

THE ACCEPTABLE LIFE

Text: Matthew 12: 31-37

Have you ever heard the expression when someone is behaving badly, “This is not acceptable behavior”? The Bible has much to say about acceptable behavior. Please observe the following Bible verses:

Ephesians 5:8, 10: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light...proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.”

Proverbs 21:3: “To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.”

I Samuel 15:22: “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

Romans 12:1, 2: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Psalms 19:14: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

Our words coupled with the meditation of our hearts activate a spiritual GPS that tells us much about the direction we are heading. We want to head in the acceptable direction.

1. THE SYMPTOMS THAT WORDS REVEAL

Matthew 12:33, 35

James 3:1-14

As in any illness there are symptoms that reveal our problems. A person who is having a heart attack may have a backache or sore arm. A person who has cancer has elevated white cell counts. By the same token, one who is using his or her words to harm is revealing a greater root problem beneath the verbiage.

2. THE SOURCE FROM WHICH WORDS ARE BIRTHED

Matthew 12:34

The epicenter of our life is defined as our heart, as pointed out in Proverbs 4:23: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” Getting to the “heart” of the problem can be tricky because Jeremiah 17:9 declares, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” We should appropriately apply these words as admonition to us from our Heavenly Father: “My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways” (Proverbs 23:26.).

3. THE SOUNDNESS THAT WORDS DECIDE

Matthew 12:37

II Timothy 1:13 says, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” The Greek word from which we translate the word “sound” is “hugiaino” which means to have sound health, i.e. be well (in body); be in health, to be safe and sound, to be whole or wholesome. Figuratively speaking, it can refer to being incorrupt in doctrine.

In his book, Emotional Intelligence 2.0, Travis Bradbury attempts to explain why we do what we do and how it effects us. He said, “Repeated complaining rewires your brain to make future complaining more likely. Over time, you find it’s easier to be negative than to be positive, regardless of what’s happening around you. Complaining becomes your default behavior, which changes how people perceive you.” Eventually, these people become very lonely because others will spend as little time as possible with that person to avoid the negative effect on themselves. Bradbury discovered in the research done at Stanford University and Friedrich Schiller University in Germany found that when people complain a lot, it has a negative effect on their overall health. Overly complaining people are so stressed out that the cortisol levels in their blood stream increase and release a stress hormone. An excess of thirty minutes a day to released cortisol begins to impact the hippocampus in your brain. This is that part of your brain that focuses on a higher level of learning, higher level thinking and memory. It is same area of your brain that is affected by Alzheimer’s disease. So, when exposed to this for thirty minutes a day, the hippocampus begins to shrink and get smaller and smaller. The impact of constant complaining has the same impact on your brain as smoking does on your lungs. Constructive criticism can be good, but the constant concentration on being critical with no remedy or answer can be emotionally and physically harmful and most definitely spiritually harmful.

Ephesians 4:29-32 tells us, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Along the same lines, Colossians 4:6 reminds us, “Let your speech be always

with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

How do we break from criticism? Repent of unnecessary criticism as sin. “Repent” comes to us from the Greek word “metanoeo,” which means to think differently, to change your mind. A good way to think differently when tempted to criticize is to stop yourself just before you speak evil of a person and think of one thing you can be thankful about that one person. It was actually tested at the University of California, Davis, that a person who regularly is thankful (rather than critical) actually had a 23 per cent reduction in the cortisol levels in the brain. This allows for far less wear and tear to the hippocampus, and actually helps your mental health. This will make your memory work further into the future with higher memory skills than the critical person. It would serve us well to memorize I Thessalonians 5:18, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

4. THE SAVIOR OUR WORDS SHOULD PLEASE

Matthew 12:36

Paul said in Galatians 4:19, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” And when Christ is formed in us, we will speak in love. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:” When Christ is formed within us we will also speak with conviction as I Corinthians 14:8 tells us, “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” We will also speak the word of witness: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (Romans 10:14, 18).

In conclusion, may I emphasize with these sobering words of Jesus, “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:37).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.