

The Timeless Voice: Civility is more than manners, it's the gospel in action

Commentary by Greg Baker

We were blessed to have a woman in our office recently who shared a message on the power of our tongue. According to the book of Proverbs, “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

Our speech has the ability to build others up or quickly tear them down. What’s more, our speech is closely tied to the gospel we preach.

If we as Christians are going to be a witness in this culture, we must change the way we speak – not only about one another, but also about the world around us.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29).

In order to make this biblical command the pattern of our lives, however, we must first change the way we view people. How we view others in our hearts will influence how we speak to them or about them: “From the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

The woman who visited our office shared with us the lyrics to a beautiful song that challenged me in how I view people. It is called “See Me Beautiful” by Red and Kathy Grammer:

See me beautiful.
Look for the best in me.
It’s what I really am
And all I want to be.

It may take some time,
It may be hard to find,
But see me beautiful.

See me beautiful
Each and every day.
Could you take a chance?
Could you find a way
To see me shining through
In everything I do
And see me beautiful?

Though sin has marred each of us, God's love looks past that, and He sees our beauty. He loves us and desires to redeem us. The gospel boasts a beautiful message of God's love for us, in spite of who we are, to the point of putting our punishment on His Son all so He could be in relationship with us.

As Christians, we must see people as God sees people. We must begin to view people as made in the image of God. We must look past the sinful exterior and ask God to help us see who He created them to be. If we are willing to do this, we will begin to understand that the people around us are not our enemies, but fellow creations of God, desperately in need of His loving, redeeming grace.

When we see people this way, it will change our speech. We will begin to speak the truth in love as God commands and as Jesus demonstrated. We can begin to have conversations that heal and more clearly communicate the gospel.

"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so" (James 3:9-10).

It doesn't take long to see the culture that the untamed tongue has caused. We can look anywhere to see the damage of slander, lies, and bullying. Kindness and grace seem to be

completely absent from Washington, Wall Street, and even on Main Street. We cannot seem to disagree without demonizing and belittling.

Brothers and sisters, let's stop using our speech as a weapon and engage in the Great Commission. Let's begin to see all people through the lens of eternity, the eyes of Christ, and with the heart of gospel-bearers:

"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:16-20).

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