

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"



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Grace in the Heart Requires Grace in the Tongue

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. (Colossians 4:6)

We relish those occasions when someone opens the door for us to talk about our strong belief in God's truly amazing grace. We'd struggle to find anything we'd rather discuss. Well it should be. Paul accepts this truth and builds a logical life-ethic on this same grace foundation. If we truly believe in God's grace as God's exclusive saving motive for our salvation, how strongly and consistently do we witness that belief in our words to those around us? If someone judged our heart only by our words, would they see as much grace in our words as they would see in our heart's belief? Would our spouse, our children, our boss at work, or our next-door neighbor know by our speech what we believe in our heart? Paul requires just such a testimony from us.

This passage may do more to demand a consistent definition of grace from us than any of the salvation passages that we quote to our friends. You see, the fundamental premise of grace is that the favor bestowed is not deserved. If it were deserved, it would not be grace, right? Many of us might well come face to face with the realization that we believe in salvation by grace but practice speech salvation by works. We readily claim and defend God's saving grace in our own case, but we require demanding works of the people around us. Our words conspicuously lack the grace toward others that we claim so vigorously for ourselves.

Paul associates grace-words with salt that seasons and enhances the flavor of food. From history's long-term perspective, we live in a rather atypical time. We regularly see news stories about how much excessive salt Americans consume in their diet. Historically salt was a precious commodity that people treasured and protected. When I go into the kitchen to cook, I try to find various seasonings and herbs to add flavor to the food, specifically to try to reduce our salt intake. However, regardless of the delightful flavors you add, nothing can replace a little salt's flavor enhancing power.

In this analogy Paul draws our minds into a fascinating idea. Grace in our speech with other people acts like salt on food. Salt preserves and, to some extent serves as a mild antiseptic, but Paul

names his point in the analogy, "...seasoned with salt..." Imagine words as food. When someone speaks to you in a kind, respectful tone, their words "taste" good. When you sense sarcasm or harsh criticism in their words, they do not taste so flavorful. We can't do a thing about the words people use in their speech, but we can control the words we use in our own conversations. Now put the shoe on the other foot. Imagine a recent conversation you had with someone. How do you imagine your words "tasted" to that person?

On occasion most of us encounter someone who speaks with such harshness and bluntness as to imitate a professional wrecking crew. If you challenge their destructive "flavor," they are already prepared to defend their sharp words, "Well, I tell it like I see it. I don't candy-coat my words." Someone should ask such a person, "So do you believe your knowledge of what is appropriate on all occasions is precisely correct and proper? Have you ever overstated your "Tell it like I see it" words, later discovering that you were mistaken? Few of us, even the most wise and intuitive among us, can boast of such wisdom. How about none of us? This destructive wrecking-ball use of words works to avoid any appearance of grace, preferring an arrogant sense of personal superiority over anyone who dares to disagree.

We all enjoy certain foods more than others. We look for reasons to eat certain foods, while we carefully rationalize why we should not eat other foods. There is a natural season for some foods. For example, a baby or a young child needs large quantities of milk and milk products to help their developing bodies grow strong. However, excessive dairy products for most adults will push their cholesterol numbers over the top in a distinctly unhealthy direction. Most of us significantly altered our diets as we became increasingly aware of the dangers of cholesterol factors from certain foods. Amazing, isn't it, that the better a food tastes the more cholesterol it contains. Others among us pick up diseases or various conditions that prohibit our eating certain kinds of food. Diabetes patients need to consistently alter the timing as well as the content of their daily diet.

Paul knows of no such restriction with the "grace diet." Notice the broad scope of his exhortation, "*Let your speech be **always** with grace....*" "Grace speech" is never out of season or good taste. It contains no unhealthy ingredients that damage our spiritual health. In fact, it always contributes to better spiritual health than avoiding it will cause.

"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine...." (Titus 2:1) Paul requires Titus and, by extension, all ministers of the gospel to not only preach the truth, to preach sound doctrine, but he also requires them to preach it so as to "...become..." it. A wise preacher's words not only are true and sound, a word that refers to truthfulness, but also to good health. They are also becoming to sound doctrine. They beautify it, enhance it, and make it palatable to those not familiar with it. Most of us have endured those sermons in which the preacher spoke words of truth, technically so at least, but his hateful attitude and words made us wish we could disagree with him. He failed to obey Paul's exhortation to Titus. His words distinctly failed to "...become sound doctrine...."

In our study passage, Paul adds this same obligation to every believer. He takes us beyond the application of the principle only to preachers. We cannot control another person's personal taste preferences, either in food or in belief. We can, however, implement Paul's requirement. We can serve up our words with grace, whether our hearers like the taste of grace or not. Their non-grace, their redefined grace, or their compromised grace vocabulary may give them a predisposition toward despising the very taste of grace. Despite their taste, we can work at "flavoring up" our words of grace to taste their very best.

We've all had the experience of learning to enjoy a certain food that we thought we didn't like at all. By our saturating our conversation with an attitude of grace, we just might encourage other folks to rethink their "taste" for grace. My wife and I grew up, thinking that the only way salmon was served was out of a can. We endured it, but we certainly didn't enjoy it. After our cholesterol consciousness began to influence our diet, we started grilling more chicken and fish. Our selection was fairly narrow in terms of the fish we'd grill. One evening on the way home from work I stopped by our favorite fish market to pick up whatever kind of fish we liked for dinner that night. The market had none of the fish that we'd tried and liked. They did have very fresh looking salmon. The butcher highly recommended it, even agreeing to refund my money if we didn't enjoy it. I reluctantly took it home. When Sandra saw what I brought home, she tried to hide a wince. Our mutual expectation for enjoyment of dinner that night dropped several

notches. We had the idea that fresh grilled salmon would taste just like the salmon we'd had out of the can. We seasoned it up and cooked it. When we took our first bite, both of us smiled and licked our chops. Delicious! Grilled fresh salmon is now one of our favorite grilled fish. We eat it at least once a week.

Paul's words nudge us to alter our "word diet," and, more importantly, to alter the "word diet" that we serve up regularly to others. If we have allowed a non-grace diet of words to control our vocabulary, we need to go to God's recipe book and learn a new way to serve up our words. We need to discover the miracle-working impact of grace in our word-diet.

...that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. Do not overlook Paul's objective. God obligates us to "answer" people who ask us a question. He does not require us to beat them up with words. He does not require us to see how harshly we can embarrass or humiliate them with our words. He requires us to "answer" them. The idea is to respond appropriately and with discretion. In simple words, we need to study our vocabulary, to modify it so that we comfortably and readily answer people with graceful answers.

Paul's words imply something that we need to regard as vital to our "grace-words." You normally answer someone who asks you a question. We need to work long before we engage other people in conversation to transform our lives, to live differently than the "ordinary Joe." We need to make it obvious that we "march to a different drum beat." And our walk should be so joyful and contented that people are drawn to our walk. They see it as appealing as having something about it that they may not understand, but they definitely sense that they need more of the "secret ingredient" in the recipe of our life. A Christian may live the ethics of Christianity, but do so with such hatefulness or resentment, or with such a sense of imprisoned compulsion, wholly void of joy, that people read our message and avoid asking us questions. They want nothing to do with our lifestyle. Or we may live that same faith with such joy and contented grace that those same people are drawn to us and ask us the question. Do we live so that people want to ask what "makes us tick"? When they ask us the question, do we have the answer? And does our answer always communicate a distinct flavor of grace to those who ask? Maybe we all need to alter our personal taste. Expand our word vocabulary, or rather our heart vocabulary, so that words of grace become a natural response. Are you ready for this new vocabulary?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder
Pastor

10:30 A. M.