

A Clean Mouth

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[0 : 00] Let's read once again from God's Word in Colossians chapter 4 from verse 2. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

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 towards 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.

I'd like us to focus tonight especially on the words of verse 6. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Of course the verses here, as often you find, are connected together very closely. Matters of prayer and of praying for the word and for Paul as a preacher of the word in his imprisonment at the time as he writes.

[1 : 13] And then the way of life in walking in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of time. All of that is connected with this verse, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.

So we can see it in that context particularly, but it has very wide implications all the same. When I was a youngster growing up, if you said something that was not acceptable, it was quite common to hear words like go and wash your mouth out.

But I suspect nowadays that that would be understood only in referring to going to brush your teeth or something like that. Because we've come to live in a world where bad language, language such as swearing, blasphemy, all the kind of other terms that we use to describe bad language is commonplace.

And although bad language, swearing, blasphemy, all these things, they've always been part of human society. There's surely never been a society where it is more communicated and where it is more normalized, where it is more regarded, more as normal speech than in today's world.

It's communicated because of the way that technological advance communicates words so readily and so speedily. And words are so easily available to us in all different forms.

[2 : 44] Whereas in the past you needed to have a letter or to actually be in speech with someone, now you've got words communicated via the internet, on your mobile phone, text messaging, all kinds of ways in which communication brings us words and brings words from us.

And in that world, our young people, and it's not uncommon to find children in our society brought up to regard such words as we ourselves tonight know are filthy or vulgar or wrong or blasphemous to regard them as just normal speech.

And they use them in normal speech because it's normal to them to use them in normal speech. It's an indication of the shift in our society from a society that's by and large based on the morality of the Bible of the Christian scriptures, a shift from that really, when that has been so much put aside, to the normality or the moral basis that we have which is in many respects only human thinking or ideas that people themselves see as acceptable in today's age.

And especially when you bring in individuality and freedom of choice and human rights that compounds the situation. So we have to come back to the Bible.

And when you come to the Bible, you don't really have to read very much of it to realize that our way of speaking, our language, our words that we use and how we use them are a very significant aspect of Christian living.

[4 : 29] And are actually a very significant matter in terms of human relationships, not only of our relationship to God, but our relationship to ourselves as Christians and the relationship we have as Christians to the outside world.

Paul is saying, walk in wisdom towards outsiders, to those that you find outside of the church. And then let your speech be gracious, always seasoned with salt.

Not just among yourselves, but also in respect to those that you seek to evangelize, that you witness to, that you want to see converted to Christ.

That's the context in which he is setting this out. But what's really concerned me for some time is how readily some Christians, or particularly those who at least would say that they're Christians, would find little difficulty in living with certain words and terms which we really ought to find offensive.

I find frequently on Facebook, for example, the social media, that Christians will like a page or an image or some comment or other, maybe from someone else, not from themselves, but will put a like on it.

[5 : 50] That then brings it up to the notice of all those who are friends with them on Facebook, even when such images or language includes words and images that are actually offensive, that are blasphemous, that use words which are intensely vulgar, even in ordinary speech.

I find that disturbing. I find that a concern. If Christians, if those who are Christians or say they're Christians, don't have the discernment to actually avoid such terms, such language, and especially to communicate that to someone else, that is surely wrong.

and it may be symptom-like, it may be not, I don't want to make too much of it, but it does bring up before us the importance of how clean our mouth must be, of how our language is to be used in a way that honors God.

The Lordship of Christ, which Christians confess in their confession to be Christians, we confess the Lordship of Christ over us.

The Lordship of Christ extends to the words we use and to how we use them. How we communicate, whatever it is we're communicating to other people.

[7 : 16] And we should, I think, if we can put it this way, we should speak to all people always, as if we're speaking there and then to Christ.

we should ask ourselves, when we're using words, and it's not just in speech, it's also in the written form, in texts or in letters or in whatever way we use words, we should always ask ourselves, would I say this to Christ's face?

Would I use this language in the way I'm using it if I was now speaking to the Lord? If not, then we shouldn't be using it. If it's going to be offensive to him, then it's not right for us to use it in any other sense.

And what Paul is dealing with here is how language and the use of language is so incredibly important within the whole scope of Christian behavior and Christian standards.

Now we have to go back in some senses to the third commandment. That's where I want to just begin our thoughts and then carry them through to this text in Colossians. The third commandment obviously sets out something which is a matter of our relationship directly with God.

[8 : 38] You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. And very often we associate that very rightly with swearing where the words include the name or names of God including Jesus, Christ, the Holy Spirit.

Any of the names that are given to God. But taking the name of God in vain is much wider than perhaps we think and certainly wider than most people think.

Because taking the name of the Lord in vain really means every careless and every irreverent use and every use that's unbecoming of the Lord's name.

Now we call that very often blasphemy. When the Lord's actual name is used in common language in an irreverent or disrespectful way.

And it's right to call it that because that is itself justified on scripture. Taking the name of the Lord in vain includes, but it's not confined to actual blasphemy.

[9 : 45] Taking the name of the Lord in vain means that, or also includes, such things as using God's name, and yet not actually taking himself or his standards or his ideals or the things of his kingdom seriously.

For example, how many people do you find using the phrase, and I'm using it respectfully, oh my God, when they have no faith in God, and you'll find some people using that, even though they would maybe say to you, I don't actually believe in God, I'm an atheist.

That is a transgression of the third commandment. It's using the name of God, but there is no attached respect to God, or faith in God, or fear of God.

You can carry that into so many different areas. Think of stand-up comedians for one example, just picking examples out, but I'm picking examples out that I hope will be relevant because there are things especially young people come across, and young people are prone to actually coming into contact with them somewhere or other during these media presentations or things.

Think of a comedian, might spend the whole of his or her routine making jokes about God, using the coarsest and most vulgar language, and yet end the routine by saying, bye, God bless.

[11 : 21] That is an irreverent use. That is a disrespectful use of the name of God. And I don't know if you heard recently, just in the last few days, I came across an article written I think in the Telegraph of a vicar in London, I can't remember her name, it's a female vicar, and she had a sticker on her car bumper, I'm not going to specify what it was, it was just letters, letters that indicated words, and it was to do with what would Jesus do, but in the middle of that there was a word beginning with F, and you can tell yourself from that what it was, what would Jesus do, and it was pointed out to her, someone in the public, that this was disrespectful, that it was in fact offensive, and she said, well it's not a blasphemy, although it's a vulgarity, that is somebody who passes herself off as a minister of the gospel, saying it's not a blasphemy, it is a vulgarity, as if that made it all right, what are we coming to?

When the use of language, however good the motives might have been, whether it was to draw people's attention, or to somehow or other make them sit up and take note, or to come and ask or something, or whatever, the method is completely and utterly at odds with the standards of God, whatever the motives are, and our motives and our methods must always match, whatever your intentions are, whatever our intentions are as Christians in communicating truth, our methods must always match what our intentions and motives are.

It is absolutely no use having good intentions but then doing things in such a grossly, worldly, offensive way as if that's going to be acceptable. Words and our use of words are important.

So blasphemy is disrespect for God, treating the name of God disrespectfully, even in association with words that are themselves vulgar, such as that bumper sticker was.

But the quality of our speech is not confined to how we use the name of God or how we speak to God. In fact, the same word that's translated in the New Testament, the Greek words for blasphemy and blaspheme, the same words are actually translated elsewhere in the New Testament in another way, which really tells us that there's more to offensive speech or sound speech or whatever, there's more to quality of speech, if you like, than how we use the name of God himself.

[14 : 26] For example, in Romans chapter 3, that word that's elsewhere translated to blaspheme is translated to slander. You go to the epistle of Peter, the first epistle of Peter, second epistle of Peter, that same word is translated there to speak evil of someone or something.

So, from that you can see that our use of speech or language and quality of speech is more than just how we speak about God. It's also including how we speak about others, whether we use our words slanderously, untruthfully, disrespectfully, misleadingly, distortingly, falsely.

You see, the thing grows as you look into it and you begin to realize that our use of language is so wide that it really encompasses pretty much all occasions when we speak.

and that quality of speech really comes into pretty much everything we say and write and do, where language is concerned.

And that brings us really to this text in Colossians. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer each person.

[15 : 53] Now, there are many descriptions of speech in the Bible as well as this one. This is speech that's always gracious, as it's put it, or in the AV, and I think it's better in the AV, always with grace.

Back to that in a minute. But if you go through the Bible and look at the descriptions for language or the use of language, you'll find that there are certain things such as in the book of Proverbs, there's references to perverted speech.

In the Psalms, you'll get words that describe, or terms that describe speech as being smooth as butter, seductive. You'll find speech described as crooked, truthful, sound, many other expressions like that, good or bad, but here it's with grace or gracious.

And all of that reminds us that words really are vehicles that convey what's in our mind or in our hearts. Jesus himself laid great emphasis on our inside, on the inside of our hearts, on our minds, on what comes out of our hearts, our souls, which includes all the different passions, the expressions that we use in use of words.

Adultery is not just an outward act, it's a thought.

[17 : 31] It begins in the mind. It's something where the very look engages, that you engage in, brings, in that respect, of adultery, brings sin into being.

so it begins in the heart, and that's where our words actually begin to. It begins in the thought processes of our souls. And our words really give expression to the things that are within us, in our souls.

It's through these words that we use in conversation or writing that we express our emotions, our attitude. Just think of the number of things the Bible tells us we give vent to, or expression to, by the use of words.

Anger, jealousies, pride, praise, joy, compassion. Whole list of things in addition to that.

In other words, what it's saying to us is this. Our words can have a devastating effect, either for bad, or for good. And we have to take account of both of these when we think of this verse, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned, with salt.

- [18 : 46] Because our speech conveys something that is either going to harm or do damage, or on the other hand, it's going to help or be beneficial and have a savouriness to it, as we'll see in a minute.

Our speech is powerful. James, in his epistle, gives the whole of his chapter three to the use of the tongue.

words. Why? Because it's such an incredibly important thing how we use our words. Either to wound devastatingly, or to build up and to help, to comfort, and so on.

It has both of these sides to it. And somebody at one time was climbing in the Norwegian mountains, and had with us was a guide, and had with them a party of climbers, and he was taking them through a route leading up into the hills or the mountains.

And one of the people in the party asked this guide, is it common to find avalanches in this place? And the guide said to him, look up, he said, to that huge lump of snow that you see in the distance, hanging off that mountain, he said, one word can bring all of that down on top of you.

- [20 : 18] If you shouted out with one word, the vibrations of it could bring all of that, he said, down on top of you. And sadly, that's how it is in human behaviour, in human conversation.

Sometimes, sadly, that's how it is in the church as well. we're not immune to this. As Christians, just because we're Christians, doesn't mean we don't need to watch our language.

Now, I know all of you know that, and I know it myself, but it's so incredibly easy, instead of bringing a bundle of praise and joy, to bring a heap of misery and trouble instead.

And our words can easily do that. That's why we've got to be like the psalmist whose words we were singing, Psalm 15, 141, Lord, keep a watch on the door of my mouth.

And yes, it was in the context of worship particularly at that time, but these are words which are so applicable to all our conversation, to all our use of language in its entirety.

- [21 : 25] Lord, keep a watch on the door of my mouth. And he went on to say that a rebuke issued in kindness from a friend would be a soothing balm.

Of course there are times when we need to speak strongly to people, when in friendship and with tact and with love, there needs to be an element of rebuke or admonition or correction, yes, but if we're Christians and if we're deciding to be holy and we want to be Christ-like, we'll be prepared to take that when it's given in the right spirit and with the right motive.

Otherwise, our claim to want to be holy is meaningless, because holiness includes having our faults pointed out and dealing with them and applying ourselves to eradicating them.

So, look at the way here it's talking about let your speech be gracious always, seasoned with salt. Now, these words seasoned with salt help us to understand what Paul means by the speech being gracious or with grace.

When you apply salt to something, I know we're always warned nowadays not to put too much salt on things, and I'm sure if I asked for a show of hands, the older ones here would say that they like much more salt on their food than the younger ones, probably.

- [22 : 55] Maybe not. But anyway, salt is something when you add it to food, as you well know, it adds a savour to it. Without salt, most if not all foods will be very bland.

And the right amount of salt adds savour, as it's usually called, it makes it more tasty. Too much is not good for you. But you need so much, otherwise the food is pretty tasteless and bland.

And that helps you to understand what Paul has in mind there. Our speech has to be savoury. It has to convey the kind of good savour that will in fact benefit people when we're speaking to them.

In other words, there are two sides to our quality of speech. On the one hand, there's the avoidance of something. There's something that you need not to have in your speech.

That's coarseness of speech, vulgarity of speech, blasphemous speech. These are things which you don't have in it. That's only one side of it. It's not enough for us to say, I don't swear, I don't use bad language in that sense, I don't blaspheme, I don't include such words in my speech, and therefore my speech is sound.

[24 : 08] Paul is saying, that's only one half of it, that's only one side of it. As well as that, he's saying, my speech has to be beneficial. It has to convey benefits.

It has to actually produce something that will help the person I'm talking to. And that really is to me at least a bigger challenge than probably to you as well, than the avoidance of bad language and swearing.

It's much easier to say, I don't use bad language, I don't blaspheme, much easier to say that than to say, I know that my speech is always helpful, that it always conveys savor, benefit, to those that I'm speaking with.

that's the challenge. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. Let it always be speech that is not just avoiding vulgarity, but communicating good, communicating benefits, things which will help the people we're speaking to.

And that's where the great challenge is, and that's personally where I find that I'm always brought short when I look at how much do my words, take it out of the context of preaching just now, talking about conversation ordinarily, how much is my conversation with people, lending them something that's good, bringing them something that's beneficial to them, helping them in some aspect or another with their lives.

[25 : 47] That's the great challenge. but that's what the apostle is really saying, our Christian speech ought always to be and always to aim at. That's the positive side of it.

And you see he's saying, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Now that places Paul's statement in a context of apologetics, if you like, where you're defending and speaking up for Christ, for his gospel, or also including the evangelistic emphasis that Paul has here.

He's talking about walking in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time. In other words, it's a context of interacting with the unbelieving world.

With those who are outside, but for whom you have a compassionate interest, that they would come to be inside. that they would be drawn to Christ.

How are they going to be drawn to Christ? Of course, ultimately, only by the power of the Holy Spirit we acknowledge that. We have to acknowledge that. But yet, within that, or underneath that, and under the ultimate power and authority of the Holy Spirit, we are actually charged to seek to draw them.

[27 : 06] And how do we draw them? We draw them primarily by our witness, and what is within our witness? It is to a great extent how we use speech, how we speak, how we convey things to them in our use of language.

Our way of speaking is absolutely vital. And it is not just talking about really being boring or dull. Yes, of course, we have to try and avoid that.

But it is more than that. It is being sincere. It is being yourself sincerely, lovingly, tactfully, honestly.

Being prepared to meet people where they are, or where they think they are. Not being sanctimonious or condescending and conveying the impression, well, what's wrong with you?

Why aren't you like me? Why aren't you where I am? Language must actually meet people where they are, but it must be the kind of language that's seasoned with salt, always gracious, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

[28 : 25] And that's how, in that context of evangelism, we are counseled to watch our use of words, to practice our use of words, to constantly be asking ourselves, is the way I express things, is it helpful or is it obstructive?

Is the way I speak to people, is it designed to win them, to bring them, to think more about Christ, and does it convey his beauty and his relevance and his sufficiency, or am I just putting them off?

There are huge challenges, of course, in all of that. And when he's saying here, let your speech be gracious, well the words in the AV I think are better, it's more than just being gracious, because the translation in the AV of grace, or with grace, let your speech always be with grace, it includes speech that's gracious, yes, but it also allows room for the idea of by the grace of God, because at the end of the day, even if our speech is of the quality it should be.

We don't actually expect to win people by our powers of speech. We don't expect people to actually come to know the Lord, just because we're skilled in use of words.

It means the grace of God working through us. There are many eloquent people in the world, but they don't have grace.

[30 : 11] And there are many people who wouldn't put a great speech together for a public audience, but whose personal evangelism and whose gracious use of words in the grace of God, by the grace of God, is a powerful and effective tool in the church's evangelism.

And maybe that is the most important and the most effective means of evangelism there is.

It's in your public or private interaction, conversationally with different people. I know it's difficult in today's world because when you go onto a train or onto a bus or whatever it is or standing at a bus stop or a railway station or at an airport, it's difficult to speak with people because they're stuck in their ears or they're playing with texts or whatever.

You've got to more or less make yourself rather impudent if you want to have a word with them. you're kind of giving the impression well you're just really interrupting something important to them.

But whenever the opportunities come and we've got to seek them, our use of words is so important. And we are in our own place evangelists for the Lord in our quality of speech.

[31 : 47] The Lord who is on our lips is also the Lord of our lips. And there's no reason at all why we cannot in dependence and by faith in God why we can't say well not only is he Lord of my lips and not only does my speech come under his lordship and control and I have to be careful about how I speak but he's the one who can give me the words.

And many many times Christians have found especially in times of crisis or predicament or when they're really impressed by something or someone in the world the Lord gives them the words.

They wouldn't have necessarily chosen the words themselves but when they come from the Lord you can be sure they're going to be effective. They're going to be the most effective words of all.

A sentence from the grace of God is far more effective than a discourse from the ability of men. Let your speech always be gracious seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

I'm going to leave you with a couple of verses from that wonderful book of Proverbs which really has so much when you read through the book of Proverbs it has so much to say about speech and how we use words either positively for good or negatively destructively for harm.

[33 : 31] Proverbs 22 and verse 11 He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king as his friend.

How good is that? Especially when you think about the king in terms of being the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of your soul. He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king as his friend.

And then we can finish with Proverbs 16 and verse 23 where we find again words so relevant to our thoughts the ceiling.

The heart of the wise person makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.

Now that's what we want more and more to be the wise person. The wise person who gives good solid attention to their use of words because the heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.

[34 : 50] Let's pray. Lord our gracious God we thank you for the way in which you have communicated your mind to us in the pure words of scripture.

You continue to speak to us Lord through your own infallible word. We thank you that in this word you have given us the way in which in precepts and principles instructions promises commands you draw our mind to the quality of speech that we ought also to have.

Forgive us Lord we pray when our own inward emotions and state of mind cause us to express ourselves ill-advisedly or hurriedly in a way that does harm to ourselves or to other people and even to your cause.

We thank you tonight for the reminder that you have given us in your word. How your grace is sufficient for us. We pray that you would teach us day by day to have our speech always with grace seasoned with salt particularly in dealing with those who are outsiders.

Hear us now we pray and accept us for Jesus' sake. Amen.