

By Our Words

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Jesus warned the Pharisees, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:36-37). Our words matter. Our words are consequential. In light of what Jesus stated on this occasion, we must learn to rightly use our words.

Using our words to communicate in constructive and conciliatory ways is endlessly challenging. As human beings, our words are spoken in and with emotion. We must learn to control our hearts and minds for the sake of effective communication.

1. By our words, we reflect our Creator. We have a Creator who speaks. He uses understandable language to communicate His will in the universe and among humans. In the opening chapter of the Bible, God commands creation into being. When ordering the new nation of Israel, God gave Moses a written law for the people to observe. Most striking, God sent a Savior for humanity in the flesh and blood form of Jesus. He is described to us as "The Word" (John 1:1).

The use of language is a hallmark of our Creator. As creations who bear His image, we share the ability to express language. We can communicate. We can give voice to thought. As stewards of God's world, communication is integral to bringing order and peace to God's world.

God's words only produced order and peace. When God finished each step of creation, he declared with satisfaction that what He had spoken into existence was good. Regrettably, our words do not always produce order and peace. The product of our communication is not always good. Therefore, we must learn how to use our language for better, righteous, and godly purposes.

2. By our words, we reveal our hearts and minds. No word has ever been spoken without first being conceived in the heart and mind. Jesus aptly said, "...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). We have all apologized to someone we hurt with our words by pleading, "I didn't mean to say that." In reality, we meant exactly what we said. Our words do not come from thin air. They come from the heart and mind.

James wrote about the danger of our words. He stated, "For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body" (Jas. 3:2). Our language is a leading indicator of our spiritual development. The precise selection of words and the demeanor by which they are spoken demonstrate spirituality. Therefore, the heart and mind must be properly trained.

Paul wrote, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Eph. 4:29,

31). Corrupt speaking stems from sinful motives of the heart. To put it another way, the heart is connected to the tongue. Only when our hearts change will our communication improve. We will not use our words for harmful, self-serving purposes.

3. By our words, we spread the Word. John wrote of Jesus, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1-5, 14).

Jesus, the Word, came to us and communicated grace and truth. These two elements of Jesus’ message are significant. The truth of our sin is painful. Yet, this pain can be taken away by His grace. We can be saved from our sins by faith in the Word. As believers, we must teach others about Jesus’ grace and truth. We must be looking for opportunities to spread the Word through our words.

The apostle Paul wrote, “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—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col. 4:3-6). Like Paul, we must seek God’s wisdom in how we communicate the Word. We must be clear and gracious with our words.

Conclusion

We are living in a complicated time for language. Attempts are being made to redefine language. Social media enables us to communicate instantaneously to a wide audience. The voices that are the loudest and most bombastic are the ones that cut through the noise. Jesus calls on us to use a different tactic to get attention.

Jesus teaches us to use self-giving love to draw people to Himself. Self-giving love comes from a heart and mouth that have been changed by Jesus. Christians must resist the temptation of ego in how they communicate. They must never be self-serving. Our words must be used to glorify God.

“The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”

2 Timothy 2:24-26