

Speak with Grace

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:6)

Does it matter how we talk to our family, friends, coworkers, or strangers? Does a quick answer with strong or harsh words accomplish the same purpose as a thoughtful and gentle answer? When we are trying to get a point across, does the manner of our speech have anything to do with how the other person receives it? How do we speak about others?

The Bible has much to say about how we talk to and about each other. What we say and how we say it usually comes from the heart, and our natural heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). By our very nature, then, it is easy to tear people down with our words. Words cannot be taken back; those things spoken in judgment or anger are often remembered forever by the recipient. Therefore, we must draw our strength from God and His Spirit and be careful about what we say and how we say it.

Most of us (including myself) must admit that we have said something to someone or about someone that we regret. Sometimes we intentionally speak words unfit for ambassadors of Christ, or speak in a manner that incites anger, jealousy, or pain in the listener. More often, though, we are not even aware of what we are saying or the consequences of our words. Therefore, we are exhorted to speak to each other with grace, as though our words were seasoned with salt. Most people add salt to food to make it taste better—the food is more palatable and enjoyable. Likewise, we should speak in a manner that is palatable and makes the situation better.

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Ephesians 4:29)

In the book of James, the brethren were exhorted to be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19-20). Do we really listen to the person talking to us, including one who may be trying to admonish us with good reason, and respond wisely and with grace? The book of Proverbs, also, has many references about how we ought to speak to each other (e.g., Proverbs 15:1-4; 16:21; 17:4; 19:1, 21:23; 26:28).

He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray. He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool. When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver, the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding. (Proverbs 10:17-21)