



By Gary Denbow

When Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), everybody listened. He outlined the basic principles of the Christian life for the people who heard Him firsthand and for all who would come to faith in Him. In this sermon, Jesus still speaks to us about what we must know and do to please Him.

One area Jesus covers is the content of our speech (Matthew 5:33-37). Speech is the key means of communication. According to Jesus, our speech must be kept clean and honest.

As with a number of the subjects covered in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus started His talk with a reference to Old Testament truth, “You have heard that it was said ...” He references three passages from the Pentateuch to form the basis for His teaching about clean speech.

Leviticus 19:12: “Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord” (NIV).

Numbers 30:2: “When a man makes a vow to the Lord ... he must not break his word but must do everything he said.”

Deuteronomy 23:21: “If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin.”

We could also add the rendering of Exodus 20:7 in the New Century Version: “You must not use the name of the Lord your God thoughtlessly; the Lord will punish anyone who misuses His name.” Jesus says that according to the Old Testament, it really matters what proceeds from our mouths in the form of speech. The vows we make are binding, and how we reference God is of utmost importance.

Jesus continues in Matthew 5:34, “But I tell you, Do not swear at all.” Jesus is not saying we are not to make vows or take oaths. He is saying we are to refrain from frivolous swearing. We are not to make vows we do not intend to keep.

He is also saying we are not to use sacred language in a frivolous way. Sacred names should be kept for sacred worship. The sacred names of our God, the Christ and the Holy Spirit should not be used in a purposeless and profane way. It is here we have a problem today. The name of God is used purposelessly and profanely.

Some tend to dismiss the content of our speech as meaningless. But the Bible knows nothing of that theory. Note these observations in *The Message* from Proverbs 10.

“The more talk, the less truth; the wise measure their words” (Proverbs 10:19).

“The speech of a good person is worth waiting for; the blabber of the wicked is worthless” (v. 20).

“The talk of a good person is rich fare for many, but chatterboxes die of an empty heart” (v. 21).

“A good person’s mouth is a clear fountain of wisdom; a foul mouth is a stagnant swamp” (v. 31).

“The speech of a good person clears the air; the words of the wicked pollute it” (v. 32).

We do have a problem in our society and even in the church world. We discount the value of spoken words. We adopt the patterns of speech used in modern media. We even deny personal responsibility for what we say. But the Scriptures are clear: “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless” (James 1:26, NIV). How do we cure this problem?

Jesus’ remedy is clear. Don’t be loose with your speech to a point where, to validate what you say, you have to call on God’s name to verify it (Matthew 5:37). We are to be known as truthful, honest and pure, both in the way we address God and make references

to Him and in the way we fulfill our promises made to others.

Let me share three steps that will help you and me to move toward clean and truthful speech.

**1. The heart is the place to start.**

Solomon told us our hearts tell our mouths what to say (Proverbs 16:23). For our speech to change, our hearts have to change. At the same time, we receive instruction through our ears (Romans 10:14). We can train our hearts by reading the Word aloud to ourselves. That Word will transform our hearts. Out of our hearts will flow clean speech. The name of our God will be honored and not profaned.

**2. The tongue must be trained to give life.**

Solomon also said, "The tongue has the power of life and death" (Proverbs 18:21). Words either contain poison, the power to kill, or fruit, the sign of life. I must be concerned to the very center of my being that what comes out of my mouth is life-giving and not life-taking. My heart must be right before God.

The Psalmist wrote, "With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth" (Psalm 119:13). You and I need to take inventory of all that we say and change anything we say that does not honor God, agree with His Word, and bring life to others.

Solomon would tell us that we have a choice. Our speech can be a "life-giving well" or it can be a "dark cave of abuse" (Proverbs 10:11, *The Message*). Evidently, you and I have a choice of the content of our speech. We can have our mouths filled with the powerful Word of God or with that which destroys. Which will you choose?

**3. Every word must be made to count.**

Many of us work with computers. We have come to realize that

somewhere in the recesses of the hard drive on our computers is a record of everything we ever did on that machine. Even what we thought we erased can linger there.

The words of Jesus are staggering: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36,37).

God is going to ask me about the times I frivolously used His name in exclamation rather than worship. Jesus is going to query me about reducing His name, or part of it, to a byword. Can I allow my mouth to speak of the Lord I love with any disrespect knowing that I will be asked about it when I stand before Him?

There is a great picture in Revelation 14:1-5. The people of God are standing before Him. They are singing like a great choir to the honor and praise of God when a voice from the throne speaks back in honor of them. One of the accolades laid on these choice servants of God is this: "No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless" (v. 5). How can we help but conclude that clean speech is really important to God?

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**ABCs OF SALVATION**

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

**A. Admit you are a sinner.**

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

**Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.**

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

**B. Believe in Jesus** (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

**Become a child of God by receiving Christ.**

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

**C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.**

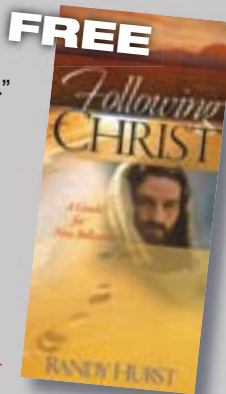
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

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