

## HOW WILL WE BE JUDGED BY OUR WORDS?

One time during Jesus' ministry there was an occasion when the Pharisees accused him of doing His miracles by the power of the devil. Jesus corrected them sharply and during the middle of His response said the following over in **Matthew 12:36**: "But I say to you that every idle word, whatever men may speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment."

He spoke of a time of judgment where we would have to give account of our words. The apostle Peter says in **1 Peter 4:17** that judgment is now on the house of God. With that in mind how can we give a good account of the words with which we speak? In the sermonette today I would like to look at three points for us to work on to ensure that we can give a good account with the words with which we speak.

The first point that I have comes from **Ephesians 4:29**. In this verse we read: "Let not any filthy word go out of your mouth, but if any *is* good to building up *in respect of* need, that it may give grace to the ones hearing."

My first point is to avoid any bad, corrupt or filthy communication. The most obvious example of this is to avoid profanity which has escalated considerably in our western nations in recent decades. Commentators have remarked that increased profanity is one sign of a decaying culture and civilisation. I have been particularly taken back by the amount that it has increased on television and in movies since I was a teenager 20 years ago. eg. Many movies that would have been R rated due to their language 20 years today are only given an M rating. Certain words that would have been very rare to hear on TV or in a movie 20 years ago are way more commonplace these days.

Paul in **Ephesians 5:4** also speaks of coarse jesting or dirty jokes as one of the works of the flesh to be avoided. Sitcoms and many jokes people tell these days are full of sexual innuendo and the like.

All trends in society do have an impact on us in the church and this is something that we all need to guard against in our own lives. After re-entering the workforce a year ago and being with worldly work colleagues in an office environment 8-9 hours a day I know that I found myself more prone to slip up in this area and I know in myself it's something I have to watch more carefully. Even the prophet Isaiah felt that he had a problem in this area when he said over in **Isaiah 6:5**: "Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" and how true is that a description of people today in our western society.

One religious commentator on the subject of how profanity affects relationships said: "It is one thing to call someone a hypocrite and it's another to add a profane adjective in front of it. Profanity raises the level of hurt and intensity in a conflict when you really need to resolve a conflict and diffuse that hurt and intensity. Profanity is engaged in when one wants to return hurt for hurt. It is the opposite of what a christian should do, which is to be forgiving and overcome evil with good."

When God judges us on our words He will not only judge us on the words we speak but also on the words that we don't speak if we fail to speak the right kind of words when we should. Sometimes people can be hurt because of a failure by us to speak the right kind of words that will help them. My next point that follows on from this is found over in **Proverbs 27:6** where we read: "Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful."

Point number two is to care enough to confront. We live in a tolerant, permissive society. While in the past we may have had a church culture where people were more prone to be too critical perhaps our natural inclination these days influenced by our tolerant, politically correct society is more towards the other side of the ditch where we tend to let things slide even where there is a genuine need to correct someone close to us or someone we are responsible for.

It takes courage and effort to confront when needed and we should not shirk our responsibility to help a friend or someone we're responsible for when they've really strayed from God's standards. This applies to the church also. We should not be too soft as we do the Work of God. God commands us in **Isaiah 58:1**: "Cry out aloud, spare not, Lift up your voice like a trumpet and tell my people their sins." The apostle Paul further writes in **Galatians 6:1**: "Brothers, if a man is overtaken in a fault, you the spiritual ones restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted."

Now this does not give us the right to be busybodies whenever someone doesn't match up to our standards nor does it give the right to tear down others or gossip about them. The right kind of confronting and giving criticism is a delicate art form. I've lost count of the number of times I've heard people criticise others harshly without including anything positive to soften the blow or thinking through what will best motivate the other person to actually make the changes that they need to.

One of the best examples of how to offer constructive criticism is found in the letters to the seven churches. I call this approach the sandwich effect. In these seven letters Jesus started off by praising them and telling them some of their good points. Then he offered the constructive criticism that they needed to be in His kingdom before He finished off with giving them a fantastic incentive to apply the criticism - "To he who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne". It's like a sandwich in that you start off with something positive then offer the criticism then cap it off with something positive again and it really is one of the most effective ways to give constructive criticism.

Someone once wrote that you can get away with many expressions of anger if you balance those out with lots and lots of expressions of love.

The last point I have here that will help us be judged well by our words is over in **Proverbs 16:24** where we read: "Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones."

While every now and then we might need to pass on constructive criticism we shouldn't be known as negative people. No one wants to be known as someone who's mostly critical. The fruits of joy and love that come from the Holy Spirit should motivate us to care and bring joy to other people by lifting them up and we should all be generous and open with our praise to others.

The famous American writer, Mark Twain, once said "I can live two months on a good compliment."

We need encouragement when we're discouraged, when we're under stress, when we've done a job well - in short, all the time. Encouragement gives strength, confidence and courage and it can help us to do things we never thought possible.

What are some practical ways that we can give encouragement and praise others? We can praise others for good qualities we like about them. When was the last time that we complimented each of our closest friends, husbands, wives, parents or children that we have? When was the last time that we complimented someone on a job well done? We can

encourage people that share with us their plans and dreams and give support to accomplish things that are difficult. We can show comfort and sympathy in times of sorrow, send cards to the sick or a thank you card to those who have helped us out.

One example of a great encourager in the Bible was Paul's companion Barnabas. His name Barnabas was apparently a nickname given to him by the apostles who were so impressed by how positive and encouraging he was that they called him this name that meant "Son of Encouragement" (**Acts 4:36**). His example is a great one for all of us to emulate.

Compliments cost nothing, yet there are those around us who would do anything to be praised for something. American psychologist William James said: "The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." Note his choice of words. He did not speak of the "hope" or "desire". He said "craving". Dale Carnegie says of the desire for praise: "The rare individual who honestly satisfies this heart-hunger will hold people in the palm of his hand and even the undertaker will be sorry when he dies."

In his classic work "Letters to Phillip" Charlie Shedd wrote:

"The Bible says, 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.' This also goes for a woman. If you give her a lovely idea of herself, that's what she will try to become. This is why it makes so much difference what you're telling her. The time finally arrives when she accepts your estimate as her estimate of herself.

"I've seen many an ordinary-looking woman grow into a lovely thing because her husband told her she was lovely. I regret to report that I have also seen some truly gorgeous women gradually fade away because they were no longer inspired from the one source that mattered most to them. All of which leads up to six very important words: If you like it, say so! (p.30-31)

David Alcock in his book "The Healing Art of Encouragement" writes:

"When others encourage us, we feel good about ourselves. We feel good about the encourager. We are willing to try new things and our confidence increases. Encouraged people are effective people. They have positive self-esteem and expect success in the tasks they undertake. They tend to have positive relationships with others and can concentrate on helping others rather than on their own personal inadequacies. Furthermore, encouraged people are the best encouragers of others (p23).

In conclusion, when God judges us and we are to give account of the words with which we speak we will be judged favourably if we are diligent in applying these three principles – being diligent to avoid bad language, offering constructive criticism to our close friends and those we have responsibility for when there is a need and lastly being generous with our praise and encouragement to others. Let's all be diligent to keep our words pure and wholesome and use them wisely to help and not to hurt others.