

Gracious Speech

Colossians 4:6

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Joshua Koura

Camden Valley Baptist Church

www.cvbaptist.org.au

Colossians 4. This morning, we're going to consider verse 6, and allow me just to read verses 2 through to verse 6. The Word of God reads, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving. Meanwhile, praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains. That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

Father, we come before You now, and we ask that You would help us. Help us to hear the word of truth. Help us to receive the word of God. I pray that our hearts would be tender to the voice of the Spirit as the word of God is proclaimed and as He ministers to each one. I pray, Lord, that we would bow our will to You and that we would confess that You truly are Lord, to the glory of God the Father. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

This morning, we're going to consider verse 6, which says, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." We've been considering the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ and how that, by means of prayer, God desires His gospel work to go on. But not only by means of prayer, but we are called also to walk in wisdom to help, as it were, that gospel be fleshed out before the lost and dying world.

And so, we come to this next text of Scripture that deals with an aspect of this walk of wisdom, and that particularly is the aspect of our speech. The aspect of our speech. I think by now, we should have come to understand that gospel work and effective gospel work in the world is not as simple as gospel proclamation. But Paul wants us to understand that although the gospel is to be preached, and there is no salvation apart from the preaching of the gospel, for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word. But Paul wants us to understand that the gospel being advanced effectively in the community, in the world, must be supported not only by the message but must be supported by a clear message and must be supported by a clear life.

He wants us to realize that the gospel, as the Scripture also says to us and Paul says in another passage, is a little bit like farming or is akin to farming. Farming is not just about sowing seed. That is a major part and a necessary part, no doubt. There will never be a crop unless the seed is sown. But farming is multifaceted. It has the idea of preparing the soil, sowing the seed, waiting, watering, and harvesting. There is a multifaceted aspect to the work of farming. And so it is with the work of the gospel. One sows, another waters, God gives the increase. Paul brings this out in Corinthians, but it also shows that here, prayer is essential to effective advancement of the gospel. Clear communication, that's why it says, "Pray that I would make the word known clearly," is also very important and essential. But also, the walk of wisdom of God's people, so as in a living example of that gospel to the lost and dying world.

And now, in this text of Scripture, also the speech of the people of God is very important for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, the word here in verse 6 that says, "Let your speech always be with grace," is the word "logos," and some people think it refers to preaching. However, I do believe that it refers to more of a dialogue or more of our day-to-day conversation, and that's because of the end of verse 6 where it says, "That you may know how you ought to answer each one."

And it seems here that Paul is concerned that the language and the speech of the Christians there at Colossae would be a wise speech that would show that the gospel has affected their lives, changed their lives, and whether they're speaking of Christ or whether they're speaking in general of things of life, it should be a speech that recommends itself to the hearers so that they might know that there has been a change within the hearts of those that speak it.

Speech is, in Scripture, a large theme. The theme of the tongue, of speech, is a massive theme in the Word of God, and I think it can be summarized as to understand the power of speech from Proverbs 18:21. The Word of God says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." The Bible speaks so much about speech because of the power of speech, and the Bible presents to us that the same tongue that is in our mouth or behind our lips can be used for the greatest good or can be used for great harm, even great destruction.

It is with the tongue that we can build up, edify people. It is with the tongue that we can strengthen people. It's with the tongue that we can teach people. It's with the tongue that we can praise God. It's with the tongue and with our speech that we can preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the very means by which we are brought out of darkness and into

the marvelous kingdom of God. However, it is with the same tongue that we can curse men. It is with the same tongue that we can lead men astray. It's with the same tongue that we can deceive people. It's with the same tongue that we can belittle people, manipulate people, and bring them to their own ruin.

And so, the Bible wants us to realize that our speech is significant, that the tongue is a powerful force, a little member, yes, but as the Word of God says, "The tongue is a world of iniquity." It's powerful, small but a powerful member that exists within our bodies. And the use of the tongue is what the text is concerned about today as we consider this passage together.

In Colossians 4:6, Paul begins by saying, "Let your speech always be with grace." The first thing I want to point out this morning to help us understand is that whatever Paul's about to teach us about our speech, he connects it to the word "always." So, he's going to teach us about how we should speak, we should have our speech always with grace, but he says "always." Whatever we're about to learn about the tongue, whatever we're about to learn about Christian speaking, whatever we're about to learn about the importance of the words that we use and the manner in which we communicate, one thing is certain: this instruction is for our continual obedience. The word "always" means wherever and at all times. "Always" encapsulates not only wherever we speak but also whenever we speak.

And if we understand our own hearts well enough and we examine our hearts well enough, I think we will come to realize that we can speak with grace in some contexts better than other contexts. It is easy for us to speak with grace to people, perhaps, that are in the Church of God. But as soon as we get home and we get frustrated by our children or by our spouses or by our parents or by whoever, our friends even that are close to us, it's so easy to loosen the speech. It's so easy to no longer have our speech seasoned with salt or gracious speech.

And so, Paul's very clear on this: that whatever I'm about to teach you about speech and talking rights, he wants us to realize that this is not just for sometimes, some places. This is for everywhere, at all times, at all places. And so, we should have a controlled speech, always speaking in a way that pleases God, monitored, controlled, wherever we may be.

But the speech that Paul is encouraging the church to have here in verse number 6 is a speech that is always with grace, always with grace, and grace seasoned with salt. The commentators have written a lot on this, and it's not extremely helpful. There is such a wide variety of different views as to what these things mean, but I do believe that there is a general consensus, if I could say, as to what this verse is referring to, especially the

phrase "seasoned with salt."

But first, we look at gracious speech. What does it mean by gracious speech or having speech that is with grace? Well, in Paul's day, the idea of gracious speech was a witty speech, clever speech, kind of an oratory skill. But I don't believe that this is what Paul had in mind when addressing the Colossian believers here. I think if we go back to Colossians 3:16, we see "with grace" also attached to the end of not only our speech but of our singing. It says, "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." And here we have not only singing with grace but we also have in Colossians 4 speaking with grace. And I think it'd be right to consistently interpret Colossians 3:16 in line with Colossians 4:6. And I believe what Paul is trying to say here is that our speech ought to be gracious in that it is imbued and endued with the grace of God, that is infused with the grace of God. Our speech is empowered by God in such a way that it is not coming from the carnal inclinations of our fleshly hearts but rather arises from the gracious work of the Holy Spirit within our lives. That's like singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord is being enabled in the praises of the Lord as we sing and praise His name. So speaking with grace in our hearts to the Lord would be on a similar note that we are moved by the grace of God in our speech or controlled, if I could say, by the Spirit of God in how we speak.

Paul is concerned that our speech would be gracious. Now let me say this also, gracious can also mean and does mean sweet speech, as it were, or speech that is tender and all that. But let me just say this, true tender speaking is due to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit within the heart. And so it's not good to pit these two ideas together, but rather they come together quite well. When the Christian is endued with the power of God, he speaks gracious words and he speaks with the grace of God upon him. And we'll consider that as we look more at the idea of seasoned with salt, of how these things come together.

But the Bible teaches us that this was the speech that the Lord Jesus had. If you remember in Luke 4:22, the Bible says that the people heard Him speak and they all bore witness and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. Here, the Lord Jesus opens up the Word of God there in the synagogue, reads the scripture, He expounds the passage that was before Him about Himself, "this day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears." And the people were awestruck and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. Now those gracious words caused the people to say, "Who is this man? Isn't this Joseph's son? Isn't this the son of Mary, the son of Joseph? How is it that He could speak in such a manner?" And obviously, those were the words that were endued by the Spirit of God. For even in that same passage, Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." And that manifestation was clearly evident in the

eyes of the people as they declared what gracious speech is coming from the lips of this man.

This was the speech that the martyr Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, was also known for. The scripture tells us about his speech being of the same manner. The Bible says in Acts 6:10, "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke." He spoke in such a way that, yes, it pierced the hearts of the people. We could argue that maybe the words weren't so tender when he said, "you stiff-necked and unlearned people," but they were gracious words. They were words that proceeded by the grace of God from his heart. They were words that proceeded with the power of God and were not words that arose in arrogance of heart. He was not attacking them, as it were, or not trying to belittle them, as it were. He was speaking the truth of God by the power of the Holy Spirit to even those Christ-rejecters that ended up stoning him to death.

The danger when we deal with the subject of speech is to say that any speech that has a measure of rebuke or correction is not gracious. But then we'd have to dismiss a lot of the speech of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 23, where He denounced woes and called men hypocrites. And what about John the Baptist, who was also endued by the Spirit to speak, who said, "Oh, you generation of vipers!" And so, in saying that, I'm simply saying there are occasions and times where the Spirit of God will lead His servants to speak with a sense of force and a sense of rebuke and a sense of a way in which will cut to the hearts of the hearers. Yet, this does not mean that the speech is not gracious. It is not an arrogant speech that seeks to put people down. Rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that seeks to convict men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. There is a vast difference between the two. Paul wants the church to have gracious speech, speech that is endued by the Holy Spirit, so much so that it is marked by fascination and charm in the hearers. The words of the Lord Jesus, in many ways, were winning words when He spoke. They won the hearts of the people. There was a wisdom that came and proceeded out of His mouth that they wondered at His graciousness. The Bible teaches us that we are to have this same kind of speech.

Now, when we deal with the issue of speech, it is easy to think that it is just a matter of learning the right things to say. But the Bible deals with the subject of speech at a far deeper level. In fact, the words of the Lord Jesus are very clear and significant for our discussion this morning: "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." So often, we think about the words that are proceeding out of the mouth, but we must never disconnect the words that come out from a man or woman's mouth from what is truly in the heart. What Jesus says to us here is that gracious speech and grace-filled words will only proceed from a grace-filled heart

and a heart that is endued with the spirit of grace. The aim in adjusting our speech often has to come to a place with the submission of our hearts to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, which is also very clear in this context, as Paul has been bringing out throughout this entire epistle.

It is important to realize that our speech has to be gracious, and God wants us to have a speech that is gracious, not the power of carnal persuasion but the work of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We should speak the exact words at the right time and in the right manner to those who are before us. Paul goes on to say, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." This phrase, perhaps more than the other one, has been subject to various interpretations. But the truth remains that salt had two major purposes in the days of the writing of this text and even in our day today. It would be only fair to connect what salt represents and what salt does and is known for doing and applying that to our speech. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt."

Gracious speech is speech that is seasoned with salt, and salt's two main purposes are important for understanding. The first of those is this: salt enhances flavor. In fact, salt recommends food to the palate. If you have ever had a meal and tasted it, finding it bland, you might say, "Please pass the salt." As soon as you do that and add a bit of salt, the same food seems to have a dynamic flavor that the salt drew out of what was already there. When the Bible talks about seasoning our speech with salt, I believe it has this idea of speaking in such a way and dressing our speech in such a way that recommends itself to the palate or the taste buds of those that are hearing us. Obviously, not undermining the Scripture and the teaching of the Word of God or the truth of what is being said, but the manner in how it is said, the time, the way, and the approach are also vastly important in understanding.

The second use of salt is that it preserves from corruption and decay. Salt has a way of preserving things. People in those days did not have fridges as we do, and salt was the primary preservative of the day. It kept things from decaying and corrupting. When Paul speaks about letting our speech be seasoned with salt, he means not only speaking in a way that dresses up our words so that they recommend themselves to the palate, to the taste buds of people, but also speaking in such a gracious way that it is pure words, holy words, righteous words, words that are not corrupting words. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, or the building up, that it may minister grace to the hearers." You see that idea: words that corrupt, grace that builds. Through speech, through communication, let not corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.

And so, the Bible speaks of, I believe, these two things in relation to our words being seasoned with salt, and so that gracious words and gracious speech must come from a gracious heart. But a gracious heart and gracious speech is speech that recommends itself to the hearer, and it's speech that comes from a pure vessel, and it is pure in itself. It's pure words. This is the way that we should be speaking to an unbelieving world: not with anger, not with pride, not with arrogance, not with jealousy, not with deceit, but rather speaking in such a way that shows that there is a purity of heart behind the words that are being said. Pure words, holy words, words that preserve lives, not destroy lives. Words that enhance the meaning and the truth and the power of what's being said to the hearer, not words that repel people from the word of truth. This is the way in which we are called to speak to a lost and dying world, in a way that would advance the gospel.

The Bible teaches, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up strife, stirs up contention." We have to be very careful about the way and the manner in which we speak. Paul told Titus in Titus 2:8, he encouraged him to have what the Bible teaches us: sound speech which cannot be condemned. Sound speech which cannot be condemned, that the one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. Imagine that, your opponent speaking in such a way that your opponent will have nothing evil to say of you because of the words that you spoke are pure words, sound words, Spirit-filled words. This is what the Bible teaches about our speech and how it ought to be.

And the Bible here encourages the church to have this. Look in Colossians 4:6 again, he says here, "That you may know how you ought to answer each one." You may know how you ought to answer each one. I thought about this for some time. Paul is saying that you may know how you ought to answer each one. Okay, he's saying this is how your speech should be in order that you may know. What he's simply trying to say here is that there is a readiness and a preparedness of speech that comes from a consistency of speech. He's saying to them, "Let your speech be always this way so that you may know how you ought to answer each one." So when the time comes to give a spontaneous answer to those who ask you of the reason of the hope that lies within you, you would be a person that has already been speaking with grace, already been seasoning your words with the salt of holiness and with the salt of tenderness and kindness and wisdom, that when you come to answer them, you won't answer in a way that would undermine all those things.

So what he's saying is here, you be prepared by speaking this way consistently and always so that you may be ready to answer each one that comes to you with questions or in your discussions. Here's a quote by a man who said this: "The man who has accustomed himself to caution in

his communications will not fall into many absurdities into which talkative and prattling persons fall into from time to time, but by constant practice will acquire for himself expertness in making proper and suitable replies, as on the other hand, it must necessarily happen that silly talkers expose themselves to derision whenever they are interrogated as to anything, and in this, they pay the just punishment of their silly talkativeness."

What he's simply saying here, which I believe the scripture is saying, is that what we accustom ourselves to will be how we respond when we are put on the spot and asked a question. I had a pastor who used to always remind me of this. He said, "Joshua, if you ever want to know the spiritual maturity of a person, just take two steps back and listen." And he used to say, "Joshua, if you just sit there and listen, you will learn as to the condition of the heart of that person, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." And I thought that was great wisdom that was shared with me quite some time ago. I haven't always practiced it, but good wisdom nonetheless to keep for ourselves.

The Bible does teach us that what we speak comes from our hearts, and we can know the condition of our hearts by how we are accustomed to speaking. When we're put on the spot, we will speak as we are accustomed to, and therefore, Paul wants us to be prepared by practicing dependence on God's grace for speaking in our homes, in our marriages, in our families, in our workplaces, in our societies as we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we engage the lost with the Word of truth, our speech must be gracious, seasoned with salt, that we might be a people that are prepared and know how to answer each one.

Paul is not concerned here about us being robots, knowing the right words to say, or like someone can ask us a question and we'll just spit out the right answer. He's not concerned about that. He's not saying to them, "Hey, study up all the answers so you can have extra smartness and be witty in how you deal with people." He's not talking about that. He's saying to us, "Have a heart, a mind, and a speech that is consistently endued by the grace of God, that when you are sprung by an opponent of the gospel, or by someone who's going to say a harsh word to you, or someone who's going to ask you a difficult question, that you might know how you should answer that person."

He wants us to be ready to give an answer, to know how to give an answer, to know how to give a defense for the gospel, for the truth of Jesus. Not just the content, although that is important, but he wants us to have the readiness of heart to know how to speak. The Bible teaches us, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit" (Proverbs 26:5), but it also says in the next verse, "Answer not a fool according to his

folly, lest you be like unto him" (Proverbs 26:4). So, do we answer the fool or do we not answer the fool? We need the wisdom of God to know whether or not that answering is going to either make the fool wise in his own conceits or whether that answering that fool will only draw us into his folly. What we need is gracious speech, speech that is endued with the grace of God, that we might know how we ought to answer each one that we are confronted with in our day-to-day evangelism and in our day-to-day lives.

1 Peter 3:15 brings this all together essentially when it says, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." All the elements come in here together. What Peter is saying in this passage is this: Sanctify the Lord God in your heart, set the Lord God as supreme, you submit to His lordship in your heart. "King of my life, I crown you now," let each other's glory be in you. You submit yourself to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and then he says to be always ready to give an answer or a defense. And then he says how to do it: with meekness and fear. That's gracious speech, a ready answer in a gracious way because you've set the Lord as first in your heart.

If the truth be known, dear Christians, we speak out of the carnal affections of our hearts more than we speak out of the Spirit-endued grace of God within ourselves. We are reactive communicators, and because our hearts are not yielded to God moment by moment throughout the day, because we're not seeking to obey the Lord in everything and being prayerful before God, and being a praying people, a people that seek after God, it's so easy then at that moment when we're crossed by somebody, or we're challenged by somebody, or we're confronted with a difficult situation, that we burst out in anger, pride, arrogance, or we lie immediately without any thought to what we're saying.

But the Bible teaches us that this is not the way that we ought to speak. We ought to speak in a way that is pure, holy, gracious, a way that reflects the grace of God within our lives. And you say, "Then what am I to do with this?" The first thing to do with bad speech is to search the heart. Search your heart, people of God. What you meditate on most will come out from your lips. It's so true, isn't it? When you develop wrong views towards your spouse, it's so easy to automatically respond in a way that is displeasing to the Lord, in a way that hurts them immediately without even thinking about it. But that speech doesn't just arise out of nothing; it arises from a heart that has developed bad convictions about their spouse. It comes from thinking, "He always does this," so when he does it, bang! What the Bible is teaching us is if we think right, we'll talk right. If we fill our hearts right, we'll speak right. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. If I want to fix my mouth, I must fix my heart. I must come before the Lord

and confess the wrong attitudes and thoughts that I have towards people in my workplace, people in my family, people in the Church of God. I need to come before God and say, "God, these things are governing my speech. I'm moved by emotion, not by grace. My speech is seasoned with hatred, harm, and hurt; it's not seasoned with salt." We must lay before the Lord in repentance and come before Him, saying, "Lord, I don't want to speak like this anymore. Purify my heart that my tongue may be pure."

Christian speech is essential for the advancement of the gospel in all areas. People know who you are by what you say, and we're challenged in that every day of our lives. When you're at the workplace and the boss puts before you an opportunity to do something that is wrong, your response is vital. In that it communicates to your boss and to your colleagues what kind of person you really are. You know, people that start a new job, and they're there in their new job, they keep asking questions about all the possible perks that are going to come up. It's an indicator to the management that this person, maybe, doesn't like the job for the job itself but is really just governed and moved by all the perks that he may get from it. You know, so is there potential for pay rises here, and what about company cars, and what about this and what about that? You can listen to this new staff member and you can almost see what is in the heart. In the same manner, the world watches the believer and listens to the believer to see the condition of their hearts. When they're confronted with a dirty joke, how may they respond? Do they respond in a way that is either just silence, and "I'm not going to get involved in this," or do they laugh at that, or do they commend that and push that joke further? Or do they say, "Sorry, I'm not really interested in things like that"? That would indicate the communication of the condition of the heart of the person. That is, of your heart.

And so the gospel's advancement, in many ways, hinges on the walk of wisdom of the believers, but the walk of wisdom of the believers is so connected to the speech of believers. As was read to us, the tongue is so dangerous; it can be so harmful to the Christian cause. With the same lips, we bless God and curse men. With the same tongue, we set on fire the testimony of the gospel and reduce it to ashes. I think in eternity, and even now, if we were to gather the unbelieving world and line them up and ask them what a Christian has said before their ears, they would have a string of things to say as to why these Christians perhaps aren't really what they say they are. They say they've got a gospel of salvation, purification, and holiness, but they just speak like we speak, talk like we talk, and act like we act. They're not walking in wisdom; they're not having their speech with grace, seasoned with salt. They're just answering people like we answer people. I believe that would be the testimony of many unbelievers if they were to stand before the Christian Church and testify to us today about the language of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is to our shame, to the degradation

of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the hindrance of the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. And Christians, these things ought not to be so of us.

We, as the people of God, should know the grace of God, know that we've been forgiven, knowing that we have tasted of mercy, and therefore our speech should proceed in mercy. Even in our rebukes, they should be coupled with mercy. Even with our corrections of others, it should be coupled with mercy, remembering how much mercy we have received. It should be in meekness that we instruct those that oppose themselves. It should not be in anger and arrogance that we make people feel stupid or belittled because they don't understand the gospel. They don't understand something. If anything, we should understand how much we did not know Christ and Him crucified and how darkened our eyes were until the light of the glorious gospel shined in unto us. We have no excuse for our speech.

The message of salvation, the greatest message ever known, God has given to the most dangerous and difficult member of the body that we have. Therefore, brethren, see that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, because the very gospel that we proclaim can be undermined by the very next word that we speak. It may be undermined not only by the word but by the spirit. Some preach Christ out of contention, only adding affliction to the bonds of the Apostle Paul. The gospel is brought into disrepute by the believing world because of how we have spoken.

May God help us to be tender, to become all things to all men, that we might by all means save some. Sometimes, Christians are so fickle in trying to just communicate the message that they forget that they're speaking to a person, a human being who has an emotional life, who has a context. And Paul, saying when I speak the gospel of Jesus Christ to people, I'm thinking about their context, and I'm trying to speak to them in a way that they would understand and comprehend and receive. He wanted the gospel to be recommended to the palate of the people that he is speaking to. He wanted them to receive the word of truth, not to change the message but not to add offense to the gospel.

My friends, the gospel is already offensive enough to an unbelieving world. It tells sinners that they are helpless without God and that they're in need of salvation. That the only way they can be redeemed is not by their own works of righteousness but by Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for our sins. And we say to the unbelieving world, "You have no righteousness of your own. You must repent. You must believe. You must turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. You must turn from your false views of God and of Christ and of yourself." Already, that message carries enough offense with it, does it not? It doesn't need a bad attitude. It doesn't need to

be seasoned with a bad attitude or with arrogance or with pride or with a spirit of grandeur that we got it, and you don't got it kind of thing. This is not going to help the gospel's advancement.

May God help us to dress the gospel of Jesus Christ in gracious words, words that season it with salt. Let our tongues, the people of God, be employed in the praises of Him. Let our tongues be employed in the magnifying of the name of Jesus Christ. Let us not be those that engage in worldly talk or in talk that makes mockery of God, but let us be a people that have speech that is gracious, seasoned with salt, that we might know how to answer every man.

You know, the attractiveness of the Christian life largely looms or falls upon the speech of God's people. And let us hold the gospel up in our social settings in a way that would be displayed as wise, effective, so that people may look at us and say, as they said of Jesus, marveling, "What gracious words proceed out of our mouth!" How do we have this? Let's come back to the Lord, purify our hearts, pray for the Spirit of truth and of grace to enable us to speak His praise, to speak His way in a way that pleases Him. And let us yield our hearts to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Let us pray.