



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Matthew 12:22-37

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English Standard Version

“Careful Words in the Kingdom”

The 41st Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled
“The King and His Kingdom!”

Matthew 12:22-37

“Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to Him, and He healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.”²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, He said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.²⁶ And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.³⁰ Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.³¹ Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

³³ “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.³⁶ I

*tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,
³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand Your hard teaching here. It's hard not simply because it challenges our understanding. It's hard because it talks of things that are so serious, so terrifying, that we tremble to even think about them. And yet we know this is Your Word for Your people, for our edification, for our correction. And so by it You intend to admonish us and to lead us into the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we pray that by Your Spirit, You would not only give us understanding, but that You would help us to embrace those things which we ought to embrace because of the teaching of this passage, and to shun those things about which this passage warns us. So by Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *A Weapon with Consequences*

I became a Christian as a sophomore in high school. Another guy in my grade came to Christ at the same time and we became best friends. And we remained that way up until his untimely death about twelve years ago. He was one of those guys that you could go a long time without seeing, but when you finally got together, it was like you'd never been apart. His name was Mark and he was great fun. I enjoyed our time together, and I wish we'd had more.

About six months after becoming Christians, Mark and I went on a week-long summer camp that our church youth group put on. We went to the old Barrington College, which has since merged with Gordon College, but at the time it was in Barrington, Rhode Island. And since Mark and I had come to Christ at about the same time, we were asked to share our testimony with the whole group, which consisted of several hundred high school students from all over the Boston area. I have no idea what I said ... and I doubt anyone else does either. But I vividly remember what Mark said. He was really attracted to the joy the other Christians had, our small group leader in particular. He loved that this guy was more excited, more joyous, sang louder, was the first to sign up for any activity, and was a great leader. And he wanted to sign up too. And there's the rub. You see, Mark was drawn to Christianity by a guy who was a great leader.

But he was never drawn to Christ.

I've never forgotten that, because to some degree, it explained what happened the next year. The next year, as youth group geared up again, I called Mark and asked if he needed a ride to the first meeting. It was important because we lived in the suburbs and our youth group was at Park Street Church in Boston, right on the Boston Common. We would drive to the parking lot and take the Green Line into the city. The metro system in Boston is run by the MBTA (The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority), commonly known as the "T".

And so I asked Mark if he needed a ride. And he didn't answer. There was a long silence. Finally, I said, "Mark, you there?" And he replied, "Yeah, I'm here. Man, I don't think I'm going. In fact, I don't think I'm going anymore. It was fun, but ... it's just not my thing. Have a good time."

I was beside myself. I was stunned. I argued. I pleaded. I begged. But he wouldn't budge. Just **not going** to do the church thing anymore. So I called our small group leader and some of the other youth group leaders and told them Mark was dropping out. I couldn't believe it. And most of them handled it great. They met with Mark, they prayed with Mark, they loved Mark.

But **one guy** didn't handle it very well. He told Mark that by leaving the church and leaving the youth group ... he was leaving Christ. And that was the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And he was damning himself to hell. Mark simply said, "I'm sorry." And he hung up. And except for the occasional wedding or funeral ... **he never went back to church again.**

Oh, we remained friends. I went to college and he went to the Air Force. Then he went to college and I went to the Army. We both got married and we both had kids. Eventually I went to seminary and he went to grad school. We both got Master's degrees and we both got Doctorates. He remained my best friend right up until the day he died. And I still miss him.

Occasionally late at night, usually over a beer, we'd get talking about high school, and once in a very great while, we'd talk about what happened. And Mark would talk some about faith, and what it meant to live that out. And I took hope in that. But Mark never forgot what that **one guy** said to him that fall day, so many September's ago. And he would say something to the effect of, "You know, some people think it's too late for me." And I would say, "It's never too late. Not for you. Not for anybody."

That deadly phrase, "*the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit,*" is found in our text today. And it contains **a great truth**. But when misused, or even misunderstood, it becomes **a great weapon, with devastating consequences**. So don't you use it lightly! Jesus didn't use it lightly. He used it sparingly, only one time, recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And He used it **to challenge people, not to condemn them**. And He used it when they attributed **the work of God to Satan**. The ESV Study Bible says this is done "through the flagrant, willful, and persistent rejection of God and His commands. This sin is committed today **only by unbelievers** who **deliberately** and **unchangeably REJECT** the ministry of the Holy Spirit in calling them to salvation." This is done by people with hardened hearts, who don't care about God, who don't care about salvation, who don't care about their own eternal destiny. It's given as a warning, and as a challenge, but **never** as a weapon.

And to understand that we have to turn to our text today, Matthew 12, verses 22–37. First of all, most commentators, and most preachers, divide this passage into two chapters, or two sermons, or two lessons. And I'm not persuaded that's the best way to handle the text ... primarily because this is part of the same teaching moment, where Jesus is answering the Pharisees.

Now, as most of you know, I teach preaching at Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington. And every Friday afternoon, I start class by having everyone turn to the text that I'm preaching on that Sunday. And I ask them ... "What's the main point?" And lest you think I'm cheating somehow, let me assure you, their answers are usually all over the map, and most of them are wrong. Maybe that's why they're taking the class. But this week, this passage stumped them. And so I told them to look for similar words that are repeated, and how that's often a good clue to what's really being taught here. And so they did.

And in verse 22, we read, "*the man spoke.*" Verse 23, "*And...the people...said.*" Verse 24, "*they said.*" Verse 25, "*He said to them.*" Verse 32, "*whoever speaks,*" used **twice**. Verse 34, "*How can you speak ... and ... the mouth speaks.*" And finally we have the summary

statement in verses 36 and 37, “*I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,*³⁷ *for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*” And hence, the title of this sermon, “**Careful Words In The Kingdom.**” Because, obviously, to Jesus, words are important!

So let’s turn to the text ... and the first thing we see are ...

v. 22–24: WORDS OF CHALLENGE¹

“Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Him, and He healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.”²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”

There are many things in this deep and profound passage, but I would like to point your attention to just a few things that we learn in this passage. First of all, in verses 22 and 23 you will see an amazing **healing**, and you will see an amazing **response** from the crowd. In those verses, we see that Christ’s work shows Him to be the Messiah. Here Matthew gives us a testimony that Christ is indeed the Messiah. He proves His messiahship by the deeds that He does.

A man is brought to Christ who is demon-possessed, and the physical manifestation of that demon-possession is that he is blind and speechless. Now we know that Christ makes a distinction. He does not say that all physical disabilities are the result of demon-possession, but in this case these physical disabilities are the result of the work of demonic activity. And the Lord Jesus performs a great work in the life of this man. He casts out the demon. The man is instantaneously healed. And the miracle shows the heart of Jesus.

Once again Matthew is showing you the **compassion** of Christ towards those who are not just **physically** disabled, but those who are **spiritually** disabled and held in the bondage of Satan. Christ loves them and has **compassion** for them, and longs for them to be freed from the power of Satan. We also see here the power of the Lord Jesus Christ ... that He is sovereign, that He is the Son of God, that He is the Messiah, that He has the power to bind Satan, and to release those who are under the control of demons. And the crowd is **absolutely astonished**. The Lord Jesus has done miracles like this before, even in the Gospel of Matthew, but apparently the people who were witnessing this one hadn’t seen Jesus do anything like this for they were **amazed**.

They detect a connection between Jesus’ teaching, Jesus’ compassion, Jesus’ power and Jesus’ deeds and the fact that He is the Messiah. And so they ask out loud, “*Can this be the Son of David?*” ... meaning the long awaited Messiah? The event itself was compelling enough to suggest that His actions were from God. God the Father was revealing the power and person of His Son in that event. And the crowd saw it, and it caused them to ask this question.

In this demonstration of Christ’s power over the physical and the spiritual world, He shows Himself to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And, as we deal with this passage today, we have to ask ourselves the question, “Have we **accepted** that truth about Him?” It’s possible to go to church your whole life and never personally **embrace** that truth about Christ! Though we profess His name in baptism, though we profess His name in the Lord’s

¹ The Exposition of the text is largely adapted from the sermons, “A Great and Unpardonable Sin” and “The Tree is Known by its Fruit” both by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, nd, www.fpcjackson.org.

Supper, though we profess truth in the creed, it's possible to live life and **not** have embraced the reality that Jesus is the only Savior, and He is the Son of God.

And if you're a Christian, if you **have** embraced that truth, and you're living in that truth, let me ask you this question. Are you taking that truth into consideration in the way that you live once you have embraced Him? Do you live in conscious awareness that it is the Savior of the world, the Son of God, the Messiah, who has saved you from your sins? Do you recognize and acknowledge and manifest His lordship in your life? Those are the questions that Matthew presses home to us in this passage today.

The second thing I would like you to see in this passage is **the wicked response** of the Pharisees to what Jesus had done. Jesus had done a great **miracle**. The crowds were **amazed**. However, the Pharisees are immediately mobilized in **opposition** to the Lord. And in that verse we see that Christ's deeds only provoke the Pharisees to great opposition. It was an amazing miracle, but the Pharisees just **hated** Him even more for what He had done. Look at what we read here in verse 24, "*But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."*

Jesus' enemies quickly respond. And apparently they do so, not directly to Christ, but either among themselves, or to the crowds. Their concern is for damage control. They see the crowds being swayed by what Jesus has said and done, and they want to quickly attempt to put a spin on what Jesus has done. They don't **dare** challenge the healing. The healing was compelling. Everyone knew the man. Everyone saw Christ heal him, and the Pharisees wouldn't dare say, "Oh, it didn't happen." And so they attempted to attribute the source of Jesus' power to heal **not to the Lord, but to the evil one himself**.

In fact, in the parallel passage in Mark 3, they go so far as to say that Beelzebul himself inhabited the soul of Christ. Elsewhere in Matthew they come right out and say, "***You are Beelzebul. You are Satan.***" These Pharisees, though they see the compassion of Christ displayed toward the demon-possessed man, they assert that the power that Christ used to free him was evil and came from the evil one. These Pharisees are the religious leaders of their day, and yet for all their pretensions to godliness and spirituality, they were fundamentally evil. A few verses later, Jesus will call them, "***A generation of vipers.***"

Now we **must not fail** to see the wickedness inherent in the charge that these men had brought against Jesus. They have seen the truth and yet they call it evil. And both the book of Romans and the Prophet Isaiah say, "***Woe to them***" who call good evil and evil good. These are people who have seen evil. They've seen good clearly, and yet they've called it "***evil.***" And note their self-deception. By slandering Jesus, they prove **about themselves** what they were attempting to get the crowds to believe about Jesus. They wanted the crowds to think that **Jesus** was of Satan. And yet by their slander against the Lord and against His compassion, they only prove that they themselves were under the control of the evil one.

We shouldn't be surprised, friends, when we find the gospel obstinately opposed by those whose hearts are darkened today. If the Lord Jesus Christ can do miracles, and still people can resist the truth of His gospel because of the wickedness and hardness of their heart, we shouldn't be surprised that when we bear witness to the gospel, there will be some who defiantly oppose it.

We shouldn't think that if we could only tell it just a little bit better, or a little bit kinder, or if we could live just a little bit more consistently, it will wipe out all objections to the gospel. That's just not the case. Because the Lord Jesus tells us that there are people in the

world whose hearts are so darkened that they will reject truth no matter how bright the light. And it appears these Pharisees are among them. And so the next thing we see is that those ...

v. 25–32: WORDS ARE CHALLENGED

“Knowing their thoughts, He said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.²⁶ And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.³⁰ Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.³¹ Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Now Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisees. Not only does He bring a devastating **response** to the Pharisees, but He **returns** the challenge. The Pharisees accuse Him of being of the evil one and doing His works according to the power of Satan. The Lord Jesus replies in a very detailed way. We’re told in verse 25 that Jesus knew their thoughts. Now that could mean that Jesus knew the general attitude of the Pharisees. But Matthew seems to be saying more than that. He seems to be saying that Jesus knew the inner heart **attitude** which lay behind their outward **attacks** on Him. He knew their hearts. The Apostle John tells us that He knew all men. And this is what Matthew is reminding us of here. He’s aware of their thoughts and their heart attitudes. He knows the state of their heart as they oppose Him. And the state of their heart is simply reflected in the words that they’ve spoken out loud.

And His response to them has five parts. We won’t study all of them in great detail today, but I would like to walk you through them because they’re very important. **The first part of His response** you see in verse 25. The first thing He says is that their claim about Him is **absurd**. He says it’s **absurd** to claim that I’m casting out demons by the power of Satan. And He shows the **absurdity** by quoting a proverb, and then by asking a question. The proverb He quotes is one that applies to all sorts of relationships — family relationships, national relationships — and what He says is, *“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.”*

And having quoted that proverb which simply means, of course, that when there is internal dissension a family, a relationship, a kingdom cannot be built up, it can only disintegrate, He asks a question, verse 26, *“And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”*

How could it be that Satan would deliberately be fighting against himself when His goal is to build up His kingdom? And so He shows the patent **absurdity** of their particular charge. “You’re saying that I’m casting out Satan’s minions by the power of Satan.” And He said, “That just doesn’t make sense.”

But the second thing He says is that their criticism is unfair, it’s inconsistent. You see, the Pharisees had followers who claimed to cast out demons. Now Jesus doesn’t get into a long argument about whether they actually did or didn’t. Jesus knows that the Pharisees had followers who claimed to cast out demons. And He basically says this, “Why is it that when I cast out demons, you accuse Me of doing it by the power of Satan, but when **your** followers, the ones

that **you've** taught in Hebrew school and seminary, why is it that when they do it, you say, "Oh, this is a mighty work of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." It's bad when I do it, but when they do it, it's acceptable.

That's inconsistent. That's unfair criticism. And so He suggests to them, verse 27, "***And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.***" In other words He says, "If your followers, your sons, if they judge that you're right about Me, that I'm casting out demons by the power of Satan, then that calls into question what they're doing. And if they judge that you're wrong about Me, that I'm not casting out demons by the power of Satan, then it calls in question your judgment about Me." And so He shows that the sons, the followers of the Pharisees, whichever way they answer that question will undercut the criticism which the Pharisees have brought against him.

The third thing that He says is in verse 28, "***But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.***" He shows that their criticism deliberately obscures the great work of the Holy Spirit. I want you to hear, loud and clear, what the Lord is saying here. The Holy Spirit had been at work under the old covenant. He had been there in the promises and prophets and types and forms. He had been there working in the Old Testament, inspiring the prophets as they spoke the word of God to the people. He had done mighty works in the old covenant, but never before had there been a greater work of the Holy Spirit than the recreation of God's people and the expansion of God's kingdom. And the Lord Jesus is saying, "The spirit is at work in My ministry. And yet you ascribe the work of the spirit of God to demons."

Let me try to put that for you graphically. It would be as if God spoke to the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai and said, "***I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of slavery,***" and then gave to them the Ten Commandments. And there were a group of Israelites standing at the base of the mountain who said, "You know, I don't think that was the voice of the Lord God of Israel. I think that was the voice of Satan." Jesus is saying, "You have called the greatest work of the Spirit, a greater work than the giving of the Ten Commandments, the work of Satan." And that reveals the **stubbornness** and the **wickedness** of your hearts. Jesus' power over the demons was a manifestation of the fact that God's kingdom had come, that the Lord was coming with power.

Indeed the Lord Jesus goes on to say that you can't even cast out Satan until you've bound him. And so He's saying, "Every time you see Me cast out a demon, you know that I have first attacked Satan. I have bound him. I have restrained him, or I wouldn't be able to do that because Satan's kingdom cannot be plundered until Satan is restrained." He's saying, "That's what I'm doing every time I cast out demons." And He goes on to indicate that by His incarnation, by His victory over Satan in the wilderness, by His preaching, by His ministry, He was in the act of binding Satan. And yet they deliberately attribute that work to Satan himself.

The fourth thing He says we find in verse 30, "***Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.***" He says that you must either be for Him or against Him. The Lord is saying there's no middle ground. You must either be with Me, or you are against Me. There's no middle position because two kingdoms are at war. You can't pull for both sides at once. When you're at a football game, and someone's switching sides between each possession, and pulling for one team and then pulling for the other, everybody in the crowd **hates** that person. **No one** likes him. Because that person's not being loyal to one side. So also

in this war, the war between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan, you can't play in the middle. **You cannot be on neither side.** You're either on one side or the other.

If we're *with Him*, and by "*with Him*" Jesus means an intimate relationship with Him, if we're *with Him*, if we're in fellowship *with Him*, if we're in saving relationship *with Him*, He says in this verse that we will gather *with Him*. That is, we will be involved in His mission to gather in the lost, those that aren't in a relationship *with Him* ... yet. If we're *with Him*, then we're in the business of bringing people to Him. Notice also, He says that if we're against Him, (and you can be against Him either by being openly opposed or simply apathetic to His claims) if you're against Him, then you're actually contributing to the **scattering** of the sheep, which will make them even more vulnerable to the prey of Satan.

The last thing that Jesus says, you'll see in verses 31 and 32, "*Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.*"³² *And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.*"

His target here is the particular sin of the Pharisees. Now this is a hard issue. The unforgiveable sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit are things that are very difficult to explain. If it were easy to explain, there wouldn't be so much confusion, and there wouldn't be so much wrestling with that issue. But let me see if I can clarify this at least just a little. **Blasphemy** is a word that was used more broadly in Greek than the way we normally use it today. When we say **blasphemy**, we usually mean someone who is insulting God directly, someone who is defiantly opposed to the Lord in speech and in attitude.

In the Greek, **blasphemy** can be used for any kind of insulting language against either God or man. It can be used of any disrespectful language towards men. Jesus says in verse 31 that those kinds of insulting words which tear down God or man, those things can be forgiven. But not **blasphemy of the Holy Spirit**. And by that He means a **defiant irreverence** for the Holy Spirit's work manifested **in speech, in heartfelt blunt words**. Sometimes people identify the unforgiveable sin with not being repentant, if we want to give it one word. That's certainly part of the sin that Jesus is speaking about here. But He seems to be speaking more particularly about the **defiant, irreverent words** which the Pharisees have shown to this great work of the Holy Spirit.

You can see this pictured in two very similar events. The first event of Peter's denial of Christ, and the second event of Judas' denial of Christ. At one level, those experiences are similar. Peter engaged in a serious action of the denial of our Lord on the night in which He was delivered up. Judas engaged in a serious action of denial of our Lord. Peter **deserted** the cause. Judas **attacked** the cause. Peter was later remorseful and repentant. Judas was later remorseful, but never repentant. Peter was **temporarily** disloyal to his Lord. Judas was **permanently** disloyal to his Lord. Peter was publicly restored by the grace of Christ. Judas killed himself without ever having been reconciled with his Lord. Here we see the outworking of two hearts, both of which had engaged in serious sin, but one of which had been permanently hardened to the Lord.

And that's a great picture for the next truth that Jesus reveals to us, and that's the Biblical principle that ...

v. 33–24: WORDS REVEAL CHARACTER

*"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit."*³⁴ *You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For*

out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ *The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.* ³⁶ *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,* ³⁷ *for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

In this section, I'm going to focus on what Jesus says in verse 35 that our hearts are storehouses of good and evil and we learn there that **we are what we think and do and say**. Look at those words, ***“The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.”*** A person's heart is a treasure chest. It's a storehouse and what a man bring out of that storehouse depends on what's in the storehouse.

You can't bring out of a treasure chest something that's not in it. And so when we bring forth goodness, it's a sign that God's grace is at work and when we bring forth evil it is either a sign that we are contradicting the nature which Christ intended us to have, or it's a sign that we are devoid of that spiritual goodness which the Holy Spirit desires for us. A person's grace and comfort and experience and knowledge and affections and resolutions — those are good treasures from the heart. When we can say with the psalmist things like ***“we desire to know Your word and study Your word”*** - that's a sign of a spiritual work in our hearts. But when our hearts are set on evil things, when our tongues are constantly tearing down and uttering slander and making flippant statements about God, it's an indication of where our hearts are really at.

Our nature determines our speech. And our speech is an indication of our nature. Since our words are intricately connected to our natures, we must not fail to examine our words; not because our words are the ultimate issue, but because they are the key indications of what's going on in our hearts. We ought to have a longing to be right with God in the area of our speech.

And we ought to long to do what is good but that can only happen by God's grace. The area of speech teaches us that, doesn't it? There's nothing **so hard** to control as the tongue. Even when we think we're using it for good, we can use it to tear down. Even among the people of God, and so it's a sign that we must depend upon the work of the spirit in our lives if we ever expect to master this area. Matthew Henry said, “Unless the heart be transformed, the life will never be thoroughly reformed.” Unless our hearts are changed we'll never get a handle on those outward expressions of the heart, whether they're deeds or words.

And of course our concern shouldn't only be to look good but to actually to have been transformed. We don't want to be hypocrites — looking spiritual on the outside — while our hearts are devoid of fellowship with God and love for one another. We want to be transformed and only the Holy Spirit can do that. One is transformed when he or she believes in the Lord Jesus Christ — accepting His claims, receiving Him as He is offered in the gospel as the only Savior of our souls and being transformed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. That's how we experience transformation, and speaking words that honor God is a mark of spiritual growth in us. Our tongues represent, very obviously, the work of the spirit in our hearts.

We should remember that God takes note of every word we say. And that disrespectful and empty and foolish words are displeasing to God and that someday we'll give an account for our words. That's an awesome thing, isn't it? Pretty scary, I think, to live in the light of the fact that our talk will be judged at the last day. The tone of our speech will be evidence either for or against us in that last day. This reminds us that **we need the grace of God**. There's nothing like the tongue to remind you that it is impossible for you to walk perfectly before God. There is

nothing like the tongue that shows you that you need the grace of the gospel in the Lord Jesus Christ. But I don't want to end on a completely negative note, because I believe, with all my heart, that ...

CONCLUSION: *You Can Be A Great Church*

As you may know, we have three students in seminary right now. Janelle Esposito is in the counseling program at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, while Philip Pugh and Amanda Garnier are attending Gordon–Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. As a graduate of both schools, I think this is great. I haven't heard from Amanda recently, but from her Facebook posts it looks like she's falling in love with New England, which is easy to do.

I did recently hear from Philip Pugh, and he wrote something that I found very encouraging. He wrote, "Spiritually, I am spending more time in prayer than I have in a while (chalking it up to devotions **with coffee**) and have already been blessed by the morning prayer service that is held every weekday. I'm still praying about where to find a church, so keep that in mind. **I am only just now realizing how much the folks at Potomac Hills blessed me this past year**, so pray that I could find good fellowship like I did **when I was with all of you.**"

And recently Janelle Esposito, who has a blog and writes often, posted the following. She was writing about being a single woman and how hard that can be sometimes, and near the end of a long post, she wrote this, "I guess I would like people to treat me like an adult, and not like a kid simply because I'm unmarried without kids. I would like others in the Church to pursue me, because I often feel like I am on the outskirts. Separate singles ministries do nothing but segregate singles even further than everyone else.

The most loved I ever felt at church was the ages of 23-25 at a suburban congregation in Virginia. I was one of the only single people my age there, and **I was able to connect** with families, teenagers, young married couples. **I was regularly invited** to peoples' houses, and was simply treated like family. One lady told me she could be my Leesburg mom. **I just felt so loved, and invited into community. I had friendships** which crossed generational gaps, and I got along just fine. I did not feel like the minority. I was family.

I did not realize how rare that was."

Philip and Janelle are writing about **YOU**.

They're writing about how you **treated** them, how you **accepted** them, how you **loved** them, and how you **spoke** to them. They're writing about how your **words** ... to them ... were filled with **grace**. And how much they miss that.

Words make a difference. **Your** words make a difference. Jesus says words demonstrate whether or not you're following Him. Our brilliant seminary students are telling the world that **you** are following **Him**. They have heard **your words**. And they're **words of grace**. And **words of life**. Thank you.

You need to pray. Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. In this passage, we hear Your Son. Open our ears that we might hear the words of our Savior. And open our mouths that we might speak words that show the world that Jesus is the Christ, that He has the words of life, the words of love, the words of forgiveness, the words of grace and mercy. And help us to know and believe and speak ... that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.

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Deuteronomy 32:46-47

*“Take to heart all the **words** by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the **words** of this law. ⁴⁷ For it is no empty **word** for you, but your very life, and by this **word** you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”*