all of life, so that we want for nothing (now and eternally) – what a spur to be thankful!

So, God's people are to be a dependent people – displayed in watchful and thankful prayer:

- When was the last time you consistently, devotedly, joined in communal prayer? Can I say that I think this expression of communal dependence needs to be expressed

communally – it is not something addressed to individuals but to the mob. And so this is not an encouragement to individual prayer, but communal prayer. We can do that in our Bible-study groups. We can do that as a church community – we have a monthly prayer-meeting. We can do that with fellas on a Thursday morning. We can do that whenever someone comes by for a meal or a visit or a cuppa. But when was the last time you did that?

- When was the last time your communal prayer was watchful, when it had an eye on the times we live in – finite, limited and with the return of Jesus looming?
- When was the last time our communal prayer was thankful – really thankful, deeply thankful, all-encompassing thankful?

3. An outwardly-prioritised people (vs.3-4)

Look at verses 3-4... READ.

Verse 3 is really a subordinate clause of the command in verse 2 – another elaboration of what it looks like to be devoted in prayer. But it turns to a slightly different emphasis, albeit with one eye still on the world watching God's mob.

In fact, the structure is interesting here – there is a clause that expands on another aspect of what it looks like to pray, and then this is unpacked in two purpose clauses which focus on Paul's circumstances.

His circumstances are not salubrious – he is in jail, imprisoned. I suspect he is under house-arrest, which is why Timothy is with

him, and so many others. Under such circumstances, his request is surprising. In these circumstances, Paul's request is not for release, not for the easing of his strictures, not for a change in his physical wellbeing. His request is much bigger, much grander, much more significant: he wants to keep doing his job (remember Colossians 1:24-29?). In all truth, he describes this as a 'requirement', a necessity, an essential expectation of him as someone representing Jesus.

But his request is even more surprising than that. His desire is not for him to have opportunities to go through doors – it is for the doors to be opened for the 'mystery of the Messiah' – the good news of Jesus – to go through. Paul's focus is on the proclamation of the good news of Jesus to be free and spoken and proclaimed, even as the messenger is in chains. In fact, as the messenger is in chains, his tongue is not, and so he desires for God to open doors for the words of salvation to be spoken and transmitted and heard.

In essence, Paul is asking for prayer that he do his job – the job of proclaiming. In essence, Paul is asking for prayer to be focused on the message of Jesus to be spoken and sail through doors that are closed, physically, to him.

In chains, as always in his life, God has worked an outwardly-prioritised viewpoint and concern in Paul, and Timothy. Their desire is for the movement of the good news of Jesus, out, through doors opened by God. This is the most important, and necessary, part of their life as part of God's community – I mean,

imprisonment will often do that to you, won't it – reveal the necessities.

- When was the last time we prayed – as a community – with such outwardly-focused priorities? On October 4, we will have such an opportunity. Albeit via ZOOM, we will gather for the monthly Parish prayer meeting, and pray for mission – for doors to be opened for the proclamation of the good news to go out into the world.
- When was the last time we prayed – as a community – with such outwardly-focused priorities? I mean, when did we pray each week, for an opportunity for us to speak the good news of Jesus into our town, our family, our friendships, our work?

Before we move further into this portrait of the people of God living as we are, with the world watching, let me make a clarifying comment.

The focus of this letter has been communal – you have heard me say that again and again. It picks up the plural structure of all the verbs in this letter, and the plural pronouns. It picks up the fact that it was read to the community gathered. And, in this day, when Christianity can be so individualized and privatized and shaped to suit my circumstances and my life-choices, this is a useful and needed corrective: Christianity is never private, and it is always corporate – we are saved into a community.

Yet, as we heard last week, we are individuals IN community. And so, whilst Christianity is never private, it is personal – and we

must apply these commands to our own daily living as God's people. These aspects of the community must be evident in our daily lives as God's people.

To fail to grasp this balance – and it is the right balance of individual IN community – is to fall into two errors. On the one hand, it is to fall into the error of being a 'Sunday Christian' – someone who does these things when they are part of the mob, but puts them aside when they are away from God's mob for the rest of the week. On the other hand, it is to fall into apathy and privatization – 'If the rest of the mob is doing it (or at least some committed individuals!), then I don't have to!'

Both are errors.

We are individuals IN community. As a community, we are dependent in prayer and outwardly-focused. As individuals IN community, we are the same.

4. A wisely-walking people (vs.5)

Look at verse 5... READ.

This is the second command of this section. It returns us to the key principle of the whole letter – remember back in Colossians 2:6-7? 'Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, walk in him...'. This whole section started with 'walking' – Paul's favourite metaphor for living life as one of God's people – and it finishes with 'walking'.

This walking has an audience, and a relationship: the 'outsiders'.

Who are the 'outsiders'?

If this is addressed to God's people, who have been transferred from the 'domain of darkness' into the kingdom of God's Son (and so transformed), then the outsiders are those still in the 'domain of darkness'. Now, that is confronting language in our society, a society which struggles with truthful conflict and labelling, but it is truthful. The outsiders are those who do not walk with Jesus as Lord, who remain enemies of God, hostile and alienated, who have not known the transformation that comes with 'his life is now your life', who live clothed in the 'old man'.

God's people walk amongst them. And their walk must be 'wise'.

What does it mean to be 'wise'?

Well, God's people are reminded in Proverbs 1:7 that the 'fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. And Psalm 19:9 places the 'fear of the Lord' as something granted through the right understanding and application of the word of God. So, to walk wisely is to walk in such a way that the word of God has so influenced your relationship with God (and brought you to Jesus as Lord and Saviour) that you display him, and his reputation and character, in your daily living (REPEAT).

Moreover, to be wise this way is to be someone who applies their 'watchfulness' from verse 2 – they live appropriate for the times. In this sense, they 'make the most of the time' – they do not waste

time, they live now knowing that this time is limited and they walk amongst people destined for hell.

Now, this does not mean a withdrawal from all life in this world – after all, we live in this world. But it does mean an intentionality with life, in life, through life, that knows the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus, the need of the ‘outsiders’, and which has its roots deep into God’s word as the foundation of life.

Now, that is helpful in theory – and I think it is, in connecting inseparably wise walking to the word of God. But what might that look like practically?

5. A salty people (vs.6)

Look at verse 6... READ.

This is an explanation, I think, of what this looks like practically, and it is worth unpacking slowly.

A wisely walking person has ‘speech’ which is ‘always gracious’. In this sense, the speaking of God’s mob, at all times, is full of grace – just as their relationships within God’s people are the same (remember Colossians 3:12-13?). This is not flowery speech or quiet speech – this is speech that has the flavour of the way Jesus has treated his people, giving them what they do not deserve!

What does that look like?

Well, it is to have 'salty' speech – did you see that there in verse 6? It is to have speech that is full of flavour and preservation. This is not an accident – the tense here is past tense – the preparation of the speech has already happened – remember reading God's word and dependent prayer? And, so prepared, it speaks into daily life in such a way that the true flavour of life and the true preservative of life is present and tasted. In essence, this is making sure that the mystery of Jesus is present constantly in conversation, because this is what is sufficient for all of life – the true flavour and preservative.

Now, this does not mean sanctimonious language, nor does it mean frilly language, nor does it involve goody-two-shoes language. It is speech that doesn't waste an opportunity by injecting the grace of God into every situation.

Moreover, it is prepared language – it is ready, and organized, to know how to speak to the queries of the world around us. It means that the speaker – you or me – has made the effort as one of God's people to be marinated in God's word and prayer, and thoughtful about the world we live in, and then speaks!

Let me blunt – there is a watchful intentionality here in language and life that aims to put grace – the very thing we have experienced in Jesus – in front of the 'outsider' in such a way that is tasty and faithful and preserving of life as God designed it to be. It is to live and speak in such a way that represents Jesus faithfully, and reflects rightly on his priorities and interests. And the aim is for the outsider to be met with the mystery of Jesus – by us as a mob, and as individuals in the mob.

It means playing touch-football intentionally, joining the RFS intentionally, participating in craft groups intentionally. It might mean not starting a certain group-specific group as a ministry and joining the same group as it already exists in town. It might mean shopping at the same shops to relate to the same people so that Jesus can be presented before people consistently. It might mean making sure that we understand the issues of our time, the themes of this moment, the culture of our world so that we can speak into it. It means bringing grace to each and every conversation and interaction in such a way that time is not wasted.

Let me say openly that I daily live with the regret of being either under-prepared for those conversations, or too fearful of such moments. I suspect you are the same!

So, as we think on this walk with the world watching – and us focused outwardly, as individuals IN community, let me close by asking how you are getting prepared for such conversations and conduct. How are you being seasoned? How are you reading the word and praying, communally and individually, in such a way that there is constant dependence, constant outward-focused priorities, wise walking, and salty conversation?