

The Wrong Use of Words (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] You know, one of the most cherished freedoms that we have in this country is the freedom of speech. You know it's part of our Constitution, the First Amendment.

A part of the First Amendment goes like this. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof or abridging the freedom of speech.

And that goes on. And it does not have abridging the freedom of speech underlined. I did that to emphasize this is a part of the Constitution of the United States of America.

It is one of our most cherished rights. No one can stop us from going out there on the street and just telling everybody what we think and how we feel.

We can make fools of ourselves, and many people do, with that freedom. But as Christians, we need to remember that we live under a higher authority than that Constitution.

[1 : 17] Jesus made it clear to His followers, If you're going to follow me, you've got to surrender not only your rights, but your life.

Look at how Jesus said it in Luke chapter 9. And He said to all, all who were there, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Taking up his cross daily, that phrase is talking about dying to self. A cross is an instrument of death. So Jesus said, if you want to be my disciple, if you want to follow me, then you've got to deny yourself.

It can't be about you. You know, Jesus is one who made it very, very clear. To be my follower, you're going to be about me. You're going to be about the Father's will.

Or you won't be my disciple. You've got to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, die daily, and follow me. He said something similar, but He said a lot more about it in Luke chapter 14, beginning in verse 25.

[2 : 34] I want to come to the end of that section and look at what Jesus said in verse 33. Again, speaking to the crowds, wanting everyone to be clear.

This is what's involved. You're going to be my disciple. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

So Jesus is telling us very clearly, if you want to be mine, if you want to be a Christian, then you've got to make a total commitment of your life.

You're holding nothing back. You've got to make a total commitment of your life to live under my authority. And that includes even our speech.

We as Christians, living under the authority of Jesus Christ, we do not have the right to just say whatever we think, whatever we feel.

[3 : 44] Now, as children of God, God has put His Spirit in us. And He so works in us to give us the right kinds of desires.

The Spirit of God works in us to motivate us to want to live a life that pleases Him, that surrenders to the authority of Jesus.

Excuse me. I love the way Paul put it in Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. Look at it with me. He's writing to Christians. Excuse me. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Paul is not telling them to work for your salvation.

He's writing to people who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior by faith. They're already Christians. He's telling them to work out their faith.

[5 : 10] Work out your salvation. Put what you believe into practice. In fear and trembling. Don't be casual. Don't be flippant.

Be serious. Reverential. Before God even. But then he reminds them, if you're a Christian, as you work out your salvation, this is not something you've got to force yourself to do.

Because the Spirit of God, we're living in you, will cause you to want to. And as you want to, He will enable you to actually develop Christian character.

He will enable you to overcome the sinful habits and to start living like a Christian in the various aspects of our lives. You know that if you're a Christian from personal experience.

None of us in this room are perfect. We're not where we would like to be as Christians. But if you look back over what? Ten years? Five years?

[6 : 12] One year? You can see how God has worked in you developing that Christ-like character. You can see some progress has been made.

If you can't, you need to question what you call salvation. Because Paul says it real clearly here. God works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

So we should see evidence in our lives of how God has worked in us like that to cause us to live a life that pleases Him. Or to be living a life that pleases Him.

That'll include our words. You see where I'm going. Proverbs has some memorable ways of describing how the speech of God's people should stand out as being different from ungodly people.

Look at this one from Proverbs 29 verse 11. A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

[7 : 25] A fool gives full vent to his spirit. A fool just lets you know what all's inside. No restraint. No filter. But the wise man, he holds it back.

He knows what he should say and should not say. I want you to listen real carefully to what I'm going to say because this is not a political statement in any way.

The people who are out in protests, setting fires to cars, screaming all kinds of profane things about our new president, these people are fools because they are giving full vent to their spirit.

They are not fools because they don't like Donald Trump. They are not fools because they want to protest, because they disagree or say they disagree.

What the Word of God says is they are acting like fools by the way that they are screaming and shouting and just giving full vent to their rage and disagreement.

[8 : 53] A wise liberal, a wise person, doesn't even have to be a Christian, a wise person who despises Donald Trump, who is opposed to everything he stands for, a wise person will speak that opposition in a timely, in a careful, in a deliberate kind of way, they'll discuss, they'll debate, they'll be civil about it.

As we're going to get into the Scripture, not just today but in the future, it's a fool who just lets whatever's in out explodes and erupts on everybody around them.

And sometimes, let's just be honest, not everybody in this room, but sometimes most of us, we act like fools, don't we?

We just let it out. But wisdom, we hold it back. we think before we speak.

We weigh our words. We can speak the truth as we understand it. That is totally the opposite of what a friend or another person believes, but we just need to do it in the right way, with the right attitude, with the right spirit.

[10 : 42] The book of James is the Proverbs of the New Testament. He describes the danger of an unbridled tongue in terms of a wildfire. Look in James 3, verse 5.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire. Our words matter.

However they come out, wherever they come out, our words matter when we have personal one-on-one conversations. Our words matter when we speak to one another on the telephone. When we communicate by email or text or tweet.

Words matter that you put on social media. It's no different. It's words of yours just in print. Words matter.

Here's what we need to understand. A lot of the division, the hostility, the bad relationships in our homes, at work, in churches, in schools, in government, in our nation, can be traced to people's unbridled tongue.

[12 : 00] To people not thinking before they speak. People not speaking in a timely, appropriate, controlled kind of way.

Part of the problem, we just don't think seriously enough about our speech. you know, we know, we know, we know that stealing is bad.

We know that attacking someone and beating them up, killing someone is bad. We need to also understand that we can beat people up, we can hurt people, we can maim people in various ways with our words.

Let me make a clarification here. If you're mad at me, I'd much rather you just tell me, even cuss me out than try to beat me up or shoot me, okay? There is a big difference in the two.

So don't misunderstand. Last week, we began looking at why we need to be serious about our speech. We looked at the power of our words, we looked at the revealing nature of our words.

[13 : 16] Today, I want us to look at the negative side of our speech and focus on the wrong use of words. We're going to start that. What I want to look at today is the twin towers of destructive speech, gossip and slander.

These words are often used synonymously. We may just use, talk about gossip and slander, we're basically talking about the same thing. Sometimes, it's really that way in the Bible.

But sometimes, they are used to convey one particular difference that I want to point out. Slander is hurtful speech about a person that's not true. Slander's not true.

Slander is repeating things about someone that is false. It involves making false charges against a person that defames that person, their character, their reputation.

If you went out from here today, this week, and you told people that I beat my wife, you would be making slanderous charges against me.

[14 : 18] You would have slandered me and defamed my character. You may be thinking to yourself, how do I know that's not true? I'm alive, aren't I?

That's how you know that. Lisa can shoot a pistol. In fact, not too long ago, she shot the actual center out of the target. I don't mean she shot the middle of the target, bullseye one time.

She shot the bullseye so many times, it tore up the paper in the middle. I am an idiot about some things, but I'm not going to mess with her. Do you know how Proverbs describes a slanderer?

Look at it. Proverbs 10. Whoever utters slander is a fool. You can't get any simpler than that, can you? Now why would such a person be called a fool?

Because they know what they're saying is not true. If you spread slander, you're talking about things you know is not true about someone, trying to defame them, tear up their reputation, you're a fool because you may get found out.

[15 : 31] The truth may come forward, eventually it will. That's what Proverbs is talking about. Anyone who intentionally tries to hurt another person's reputation by spreading slander is a fool.

Now let's look at the word gossip. It is sometimes defined differently. Gossip is hurtful speech about a person that may or may not be true.

Gossip, it may be the real deal, or it may not be. Gossip involves repeating personal, private information about someone that should not be repeated.

Whether it's true or not, it's just such of a personal and private matter it does not need to be repeated. Proverbs reveals the kind of damage that gossip does.

First, a gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. That's from the NIV.

[16 : 31] The ESV, English Standard Version, uses the word slander there instead of gossip, which shows how these two words are closely related a lot of times in Scripture.

Proverbs also says, gossip separates close friends. These two verses, look at them. They reveal the kind of damage that gossip can do. But for some reason, I mean, gossip can destroy a relationship, destroy trust.

But for some reason, many people, maybe most people, don't see any harm, don't see any real harm in gossip.

In fact, we all do it sometimes, don't we? There may be a few people here that you really have worked on it, you understand the truth about it, and you don't.

But most of us, even if we know better, even if we most of the time do better, we backslide. And we usually introduce our gossip in innocent-sounding ways, like, have you heard?

[17 : 44] Did you know? You ever said this? I don't know if it's true, but, you go ahead and tell it. Here's one, this will get most of us.

I probably shouldn't say this, but. And here, we're all good southerners, aren't we? Most of us. And we know that if we first say, bless his heart, we can say whatever we want to do, whatever we want to say.

Bless his heart, he's just a sorry writer. Bless his heart, Mike's just an idiot. You know that? We do those things.

I want you to think. We do those things. But our gossip serves no good purpose.

It really exposes us, when we repeat it, as being troublemakers, to some degree.

[18 : 53] It really says that we don't care about the person that we're talking about. And rest assured, if you know someone who's just a gossip, and they're always telling you about somebody or wanting to tell you about somebody, they're talking about you when you're not there.

It's just in their makeup. Why are we so quick to repeat or listen to gossip? Bottom line is, we like it.

And the book of Proverbs points it out. Look at it. The words of a whisperer somebody who talks about somebody behind their back. Somebody who doesn't want other people to know what they're saying.

The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels. They go down to the inner parts of the body. Let's all admit it. There are times we like gossip.

We like to hear it or we like to repeat it or both. The negative information, the juicy things about people. The reason is, we have a fallen, sinful nature.

[20 : 05] And that fallen, sinful human nature considers gossip delicious morsels. We don't even have to put ketchup on it, do we? We can just say it.

It's good by itself. Now, even though gossip is good to us, it's pleasurable to us, it's not good to God.

Proverbs says it tastes good to us, but it sickens God. He hates such speech.

I do not have it in my, on the outline, but I want you to look at Romans chapter 1. If you want to turn to it, I'm going to read it. In Romans chapter 1, Paul is, okay, we do have good, I'm going to quit talking about those guys in the balcony.

Tim did a good job today. Thank you very much. Paul is writing about the sinfulness of humanity. He goes into great detail beginning in Romans chapter 1, verse 18, about how even people who don't have the law of God, Jews, he's talking about then, God reveals himself to everybody in various ways, through nature, various ways, but everybody rejects what God does reveal about himself.

[21 : 29] We sin. We reject, we reject the truth about God. We reject his truth, period. And the more we do that, the more God just says, okay. He just gives us over to that sinful mind and way of life.

And in verse 21, 29, here's how Paul describes sinful humanity.

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, or greed, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, and look what's in this list.

They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God. I know gossip and slander is wrong, it's sinful.

But without reading it like this, I would never categorize it in the same list as haters of God and murder.

[22 : 49] But it's there in God's word because it's sin, because God hates it, because God will punish those whose lives are characterized in any kind of sinful way.

We need to ask God if we're Christians, and that is something we struggle with. We know it's wrong, we don't want to do it, but we struggle with it.

We need to ask God to help us to change our taste buds. Let's ask Him to start now. We need to set up some guards for ourself to avoid repeating gossip and slander.

Here's one way to evaluate whether we ought to pass on certain information, whether it's gossip or slander. When you hear something, find out something, and you're tempted to pass it on, ask these questions of yourself.

Is what I'm about to say true? Is what I have heard, and I want to say, is it true? If it's not, or you don't know, don't say it.

[24 : 02] If you don't know, forget it, drop it. Number two, is what I'm about to say necessary? If it's true, ask next, is it necessary?

If you think it is, explain to yourself why. How will it help the person I'm going to talk about? How will it help the situation? If you think it's true, or if you know it's true, think it's necessary, third question, is what I'm about to say motivated by love?

Would you want that person to say something similar about you? Can you fulfill the second great commandment, love your neighbor as yourself, by repeating that?

The next time you're faced with a decision about repeating information about someone, stop and ask these three questions. Is it true? Is it necessary? Is repeating it an expression of love?

I need to do that. And I'm going to guess that you do too. Most of us anyway. Now there are some things that are not pleasant that do need to be passed on.

[25 : 23] If a young girl came to you and explains to you very seriously, confidentially, that Mr. Jones has molested her, should you keep that to yourself?

Let's ask these three questions. Is the information true? Well, if you don't have any reason to think it's not, something like that, you've got to accept it's true. Is it necessary to say something?

Yes. Morally and legally. You cannot let something like that go. A lot of times it does get let go.

I didn't think about this in the first service but I'm going to say it here. That's something we will not let go. We will not sleep under the floor, under the table in any shape, form or fashion. We take all that kind of stuff seriously.

And if you know somebody is a member of our church, has joined our church and it appears that they want to work with our preschool or children or youth, but you know they're a sex offender.

[26 : 44] You tell me and you tell me before the sun goes down today, that is not gossip. That is right. That will protect our children. That person can be forgiven and made right with God.

That person is not going to be given a chance to work with children in this church. That is what's right. There's times it's not gossip that which is true that would be hurtful.

It's necessary and it's loving to protect children. It is loving, it is right to protect children. Now before we leave this subject we need to understand that the problem with gossip and slander is not limited to just repeating it.

Listening and tolerating it make us involved in the evil. We need to be careful what we listen to, what we sort of feed on.

Ray Ortlund is a pastor who wrote about this passage, wrote a book, commentary. He describes the person who habitually listens to gossip and slander like this.

[27 : 50] Look at it. A person who listens. A person can become a garbage collector. Someone in the group becomes the one to whom, look at this, disgruntled people go because that person will listen and sympathize and be a shoulder to cry on and a rallying point for complaints and a hero to those with hurt feelings.

And that listener becomes a bigger problem in the group than the talkers. He's not talking about someone who has just a compassionate heart, who's an encourager, a sympathizer.

He's not talking about someone who just tries to be a friend and a helper to people who are hurting. Look at what he's saying there. He's talking about someone who's just like a magnet to the negative, critical, whining, complaining, gossiping people around them.

Don't be that person. Ask God to help you to change if you are that person. We need to always be on guard that we don't become this kind of garbage collectors.

We need to learn to just walk away from people if necessary. Don't show interest. Maybe even just say, I don't want to hear it.

[29 : 20] It's better to offend somebody by saying to them, I don't want to hear it, than to offend God by listening to it when you know you shouldn't. There are times when we all just need to be more confrontational.

just say to somebody, I don't want to hear it. Or say, you know, before you talk about that person, I'll go with you.

Let's go to that person. Let's go to that person and ask them what you're saying. Is it true? That'll close the mouths of a lot of people.

But gossip and slander, they're serious problems. There's serious problems in many people's lives, even some Christians. Always remember that gossip, slander, it only hurts people.

It doesn't serve any good purpose. We need to learn to stop listening to it. Stop repeating it. Any kind of harmful speech.

[30 : 27] Our words matter. They're going to matter on the day of judgment. I want to repeat the way I closed last week with what Jesus said about our words being one of the criteria for judgment at the end of our lives.

This is serious. Something we need to take to heart. So read it with you. Jesus said, 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. That's a sobering statement that we need to take to heart.

Would you pray with me now? Dear God, Dear God, convict us of the seriousness of our words.

Father, right now, convict us if we are guilty of being gossipers or slanderers. and if we are, help us to truly confess it to you and repent of it and seek your forgiveness.

[31 : 47] Help us, dear God, to start being on guard and not listening to it or repeating it.

Dear God, help us to understand that if we're Christians, by doing this or not doing that, that's not what saves us.

Help us all to understand that salvation is a gift of your grace, your undeserved love and favor that we receive through faith in Jesus plus nothing else.

Dear God, help us to understand that we're forgiven because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. Help us to see that if we truly are believers in Jesus, then because your spirit is in us, we will have the right kind of desires.

We won't always act on them, but you won't let us just live like unbelievers. help us. Help us to see, dear God, when it comes to the matters of our speech, it's your spirit who gives us the desire to be obedient in these ways.

[33 : 15] Help us, dear God, to seek your help to do it, to make the changes we need to make. Lord, if there are people in this room who are not Christians and they've been convicted this morning of this particular sin in their life, help them to understand that the way they need to respond is to come to you and just confess, I am a sinner.

I am separated from you by my sin. Help that man or woman or young person to turn from their sin, change their mind about it, seek your help to stop it.

Help them to see, to understand, to believe that when Jesus died on that cross, He actually took the punishment that they deserve. So help them to trust Jesus and call upon Him to be their Savior.

Help them to truly surrender their lives to Him, to His authority in every aspect of their lives. Help all of us, dear God, as Christians to renew that commitment if we need to this morning.

In an attitude of prayer, you just listen to the Lord and respond to Him as He speaks. I'd be happy to pray with you here at the front. That would be helpful and meaningful to you. I would like to do that. But the important thing is that you listen to God and obey Him during this time.