

#217 “The Words We Speak”
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Words are powerful things. God has revealed Himself to us in detail in His written Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is the Word preached that, when heard, can lead to repentance and salvation (Romans 1:16, 10:17). It is the Word that just by its very reading can move hearts and change minds (1 Timothy 4:13). Jesus Himself is even referred to as the Word (John 1:1). Language and communication are God’s inventions, and, as such, Satan has great interest in perverting them. That is what the evil one does, taking the good things of God that can be used for edification, grace, enlightenment, and love and making them into something vulgar, dehumanizing, and certainly not pointed to the glory of God. As Christians, we need to recognize that there are jokes that we shouldn’t laugh at, there is gossip that we shouldn’t participate in, and there are words that we shouldn’t use.

Bridling the tongue is a very difficult part of the believer’s life, but it is one that we cannot dare to ignore. James 1:26 says, “If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.” Part and parcel to sanctified living by the power of the Holy Spirit is controlling the words we speak and focusing on saying only that which is useful for edification and God-honoring purposes. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” Believe it or not, I have heard some professing Christians argue that using some degree of foul language is purposeful to convey certain truths or feelings. Some even try to claim that Paul used what we refer to today as curse words or swear words when he spoke of his former life without Christ as being “dung” (Philippians 3:8). The word *skubalon*, translated as “dung” or “rubbish,” carries extreme revulsion as of excrement, but it was not a parallel in any way, shape, or form to the curse words used today in our time, in our language, and in our culture. The reality is that Paul, who spoke of dung while being under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the same Paul who in Ephesians said that we should use no unwholesome word. So either unwholesome means that Christians can speak the same derogatory words that the world speaks, or Paul was consistent in his own application of his admonition for God-honoring language. The truth is that Paul was willing and able to state something strongly without crossing the line into worldliness.

“Unwholesome” carries the meaning of rotten, putrid, corrupt, of poor quality, unfit for use, worn out, and worthless. We can all think of words, discussions, outbursts, and conversations that fit these criteria. Worldly talk does not bring grace to the hearer or to the speaker, and it most certainly does not edify. It only defiles. As Jesus Himself said in Matthew 15:11, “It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.” Pure and undefiled religion before God involves keeping oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27). Part of the way we demonstrate the legitimacy of our walk with God is by not letting even a hint of the immorality of the world impact our speaking and conversations. Ephesians 5:3-4 says, “But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is

proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” Filthiness is translated from *sapros*, the same word used in Ephesians 4 for unwholesome. Gutter talk and dirty words are certainly in view here. Silly talk is from *morologia*, meaning foolish words. By not thinking through what we say before we say it, particularly in light of Biblical truth, we likely will say things that we will later regret. We should focus on making our words purposeful. Jesus always lived His life with purpose and objective. Sure, we can expect that He made some degree of small talk, but it was also with a God-inspired agenda, seeking to create an opportunity for the gospel. He didn’t waste words on pointless gibberish, and neither should we. Coarse jesting is translated from *eutrapelia*. This includes any rude or abusive remarks such as a racist attack or personal insult. It is the student making fun of the teacher or another student. It is the locker room degrading into sex jokes. Sexual innuendos, a plague in our day, is certainly in view here. We would do well to follow Paul’s admonition in Colossians 3:8, “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.”

Our words betray our hearts by revealing who we really are and what we really think. Some people can control their tongues better than others, but unless their hearts are right, eventually evil speaking will pour forth from their mouths. This is why we need to objectively evaluate our walks with Christ by taking a look at what we laugh at, what we say, and whether our words are abusive to others or offensive to God in any way. Our words should edify, minister grace, and demonstrate how thankful we are to be changed from the inside out and freed from language that defiles, debases, and dehumanizes. The apostles couldn’t help but speak of Christ and His glory and gospel, and, even under duress, they spoke praise and thanksgiving. We, under much less severe conditions, too often refuse to give thanks and rather speak malice, anger, abuse, and filth. As God’s people, let us be those who minister healing to others through kind and gracious words and who stand out as an example from the world by speaking truth and not by speaking filth. In many ways, we are, after all, what we speak.