

The Christian's Speech

Exodus 23:10–13, Colossians 4:2–6

After his death and resurrection, and just before he returned to heaven, the Lord Jesus told his apostles: “Go into all the world and *preach the Gospel*.” True preaching consists of two things: explaining the meaning of God’s inspired Word, and applying that Word to our lives. The text to be preached this morning is Exodus 23:12, which a moment ago we read in context. Here, God tells his people: “In all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.”

In the original Hebrew this verse is divided into two clauses. The first clause is this: “In all that I have said to you, be circumspect.” I would improve the reading of the New King James Version by adding a comma after “circumspect.” The focus is on what God had previously said in chapters 21–23, which we’ve considered in previous sermons: laws dealing with servants and masters, violence, cursing father or mother, protecting innocent life, workplace safety, theft and restitution, sexual purity, safeguarding the weaker members of society, giving tithes and offerings, living lives of holiness, and so forth. What God is saying is: do not forget the commandments I have given you; meditate upon them, talk about them regularly, so that these duties are fresh in your minds. The Bible commends the person whose “*delight* is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he *meditate* day and night” (Ps. 1). We should meditate on the preached Word; we should also read our Bibles—preferably aloud—and pray for grace and understanding to put God’s truth into practice in our lives.

The second clause says, “and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.” The phrase “other gods” immediately calls to mind the first commandment, “Thou shalt have *no other gods* before me.” The God of heaven justly requires his people’s absolute loyalty and devotion; *God himself* should be our primary focus. The reference to “the *name* of other gods” reminds us of the third commandment, “Thou shalt not take the *name* of the LORD thy God in vain.” This commandment requires the holy and reverent use of God’s name by every person at all times. God’s name should never become a swear word or a thoughtless oath. When I hear another person say with disgust, “O my —,” I inwardly cringe, knowing that the next word is going to be “God,” and the person about to say that word is clearly showing that the God of heaven is *not* his God! This is a taking of the holy name of God in vain. The phrase “O my God” is used 21 times in the Bible; in every case it is used reverently in prayer. “God” is never used as an empty oath, or as a fill word, or in an attempt to get people’s attention. There is not a word on our tongue that escapes the notice of the God of heaven. I beg you, do not add to your guilt by taking his name in vain!

But what does the phrase “make no mention of the name of other gods” mean? Joshua 23:7 goes into more detail: “You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them.” God demands our exclusive loyalty. He does not want his people focusing on other gods but on himself. He does not want us to focus on pop culture, imbibing the anti-Christian worldview of the mainstream media, soaking up the latest gossip about this or that “star” or media personality. We should never uncritically imbibe the world’s way of thinking. If we engage it at all, we do so to critique it, not to savor it. We must not become conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of our minds. How do we do this? By meditating on Holy Scripture, by thinking through its meaning and how it applies to our lives, by devoting ourselves to God. We must not allow ourselves or our family members to adopt the worldview of God-haters, the worldview of a world at war with God, a world wanting to throw off God’s restraints. The world does not want to worship and serve the Lord of heaven—but that should be the Christian’s constant focus.

So to recap, our text says, “in all that I have said to you, be circumspect.” The word translated “circumspect” means “be on your guard.” This implies that God’s people must constantly endeavor to keep *all* God’s commandments—not just the easy ones, not just the public ones; it includes both personal and public duties. The God before whom we will one day stand at the final judgment sees not only what we do outwardly, he also knows our heart perfectly. He knows if he is truly first in our heart.

The second part, “and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth,” has to do with our *speech*. All of us talk, so the sermon today affects every one of us. Our New Testament text from Colossians also deals with speech. It ends with this exhortation: “Let your *speech* always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

So our focus today is the Christian’s speech: the kind of speech that pleases God—the kind of speech that *ought* to come out of our mouth, and the kind of speech that ought *not* to come out of our mouths! We will see that our speech ought to be (1) wholesome, (2) Word-infused, and (3) full of grace. First, the Christian’s speech ought to be

1. Wholesome

What we talk about reveals what’s in our heart. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

The word *wholesome* means *good for one’s health or well-being*. It is best to eat *wholesome* food—food that’s good for us, food that promotes health and doesn’t make us sick. It’s best to practice good health habits: washing hands, getting quality sleep, learning to forgive and not hold grudges, having a thankful heart.

Our speech should be wholesome. Proverbs 15:4 says, “A *wholesome* tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.” 1 Timothy 6:3 warns, “If any man . . . consent not to *wholesome* words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness.” God wants the Christian’s speech to be wholesome—to promote the health and well-being of ourselves, our families, our churches, our workplaces and communities. Scripture warns against “filthiness” and “foolish talking” (Eph. 5:4). A lot of rap music promotes selfish, coarse, vile behavior; violence; and using women as sex objects. If the music we listen to promotes sin or ungodly behavior, we should immediately turn it off. We should refuse to allow it to influence us. God wants us to use wholesome speech. He does not want us to school ourselves in unwholesome speech—to learn the ways of a world in rebellion against God. Speech that is unbecoming of a Christian should not become the staple of our entertainment. If Christ were sitting there, listening with us, would we be embarrassed? If so, we ought to turn it off!

Our speech is a window to our heart; it shows what is our heart. Jesus warned that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). As a finite human I cannot know with perfect certainty what is in your heart, but I can get a good idea by listening to how you talk.

Brothers and sisters, our speech ought to be *wholesome*. It ought to honor our fellow humans as individuals made in the image of God. It ought to reflect the teaching of Scripture: “whatsoever things are *true*, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are *just*, whatsoever things are *pure*, whatsoever things are *lovely*, whatsoever things are *of good report*; if there be any *virtue*, and if there be any *praise*, think on these things” (Phil 4:8).

Second, our speech ought to be

2. Word-infused

To *infuse* means to fill something with a quality that alters it for the better. A tea bag infuses a cup of hot water. Our speech ought to be filled with the Word. When a Christian speaks, his speech should be filled with Scripture.

How does our speech become Word-infused? It takes practice, resolve and determination. We need to listen to good preaching. And we need to spend time in the Word day by day. We need to develop the habit of reading the Word aloud, of savoring the sound of the words of Scripture and pronouncing them with our lips. As we read the Word aloud it comes alive. God says, “my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and forever” (Isa. 59:21). The Word of God should be in our mouth. If God’s word is in our mouth and on our lips, it’s going to transform us, it’s going to transform our family, and it’s going to transform generations. Our children and grandchildren are

going to have God's Word in *their* mouth too. Isn't that the kind of legacy we want to leave? Isn't that a lot better than leaving behind a pile of money? And when the words of Scripture are in our mouth, then people around us are going to profit from our wisdom. As they come to us with their problems, we will be able to give them biblical answers—*real* help.

Thirdly, our speech ought to be

3. Full of grace

It ought to reflect our own personal walk with the Lord. It ought to reflect the grace that has been shed abroad in our hearts. It ought to be full of the *Gospel*.

Have you ever noticed how being around certain people is uplifting, while being around other people is trouble? Here's a secret: if we walk with the Lord, spend time in his Word, fellowship with his people, take part in wholesome conversation, it's going to have a positive effect on our life. In Acts 4 Peter and John were arrested for preaching Christ in the temple. They were thrown in jail overnight. The next day they were brought before the Jewish council for interrogation—and what did they do? They preached Christ to the Jewish leaders. Peter boldly spoke one of the most important teachings in the Bible: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." He was telling the religious leaders that there is but one way of salvation—one way to the Father, one way to heaven—and that is Christ. Here is a lesson that every person the world over needs to hear: we are sinners who have offended a holy God. He is perfect and requires us to be absolutely perfect in order to enter heaven. Since we fall short of his perfect standard, our only hope is Christ. If we trust in him as our sin-bearer who died in our place and rose again the third day and gives all who believe his perfect righteousness as a free gift, we are saved. That is the *gospel*—the Good News. There is no other way of salvation! Our text tells us that the religious leaders "saw the boldness of Peter and John, and . . . marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Amazing! Here were ordinary men who had spent time with Jesus, and it transformed their lives. If you and I spend time with the Lord, our lives likewise will be transformed. We will begin to act like Jesus, think like Jesus, talk like Jesus, and live like Jesus.

The Bible says that God's word must be in our hearts and on our lips. This takes time and commitment. But if you read God's Word aloud, it's going to change your family. As you become more conversant with God's word, it is going to come out in your everyday conversation. People are going to take note that you have been with Jesus. Some people will become offended and shun you, but others will be drawn to you. They will intuitively sense that being around you positively impacts their lives. They will want what you have.

In our New Testament text the apostle instructs: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” Oh, that our everyday speech might be seasoned with grace!

Luke 4 records that the Lord Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. He was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and when he had opened it, “he found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.’ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at *the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.*”

Here is the font of all grace, our Lord Jesus, reading the Holy Scriptures aloud and giving a sermon, and the people of his hometown marveled at the *gracious words* that came out of his mouth. Would that the gracious words of Christ would come out of our mouths too!

One of our members, Kevin, has been writing a daily devotional. When he composed yesterday’s edition, he didn’t know what I would be preaching on today—but the Holy Spirit did! His devotional was titled “Your Words Are Building Your Eternity.” He wrote: “We live in a world where words are cheap—spilled carelessly in conversations, posted recklessly online, and thrown out like they’ll disappear into the wind. But Jesus says otherwise. He tells us that every single word—spoken in private, shouted in anger, whispered in gossip, or typed in haste—will be brought into the light. . . .

“Our words are windows into our hearts. What we say reveals who we really are and what we truly believe. Words are not just sounds; they are moral and spiritual indicators. . . .

“On the day of judgment, our words will either stand as witnesses of a heart transformed by grace—or as evidence that we lived apart from God. . . . Are we building others up in love and pointing to Christ, or are we storing up words we will regret for eternity?”

Kevin offers a beautiful prayer: “Forgive me, Lord, for every careless word that has wounded others and dishonored your name. Fill my heart so fully with your Spirit that my mouth naturally speaks life, encouragement, and truth. Teach me to pause, to pray, and to speak with the wisdom that comes from above.”

Brothers and sisters, let our speech make no mention of the name of this world's idols, but always lift up Christ. Does your speech identify you as a Christian? May your speech always be wholesome, Word-infused, and full of grace. Amen.