

2023 National Ministries Conference
Bring Him to Them
“God’s Method For Reaching the Lost – the Church”
Colossians 4:2-6
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We will be in Colossians 4 and as you hear it, remember that the grass will wither, flowers will fade, but the Word of God will endure forever so the people of God strive to hear and heed God's Word faithfully together. Colossians 4:2-6 says [2] *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. [3] At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— [4] that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

[5] Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. [6] Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Prayer:

We ask dear Holy Spirit that now You would open wide our hearts to receive the truth of Your Word and we pray not simply that we might understand. We ask also that you grant to us faith, and we would not stop there asking simply for faith, but also for a right and proper ability to apply Your Word and to practice it faithfully in our own lives. To that end, we ask Your blessing upon us, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

I’d like to review the questions I've been attempting to ask and to answer from the previous two studies. The first one is, is there anyone God cannot save? The answer is no. The easiest proof of that is the fact that you and I are here by the grace of God. The second question is where and how did you come to meet your true love, which is Christ? And then also, who does God use to call the world to come to Christ? The answer is the church, a theme to which we will return again in this study. Another question was, why do we sacrifice our time and resources for the Kingdom of God? The answer is because Jesus first sacrifice Himself for us. We owe Him a wonderful debt of gratitude. Finally, this is a question I want to lean into in this study, who does God use to carry out the work of the Great Commission? The answer as has already been alluded to in one fashion or another, is the church.

As we look at our text from Colossians 4, we are going to look at it from a few different Perspectives. The first of which is praying for church leaders and missionaries. Colossians 4 is a really important text to me. There have been believe it or not, discussions in the evangelical and even reformed world about whether or not laypeople are called to do evangelism. Is there a distinction between the role of the ordained and the unordained? When Paul says in I Corinthians 9:16, ‘woe is me if I don't preach the gospel’ does that woe rest upon the shoulders of every Christian without distinction or discrimination? These are good questions and yet, at the same time, there's a sense in which the whole church, in one fashion or another, participates in the work of the Great Commission. In my mind, one of the most helpful texts that draws both the role of the ordained and the unordained into clear distinction is Colossians 4.

Notice that while Paul is going to get to the question of what role does the church as a whole, even the unordained play in the work of evangelism, which is very important, that's not where he starts. In fact, he starts with prayer. If he's walking towards evangelism, the door through which he walks to evangelism is the door of prayer. Paul's section on evangelism

actually begins with the request for prayer and a prayer on behalf of those who are ordained evangelists.

Now, on the one hand, I'm excited that we are in a day and age where many Christians are wholeheartedly committed to evangelism, and we have evangelism flowing from the church and the para church with a lot of different things that are out there. And at the same time, it might be good to sort of just walk back the trail for a moment and remember that when God wanted to first send the Gospel, He sent preachers. Now it seems a little self-serving for a preacher to say that, but get over that and don't miss the point for when God wanted the Gospel to reach people, He sent preachers. Imagine a world without Bibles and yet think about modern invention. Around 400 years ago hardly a Christian would have a Bible in their home. So what happened for the 1600 years of Christendom from the resurrection to the printing and proliferation of Bibles, where now we all have 20 in our home and as many as we want on our phone? Before that, if you wanted to hear the Word of God, you went to church and if you wanted the Word of God to reach people nearby or far away, generally speaking, you sent preachers. This is what happens in Romans 10. This is the promise that grows out of the Book of Isaiah and it's the way the momentum of the Great Commission begins in the New Testament. God sent preachers.

Here in Colossians 4:2-3, Paul says from a prison cell, 'pray for us, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Pray also for us that God would open a door to us for the Word.' What's ironic about that? Paul's in prison, but he doesn't say, "Pray that we will get out" but rather says, "Pray that the Gospel will get out." It's the Gospel that he wants to have a door of opportunity. God uses means and the general means that He uses to carry out the Great Commission is his church but there is a particular sense in which he uses the ministry of ordained servants to carry the Great Commission to the ends of the world and prayer is at the center of this. Paul's pleading with the church to participate in the Great Commission, foremost through a ministry of prayer.

I think sometimes our reformed theology, our Calvinism, our doctrine of the sovereignty of God, sometimes struggles to find a resting place that is truly healthy. And what I mean by that is I think sometimes without realizing it, we almost hide behind the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, as though it gives us a reason not to pray. We tend to think 'God's sovereign, He'll get them if He wants them. God's sovereign, He doesn't need me and how much does He really, watch the word here, need my prayers.' But the sovereignty of God, does not hinder our prayer or eclipse our prayer for the exact opposite is true. The sovereignty of God enhances our prayer. Evangelism is driven by it, dependent upon it, and evangelistic ministry that is not centered by, driven by and upheld by a sustained ministry of prayer is relying on the strength of man. So, Paul pleads with the church to pray and to pray for those who are evangelizing.

In fact, you might say it this way. Paul says, pray for those who are evangelizing in a certain sense parallel to the way we pray for those who are being evangelized. Who do you pray more for – the lost or those trying to reach the lost? The answer should be yes. We pray for both, and we remember that the sovereignty of God does not hinder our prayer, if anything it invigorates it. It gives us confidence that God has ordained to use our prayers to accomplish all His holy will – even our prayer is part of His plan and part of His Great Commission. Evangelism without prayer is self-reliance and actually kind of scary.

Remember where Paul is – he's in prison. I find this sort of intriguing because we're likely getting to the end of Paul's life here. He's in Rome. He's in trouble. He's been there for a while. He asks for things and you can sense he's getting old and weary. He, in another letter, says, 'My time is near.' Acts 1:8 is verse running all through this national mission's conference

but have you ever thought about the bookends of the Book of Acts and how ironic it is that in Acts 1:8 the resurrected Savior says ‘you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to all the ends of the Earth.’ Think about that – you will be My witnesses and you will have power. (10:41)

Then the last chapter of Acts, Paul, is in prison and here’s the question, Can the Gospel be changed? Can the Gospel be imprisoned? Can the Gospel be shackled? Can man hold the Gospel down? Is God hindered by the Apostle Paul in prison? Is the Great Commission now behind bars on trial, sentenced to death? Is this thing not going to work? The answer is ‘no’ and the reason is because God is a resurrecting God. So often He uses brokenness and weakness to display the power of the resurrection so that even behind bars, the Gospel is powerful. Even as Paul is chained, the Gospel is completely free. Even as Paul is sentenced to death, the Word of life is going to spread like wildfire. The Spirit of God works through the prayers of God's people, not as though He's dependent upon them, but it's part of His plan. So, my encouragement to make it very simple, very plain, is that a church that wants to be faithful and fruitful in mission should be found many times in prayerful submission. That's the closest I get to channel my own Harry Reeder. He couldn't speak without alliterating, but you know that.

My second point is going to be a little controversial. I want to talk about this language here that Paul uses, particularly in Colossians 4:5-6, speaking to the church. What's great about this section is Colossians 4:2-4 refer to the ordained minister and then in Colossians 4:5-6, he's talking to you – the whole church, young and old, male and female, Covenant kids, Covenant Seniors. Colossians 4:5-6 says *[5] Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. [6] Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

Paul asked for himself that God would open a door that he and the others are called to do it – to publicly proclaim the Word. One theologian has well said, “All Christians are called to promote the Gospel, but not all Christians are called to proclaim the Gospel in precisely the same way.” There's something wonderfully liberating about that. I am called and ordained to proclaim the Gospel and woe is me if I don't do it. But my wife does not go to bed at night with that upon her shoulders. You should not go to bed at night with that on your shoulders and yet, to promote the Gospel is something that the whole church is called to do. It's like a drama where everyone finds their part. No one is left out. Scripture is our script and we are all finding our role in the Great Commission, whether we're out in front speaking or we're supporting cast from behind. We're praying nonstop. We're working the lights. We're taking the slow track. We're taking the fast track. Everyone's involved. That's the great thing about the Great Commission is that it wraps its arms around the whole church, this is very simply; find your place. It's wherever God puts you.

Yet this language here of walking is so important, so beautiful. It's one of the most Biblical verbs used to describe the lifestyle of God's people. God said to Abraham in Genesis 17:1, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.” What He didn't mean by that is for Abraham to take a one time stroll past Him and this will be done, but rather Abraham walk before Me which is the language of life and fellowship. It's the language of every day of the week. It's a summary of the character and the manner that God wants His people to embody. In the law, Israel was repeatedly told to walk in God's ways and to not walk in the ways of the world and the pagans around them. What is God's saying? Don't imitate their lifestyle, don't follow after their ways, don't be seduced by their temptations. So here we are told to walk.

Leviticus 26:23-24 says [23] *“And if by this discipline you are not turned to Me but walk contrary to Me, (warning) [24] then I also will walk contrary to you, and I Myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins.* Psalm 23:4 says [4] ***Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*** Psalm 119:1 says [1] *Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!* That's not a one off. That's an everyday thing. Proverbs is one of my favorite books of the Bible. Proverbs 1:15 says [15] *My son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths.* God is saying to His people that we should walk before Him and not walk in the ways of the world. He's not describing 30 minutes of our day, but rather the manner of our entire life.

I want to stretch you a little bit here. You may want to push back on what I just said. Paul is clearly here not talking to the ordained or about the ordained. He already did that, but he's talking to the church. He's talking to you. Let me say it in a way that's stretching your neck and mine. He's talking to our covenant kids and he's saying, ‘take a walk in wisdom, take a walk.’ One of the greatest challenges before our church, I think, broadly speaking and I live in Southern California, is the temptation of cultural escapism, to pull back, circle the wagons, play it safe, protect our own at all costs. I'm not talking about the culture wars, per se. I'm actually talking about the Gospel and the tendency before Christians. Even today, I get asked this question all the time – is it time to run for the hills? I have a simple response, ‘Show me that anywhere in the Bible where retreat is an option.’ We are not the village referring to the movie. We're not longing for the shire. There are always hobbits somewhere. Nor are we striving to embody what's been penned in a book, *The Benedict Option*. The church doesn't live under a bubble. Isolation is not an option. Withdraw/retreat are not imperatives given to the church regarding the Great Commission.

In fact, here Paul commands the opposite. He says ‘walk... in wisdom toward outsiders.’ He doesn't say walk with them nor does he say walk away from them. It's important to make that distinction. He says walk towards them but he does not say walk with them. That's what you're warned against over and over in the Psalms and the Proverbs. Nor does he say, walk away from them which is the temptation to withdraw. Why is it such a strong temptation? It is because the idols of cultural comfort and ease are always around us and ever tempting. The idols of comfort and ease are the greatest threats to my Christian life in ministry.

I'll say it differently. What really threatens the church? J. Gresham Machen said it wonderfully. It's not that we're going to get chased down with swords and clubs or thrown into prison. No, the big temptation that Machen saw before the church in the 1920s, which is still going on now, is that the church would get slowly and peacefully seduced into accommodation with the world, that we'd want to be liked more than evangelistic, that we'd want to blend in more than we want to be salt and light that makes a distinction.

Paul doesn't say walk recklessly. He doesn't say just jump in with both feet, no holds barred. He actually says, walk in wisdom towards those who are outside and this is a very helpful category of wisdom. Wisdom is on the one hand one of the hardest things to attain and one of the most essential for the Christian life. To offer a frail definition of wisdom, at least as I see it, is applying the truth of God's Word to the bending specifics of life. The Bible doesn't tell you what time to put your kids to bed. The Bible doesn't tell you exactly how much to eat, when to stop. The Bible doesn't tell you a lot of things, but wisdom does because wisdom tells you that there are certain things that you should do and you should not do and wisdom traffics in between the little nooks and crannies of life. So that a right and healthy theology drips down into the nooks

and crannies of everyday life. That's what Paul is telling us to do here – walk in wisdom toward those who are outside.

Here are a couple of examples. What would be the opposite of wisdom? What would be foolish? Missionary dating is foolish. I'll date them into the kingdom. If you're doing that, knock it off. It's a bad plan. It's going to crash violently. You might as well hear it from me. You've probably heard it from someone else. It's a horrible plan. You will never seduce the world into the church. The world will seduce you out of it. The Bible makes that very clear.

What would look like positively to walk in wisdom towards those who are outside? I want to give some very specific practical suggestions on how we can bring Him to them. One of them would be, get a hobby. Spend some time somewhere around non-Christians where you can pardon the pun here, drop your hair a bit. Do you know that most people are most willing to be evangelized where they recreate? In Southern California fitness is idolatry. Few people go to church, but everybody's out on Sunday – they're on their bikes, they're surfing, they're playing beach volleyball. Here in Birmingham, maybe you don't do some of those things. They're playing golf, they're playing basketball, they're playing whatever it is that you like to do when you are trying to unwind even if it's not a sport, it's something that you do. Very often in those contexts, we get to be salt and light. We get to walk, they see how we play. Do we cheat? They hear how we talk. Do we cuss when we get fouled? They overhear our conversations in between games when we're sitting there looking for our asthma inhaler because we're asthmatic. Maybe you get to say, 'I see you're wheezing too. If you were to die tonight and stand before God without that asthma inhaler, what would say?' You see the point.

Often, we have opportunities to evangelize people that are actually quite easy for us simply by doing the things that are not only fun for us, but actually recreate us. And I love the way that the word recreation and recreation are spelled virtually the same because we need that. Even non-Christians know they need to be cleaned out, but they don't know how to do it. They think basketball, surfing, golf is enough and so come alongside them, walking in wisdom toward outsiders.

Here is another suggestion, and I think your church is doing a lot of this. Go where the pain is. There's pain all around this place. Do you know why? It's because there's sin all around the place. The last study I titled 'Father of the fatherless' about a widow. Why? It is because there are fatherless kids all around here. There are single parents doing their best to pull it off and working too much and needing help. There's all kinds of pain around us. When people ask me about church planning and what should they do to get going at the beginning, I ask them a question; Who are you fishing for? If it's just the comfortable middle class, already well-groomed, mostly reformed, somehow frustrated, and you're just going to be the most reformed thing in town, critical of everything else that's not as reformed as you are, it's a terrible reason to plan a church. It's also not a great reason to be the church.

I'll come back to how great it is to be reformed and evangelistic but here's another way of putting the question. If your church were to disappear tomorrow – Briarwood only is raptured, that's not my eschatology, by the way – who would miss you? Who would be left exposed? Whose pain wouldn't be ministered to? That's the kind of thing I mean. There's pain all around us if we have a watchful eye and we have a Gospel approach that is so much better than a woke world's attempt to bring justice, not even knowing how to define it, to bring mercy, with no idea what it really even means. So, we need to be in the world, but not of the world.

Let me push this a little bit further. We need to lead our kids. One of the real highlights of my time here this week was yesterday evening, looking off to my right and seeing a sea of young

people. I would be very happy to have their attention quite a bit. But I want to say to all of us, on the one hand, remember, I'm a dad with two teenagers, a five and a six year old. I'm in the thick of it. I'm 51 with a five year old. Pray for me. When my youngest graduates high school, I should be retiring the same year. We've already planned our party but we need to lead our kids. We need to encourage them that the work of the Great Commission belongs to them. That they have a part in this story, that they have something to say, that if they are shy, that's all right but there are forms of service that they can do. If they are extroverted and leaders, that's great. Put those skills to use. They need to see by example that this is what it means to take up your cross, deny ourselves and follow after Christ. They need to see that the Great Commission means something to us as in our homes. We pray for those who preach the Word and bring the Word to the lost. We pray for those who are lost that they might hear the Word, that they may come and sit under it faithfully.

Here's a challenging point. Sometimes you might actually need to follow our kids. I am impressed that there is a momentum among some of our young people. Don't put a basket over that. Sometimes I get to travel to rural places and one of the things that strikes me is the strong zeal that a lot of young people have to reach the lost. Do you know why that is? Their world has changed. Some of us have grown up without the Internet and others can't imagine life without it. Some of us have grown up knowing, largely speaking, only one cultural sphere. Others have grown up seeing just a sea of diversity all around them and wanting to see more of that in their church. Some of us have been very focused and inward. Others have a very strong outward set of priorities. Some of our kids have better social skills than we do and different social opportunities than we do. I love surfing. I can't stand golf. It makes no sense to me. I am sure that when the devil stops for gas going to and fro, he does so at a golf course in Phoenix because the two make no sense to me. I know I just lost a few friends but you'll forgive me because you're gracious Christians.

I'm not suggesting here that we throw our kids to the lions. I'm a tremendously protective dad. I remember what I was like as a non-Christian teenage boy. That's not what I want for my kids. Here's the point. What are the options? Draw back and retreat. Try to hide them from the world and hope that they won't be found. It won't work. It's not Biblical. It's not good parenting. It cannot be found in Scripture. It's never worked in church history. There's a great movie that our family really enjoys called *How to Train Your Dragon*. If you don't know the movie, it's okay, you're not far from the Kingdom but you should watch it with your kids or grandkids. It's a really fantastic movie. At one point in the movie, Stoic, the large, muscly, overprotective, overbearing father has one son named Hiccup. His mother has died. So Stoic is raising the boy himself and the boy is always out getting into stuff, always finding ways to get into trouble and the dad's always grabbing him by the back of the shirt and kind of pulling him back saying "If you go out there, you're going to get hurt, it's dangerous out there. No, no, no, no, no. There are dragons." So Stoic's heavy hand rests hard upon his son.

Then at one point, they have kind of a flash point of a moment. Stoic says to his friend, 'I just don't know what I'm going to do with him.' The friend gives Stoic the best advice which is my advice to you and I'm trying my best to take it myself. "You're just going to have to teach him. You're not always going to be there to protect him. Someday he's going to get out there again. He's probably out there right now. You're simply going to have to train him." What is the best thing we can do for a rising generation? Just imagine. Think about how nutty the world is now. Give it an hour. Give it a decade. A decade from now, my teenagers will be in charge of the world. It's the scariest thought imaginable. They will not only have driver's licenses, they will be

likely parenting, navigating work world, maybe even growing into office and church so get the point. We have to train them. The Great Commission belongs to them. It's what we need to do.

Here is my third point. Don't sacrifice the doctrine of the church on the altar of evangelism. Now, this means a lot to me. One of the things that made me so excited about discovering the reformed faith, which I did towards the end of Bible college and into seminary, was to realize that there was not some sort of a tension between the church and being reformed and being evangelistic. In fact, the two go wonderfully hand-in-hand. A favorite lecture of mine, is Calvin the Evangelist, the reformed Confessions in Evangelism. Do you know that the Reformed world owns the landscape in the history of missions? All the titans, or at least the majority of them, are ours. The best evangelists, the best missionaries, church planners all over Europe to the Indies, to Africa, to Asia – the Reformed Church has dominated that and evangelism is the work of the church. It is done by individuals, but it is the work of the church.

I want to read from a few of our reformed confessions. Why? It is because they ignite and sustain my personal fire for evangelism and they should yours as well. There's not a tension between being reformed and being evangelistic. In fact, if we're not evangelistic, we're not faithfully reformed. The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21 question 54 is; What do you believe concerning the Holy Catholic Church? Answer; 'I believe that the Son of God, through His Spirit and Word out of the entire human race from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects and preserves for Himself, a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith and of this community, I am and always will be a living member.' That is beautiful! Until the end of the age, Jesus is going to gather, protect and preserve His church, which is the work of the church and of that church I am and always will be a living member.

The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 31, question 84 is; How does preaching the holy Gospel open and close the Kingdom of Heaven? Answer; 'According to the command of Christ, the Kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to all believers, each and every one, that, as often as they accept the Gospel promise in true faith, God, because of Christ's merit, truly forgives all their sins. The Kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent, the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them. God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on this Gospel testimony.'

Why do we need the reform confessions? It is because they keep us from ourselves. They protect us from a selective, unhealthy theology. When's the last time you heard mention of the word hell or repent? These are in the Bible. In the American soft package approach to the Gospel that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, is such a partial truth. He also has a plan for your life if you don't believe and it's not wonderful, it's eternal hell.

The Canons of Dort, Article 3 says 'And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom He will and at what time He pleaseth; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:14–15).' (35:43)

What were the reformers saying? God in His great love and his condescending mercy, even upon sinners, sent preachers to bring them the message of this joyful tidings. But they affirm that while rejecting this; We reject those who teach that the reason why God sends the Gospel to one people rather than to another is not merely and solely the good pleasure of God, but rather the fact that one people is better and worthier than another, to which the Gospel is not

communicated. Is the Gospel a respecter of persons? No, we reject any suggestion that some people deserve the Gospel more than others, that any bearer of the image of God should not hear the Gospel of God.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 25; of the Church, paragraph three says, 'Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto.' What's the point? The point is God has a means to build His church, and the means is His church. As the shorter catechism says, 'the outward and ordinary means by which God convinces and converts sinners and builds them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation is Word, sacrament and prayer.' God's primary means to reach the world is the means of grace – Word, sacrament and prayer.

When Charles Spurgeon would go up in the pulpit to preach, they say that he would say on each step as he went up, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit.' If you believe in the Holy Spirit, you have to believe in preaching, because that's the primary means that the Holy Spirit uses to convince and convert sinners and then to build them up. One theologian has well said, 'nothing undermines the Great Commission more than a church with a low view of preaching' – a low expectation of what God will do through the word preached.

One of the best quotes about preaching actually comes from the book that became Moby Dick, written by Herman Melville, in which he says "The pulpit leads the world." He likened the pulpit to his ship and the pulpit at its front, its prow. It's the first to say 'the weather is bad, batten down the hatches.' It is the first to say 'fair weather ahead, open up and breathe.' The world is a ship on its journey out and the pulpit leads the world.

Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 15; of Repentance unto Life, article 1 says 'Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.' There's that word again, repentance. It's good for our souls to be reminded of our confessions. Why? Because without them, we develop historical amnesia, and we get a little cocky. We start thinking we should start writing our own creeds and confessions. You know what we end up with? Porridge. We have wonderful reformed standards. If you love evangelism, you should be over the moon about the reformed confessions. If you love the reformed confessions, you should be on fire for evangelism.

This one is my favorite; Canons of Dort, article 2, 5 says five 'Moreover, the promise of the Gospel is that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God, out of His good pleasure, sends the Gospel.' What does the reformed confession suggest? We should be promiscuous with the Gospel to all people without distinction. This is absolutely wonderful. We should be throwing the seed of the Gospel far and wide, trusting that the Spirit of God will cause it to take root and bear fruit in the hearts of whomever He wills, wherever He wills, and whenever He wills. The number is not up to us, but the mission is given to us.

In application, having surveyed Colossians 4:2-6, having reviewed some of our reformed confessions just skipping the surface on what they say about what it means to be evangelistic in the context of being confessional and reformed, I want to ask this question; as it comes to our confessions view of evangelism, are we reformed or deformed? Because if you love the confessions and don't see their strong emphasis on evangelism locally, regionally and globally,

that's not reformed theology, that's deformed theology. If you love evangelism, but you don't know the reformed confessions well, you are ignoring one of the most wonderful trails, wonderful histories, wonderful stories, endless biographies, and most importantly, fine and faithful theology. So don't sacrifice your theology, your doctrine of the church on the altar of evangelism.

The year is 1923, still the hundred-year centennial when Machen wrote *Christianity and Liberalism*. If you have not yet done a study of that book this year, you have three months to repent and believe, really just two in a week but it's a great year to be looking at that book. Machen suggests some things that are potentially threats to the church. He gives three. I'm going to add my own three as well. Machen said 'The things that threaten the church are not the following; Liberalism, Syncretism or Pluralism.' The three I would add to this is, atheism, wokeism and multiculturalism. Here's the point. The problem with the church fulfilling the Great Commission is not them out there. It's not the liberals, the pluralists or the syncretists. It's not the atheists. It's not the woke-ist. The problem is not them. The problem is in here. If we have a problem, this is way Machen would say it; 'The problem before us or challenge is not liberalism, syncretism, pluralism, atheism, or wokeism. It's rather indifferent-ism, quiet-ism and isolationism. It is the idols of comfort and needs, the temptation to retreat when Jesus says 'Go.' If those things burden our hearts, we should repent.

I wonder if you'd be willing to empathize with me here; as I get older, it's not the sins of commission that actually burden me now. It's not what I've done. It's what I left undone. John Calvin, on his deathbed, penned his own last will and testament. His last will and testament is something really fantastically beautiful and inspiring to read. In it Calvin asks God to forgive him for his laziness and the fear of man. If we want to bring Him to them, we need to remember that our God is a resurrecting God. He sent His Son. He sent His Word. He sent His Spirit and now He sends His church. And until the curtain closes, beloved, we all have a part in the Great Commission.

One man said, "I share the Gospel all the time and sometimes I use words that could have been butchered so many different ways." R.B. Kuiper in his book, *God-Centered Evangelism*, says "Godly living is no substitute for the Gospel." We need to bring them to Him and we need to bring Him to them. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord, I know that in a certain sense I'm preaching to the choir amongst brothers and sisters who are attending a mission's conference on a Monday night. Some came on Saturday nights and others were here for more than one service on a Sunday and now they're back again. The choir needs a good sermon on occasion too so we ask Lord that You would invigorate our hearts, calm our fears, still our hands, empower our voices, enlarge our hearts, give us a great hope and faith that You will continue to do all Your holy will, that You will carry out Your Great Commission that You've given to Your church, and that You'll be pleased to use even us; small, frail, broken, fearful, imperfect as we are, to accomplish great things for the weakness of man is nothing more than a stage to display the strength of our God. So, we thank You for the faithful life, sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray that You would help us to make Him known locally, regionally, and to the ends of the earth. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.