

Let the Message of Christ Dwell Among You

I perk up my ears whenever I hear someone say the word “God.” Whenever the word “Jesus” is used, it catches my attention. When I’m in public, most often I’m hearing “Oh my god” in a sense that has nothing to do with any god at all, and it bugs me. Sometimes I hear “Jesus” as an expletive, and I bristle at that. But what I am really hoping to hear is something about what our Lord has done in the life of the speaker, or something God has told us about himself in his Word.

Our Lord gave the Christians in Colosse a beautiful description of how he wanted his Word to live among them. “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:16-17)

This does not describe a one-way scheduled lecture from pastor to congregation or from teacher to students. It describes a way of life for any community of Christians. When we speak to one another in this way, we are much more prepared to speak to non-Christians about spiritual things. After all, if we are only talked *to* about God, and we seldom speak casually about him *with one another*, how can we expect to be comfortable reaching out to non-churchgoing friends with the gospel message?

Maybe we are afraid of not saying things in the right way when we talk about God. We are concerned about correctly handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15) That is good. We DO want to be careful when talking about our Lord so that we represent him truthfully. And yet, the warnings about NOT speaking up about Jesus are severe. “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation,” Jesus told his disciples, “the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38)

The parable of the ten minas (Luke 19) encourages us to use what God gives us, not being so afraid of misusing it that we avoid using it at all. In that parable, servants were each entrusted with some money while their master went away. One of the servants wrapped his money in a piece of cloth and hid it away, because he was afraid of his master. “You are a hard man,” he said to his master when he returned. “You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.” The master responded, “You wicked servant! ... Why didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?”

Like the master in the parable, Jesus our Master has left his people on earth with the responsibility of handling something valuable—the gospel of salvation. He is not, however, a “hard man.” Yes, God is “hard” against sin. He cannot tolerate it. We fear his judgment for our sin of failing to faithfully use his gifts. But when it comes to reaping what he did not sow, he is merciful beyond imagination. He reaped punishment for unrighteousness he did not sow. He put in perfect obedience and the reward he took out was suffering and death.

Knowing that Jesus was perfect for us, we can go forward with the freedom to try, and, sometimes, to fail. We can open our mouths knowing that our human words will always be tainted with unrighteousness. By grace, Jesus took the punishment for that already. Just as gracefully, God takes our tainted words and accomplishes his purposes through them! He uses our faulty words spoken in faith for his glory! This is how God planned for his gospel to be spread: carried in jars of clay (2 Corinthians 4:7), “to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” God wants me to go forward in faith, failing at times along the way, so that his power and glory can be displayed.

As if that astounding privilege isn't enough, God tells us that when Christians speak his truth to one another, the community of believers matures in their faith. “Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15) An even more personal promise came from our Savior himself: “Whoever acknowledges me before others,” Jesus promised, “I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

When Christians utter one of God's names, we want to be sharing the truth about him. We want our conversations to be filled with the light of the Spirit. We want the word of Christ to dwell in us richly so that we acknowledge him in all we think, do...and say.

Prayer:

I praise you, God, for your astounding plan for spreading the gospel—that you have entrusted your treasure to us, your clay jars. I confess those times when I have hidden the light of the Holy Spirit from others rather than putting your Word in a prominent place in my conversations. I thank you for taking my imperfect words and actions and using them for your glory. I ask you to help me faithfully acknowledge you with all that I am. Amen.

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