

“LET YOUR SPEECH BE ALWAYS WITH GRACE, SEASONED WITH SALT”

Public discourse in our society today is often characterized by extreme incivility and intemperance. The advent of the Internet and particularly social media has reinforced this trend. As those who have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ to partake of His holiness, we should resist this trend. Whether coming from a young person who is venting real or perceived grievances or from a leading one who is reviling others under the guise of “speaking frankly,” such utterances are unworthy of saints and defile both those who speak or write them and those who hear or read them.

The Bible sets a very high standard for the words that believers speak. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, according to the need, that it may give grace to those who hear.” Paul’s word here indicates that our speaking must have four characteristics. First, it must contain no corrupt word. Second, it must be good for building up. Third, it must be according to the need. Fourth, it must give grace to those who hear. In his *Life-study of Ephesians* Brother Lee said of this verse:

The Greek word for *corrupt* signifies what is noxious, offensive, or worthless. Our conversation should not corrupt others, but should build them up. The church and every member of the church need the proper building up. This building up is accomplished primarily by our speaking. What proceeds out of our mouth should be that which is good for the building up of the church and all the saints.

Furthermore, the word out of our mouth should give grace to those who hear. Grace is God embodied in Christ as our enjoyment and supply. Our word should convey this as grace to others. The word that builds up others always ministers grace to the hearers. Our word should communicate God in Christ as enjoyment, imparting Christ to others as their life supply. (410)

In 4:16 Paul spoke of the Body building itself up in love by the mutual supply among the members, causing the growth of the Body. This mutual supply is the supply of life, which is the supply of grace out of our enjoyment of Christ. According to verse 29, our speaking should not tear down the church but should fit the saints’ need in their present situation to supply them with Christ that they may grow for the church’s building up (see *The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ*, 116-117). The channel of this supply is our speaking words of grace that build up one another (cf. 1 Cor. 14:3, 5). The more we learn to be in the spirit and be ruled by the spirit, the more we will have the anointing and wisdom to speak words of grace to meet the present need. In such speaking, words that are noxious, offensive, or worthless have no place.

In Colossians 4:6 Paul wrote, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” The word *always* is unambiguous and absolute; it means always, without exception. Here again we see that our speaking should always be with grace, that is, with the Christ we have experienced and enjoyed to be a supply to others. In this passage Paul added “seasoned with salt.” This expression is very meaningful and its pairing with grace is quite significant, as Brother Lee showed us:

What does the expression *with grace, seasoned with salt mean*? What is grace? The Scriptures reveal that grace is Christ (Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 15:10). And what is salt? Unlike honey or sugar, salt can be used to kill germs. The spiritual meaning of salt is the working of the cross to kill all the germs. Thus, for our word to be always with grace, seasoned with salt means that our word should always be filled with Christ and should always pass through the killing of the cross. (*The Mystery of God and the Mystery of Christ*, 20)

Dear saints, if we would practice this one thing—to exercise to have all our speaking filled with Christ and passing through the killing of the cross—many problems in the church life would be resolved. When problems arise, we are tempted to think that we are right and others are wrong and that we have the liberty to voice our opinion or give vent to our feelings. As a result, we may gossip, criticize, and argue, even stridently. We may not realize that such words are noxious, offensive, and worthless. They tear down rather than build up. They impart death rather than supply life. They are devoid of the element of Christ as grace and bear no taste of salt, the killing work of the cross. The Lord will never justify such speaking (cf. Matt. 12:36-37 and footnotes). We should neither speak nor receive such words.

The Bible charges us to all speak the same thing and even think the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2). This is not some kind of outward conformity, robotic behavior, or rote performance. Rather, it is the issue of seeing the supremely preeminent Christ (Phil. 3:8-9). Such a seeing changes our thinking and reorients our living toward seeking Him for the building up of His Body. According to the book of Philippians, thinking the same thing means to seek to live and magnify Christ (1:20-21); to take the crucified and resurrected Christ as our pattern by working out our own salvation in

cooperation with the inner operating God (2:5-9, 12-13); to gain Christ, be found in Christ, know Christ in His death and resurrection, and pursue Christ (3:8-10, 12,14); and to learn Him as the secret in our living in every circumstance (4:12-13). These things should saturate and permeate both our thinking and our speaking.

In *Practical Lessons on the Experience of Life*, Brother Lee devoted an entire chapter to “The Proper Speech for the Building Up of the Church” (211-223). He spoke at length about having our speech seasoned by “the killing element of the cross” and checking whether we have a pure motive, whether the Lord in our spirit is the source, and whether we have the proper position to speak. In his concluding word he said:

According to the lessons I have learned, the first thing we must be checked in is our speech. If we are truly willing to grow, the first thing the Lord must check is our talking, particularly our motive, the source, and our position. Whether or not it is right to say something depends on these three things. If we cannot get through these three points, we should forget about saying anything. We must be pure in motive, right in source, and proper in position; then we can say something. If we cannot get through one of the points, we must be checked. (222-223)

Later in this passage Brother Lee added, “May the word that we speak always be full of Christ, checked, controlled, and killed by the cross. We must learn this lesson; then we will see the growth, and we will realize the real building among us” (223).

For a brother or sister to cast off restraint and claim the right of free self-expression is not according to Christ. He said, “If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Moreover, those who, in the name of “authority,” demean saints misrepresent the Lord. Matthew 24:49 speaks of one who “beats his fellow slaves.” Brother Nee said, “To beat is to usurp God’s disciplinary authority. Whenever you think you have special authority to rule over a fellow slave, you are beating. Matthew 23:8 says, ‘You are all brothers.’ To beat a brother also means to lose the ability for self-control” (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 15: Study on Matthew*, 301). Brother Nee added, “If you hurt others with your words, or if you cause pain and suffering to others through your meanness or sarcasm, that is also to beat” (301). This does not annul the elders’ responsibility to administer discipline when it is needed. It does mean, however, that even in administering such discipline, the elders must be under the restraint of the cross, especially in their speaking. Referring to the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, Brother Nee concluded, “We can only use oil and wine to heal wounds; we cannot perform surgery. God’s children already have enough sorrows. How can we add more painful wounds to them! Yet he who is proud and independent and has a temper finds it easy to beat others” (301). In the same vein Brother Lee said, “By His mercy and through His grace we must do the best not to beat the fellow slaves, the fellow believers. Do not criticize or murmur about them. Do not speak anything negative about them, because you do not have the time to do it. Your mouth was not made for criticizing but for speaking forth Christ” (*The Way to Practice the Lord’s Present Move*, 156). The same principle applies to all the saints. We should not take any excuse to demean others. We should rather seek to restore those who have stumbled (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1). This does not mean that we cover up serious misdeeds that damage others, but even when we raise concerns about others’ conduct, our words and the way we speak them must express the One who is our life within and whom we represent (Col. 3:4; 2 Cor. 5:20).

This is not to say that we are made of marble, without any feeling. We will encounter situations that provoke us. In this Brother Lee gave us an excellent pattern:

Do not think that since I can give this message, I do not get angry. However, when I want to voice my resentment, a voice within me says, “Why are you angry? James 1:20 says that ‘the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God.’” I occasionally reason with God, saying, “Even so, this person has made me angry. Lord, let me be angry just this time.” But He says, “Calm down and pray,” and I have no choice but to kneel down and pray. Sometimes I am at a loss and can only say, “Lord, I am really angry.” This is a prayer. Do not think that such a prayer is poor. This kind of prayer can often lead me to be enlightened and repent to the Lord, saying, “Lord, be merciful to me and forgive me. I need the cleansing of Your precious blood.” After such a confession, the fellowship within is restored, and I am able to enjoy the Lord again. (*The Proper Way for Believers to Meet and to Serve*, 13)

This fellowship matches Brother Lee’s realization that “all the virtues taught by the Bible are through the cross, by the Spirit, and minister Christ for the producing of the churches for the building up of the Body” (*The Divine and Mystical Realm*, 29). May the Lord use these words to call us to repentance, to purify His recovery, to guard us from speaking improperly or receiving improper speaking, and to bind up the wounds of any who may have been damaged by others’ words so that His building work in and among us can proceed unhindered.