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# [Week 3] War of Words - The Word in the Flesh Manuscript

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Good morning and welcome to our third class in this *War of Words* AM seminar. Let’s **PRAY.**

How many of you have not been here for the first two classes of this series? The content for this AM Seminar is adapted from a book entitled *War of Words* by Paul Tripp, and the quick recap of the first two weeks is that this seemingly normal, ordinary thing we do every day called “talking” is actually more profound than we realize. As human beings, we are unique in all of creation in being able to talk because two weeks ago we saw from Genesis 1 that we are created in the image of the Great Speaker. God has given our words significance and value. We do not really understand the significance of words until we realize that the first words that human ears ever heard in Genesis 1 were not the words of a human being, but the words of God. Think about that! The value of every piece of human communication is rooted in the fact that *God* speaks. And yet, despite the truth that God speaks, and the truth that everything we say has its origins in his words to us, there was another speaker in the Garden of Eden. His arrival began the great war of words that we now fight daily, hence last Sunday’s class, when Satan speaks, because sadly our words often also image the Great Deceiver of Genesis 3.

From Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, fast forward thousands of years later and picture a husband and wife in Nairobi today. A Christian husband and a Christian wife for that matter. They likely don’t have to look back very far in their conversation with each other to recall a word hastily or thoughtlessly spoken, a word of irritation, a quick accusation, a selfish comment-or-demand, an “I told you so” where a word of comfort or encouragement was needed, an impatient retort, a moment of needless nit-picking, a comment filled with self-righteousness or self-pity, or a situation where past sins are resurrected for a moment. That’s us! Even with all the scriptural teaching that we have received, even with all our personal commitment and practical effort to improve, even with all our pleas for forgiveness and all our prayers for help, we still have problems with our talk, especially with those whom we love the most. That’s how great our need is! That’s how deep our problem is!

And yet, as we’ve said in each of the past two classes, we are prone to forget what our real problem is. We tend to forget that our communication problems reveal a heart issue, as we saw from Mark 7 last week. The question, then, that we’re tackling this morning is, how does God, the Great Speaker, address our need in this area? You know what he doesn’t do? He does *not* demand that we meet his standard in our own strength. No, he sends his Son, the Word, to take on flesh, to live as a man and to be the most glorious of all of God’s messages to us! *The Word became flesh.* Listen to the words of John chapter 1 (you can see the references in your handout): **READ John 1:1-5, 10-14, 16-18.**

In the sermon two Sundays ago, with tongue firmly in cheek, I asked if you were looking for your word for 2025? And I then asked, rhetorically, whether this Word of John 1 would do. Think about it. The God who created speech and spoke the world into existence, the God who used human words to reveal himself to his people throughout the ages, comes to his world as the Word, to his people who have forsaken him. He is not only a speaker of truth, he *is* Truth, and only in him is there any hope for us. Only in the Word made flesh do we find hope to win this war of words and start to speak again according to our Maker's example and design. The word became flesh because there was no other way to fix what was broken in us.

The fact that the Word came in the flesh tells us something very significant about our trouble with talk: Our problem is not fundamentally one of ignorance or ineptitude. Remember the words of James that we saw last week in **READ James 3:7-8**? James' point is that our communication problems cannot be solved by normal human means. Changes in location, situation, education, training, exercise, or the nature of the relationship will not solve the problem. The tongue is humanly untameable! It is a powerful, restless evil that leaves all of us confounded.

There's a fundamental biblical observation we need to make at this point: *The Word would not have come into our world if our struggle were primarily a struggle of flesh and blood.* The problem with our words is an intensely spiritual one, a problem of the human heart. Perhaps, you're a wife who is very hurt by the way your husband communicates with you. Or maybe you're a young adult and it's hard not to feel condemned by the way your parents talk to you. Maybe you're a husband who is bitter over the lack of respect given to you by your family. Each of us has been personally hurt by the words of others, and each of us has spoken words that have stung others. Because of this, it is important to recognise that the war of words is actually the fruit of a greater, more fundamental war. This war is the war of wars; it is what life is about. On page 2 of your handout you’ll see that Paul refers to this war in Ephesians 6:12. Could someone please READ: **“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”**

If you flip a page or two back in your Bible, in Ephesians 4, Paul says a great deal about the talk of the body of Christ. In v.2 he calls us to be “completely humble and gentle,” to “be patient, bearing with one another in love,” in v.3 to “make every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” in v.15 to speak “the truth in love,” in v.25 to “put away falsehood” and “speak the truth with [one’s] neighbour.” He says in v.26, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” In v.19 He urges us to “let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up.” He calls us in v.31 to “let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice,” in v.32 to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave [us].”

Then in Ephesians 5 and 6, Paul applies these principles to the church, the home and the outside world. You cannot read what Paul has to say here, without being impressed with the depth and scope of the commands. Perhaps you're thinking as you read, *Paul, you've got to be kidding! Completely humble and gentle talk in our home? No way!* *Communication that is free of all anger and malice? That will be the day!* Yet, this is what Paul calls us to. And these commands are intended to help us.

But perhaps you are saying to yourself, “These commands don't help me – they just leave me discouraged!” But maybe that is exactly the point. When you face God's high standard for our words and see how far short we all fall from it, you are driven to recognize two things that are the focus of today’s class:

1. First, you and I are immediately faced with the fact that we have grave problems in our communication that are much more fundamental than skill, technique and vocabulary.
2. The second fact flows from the first: Since our need runs deeper than technique, we need more than a training course or a new set of skills. We need a rescue that only Jesus, the living Word and Our Redeemer, can provide.

So, when our best efforts to win the war of words have failed, we encounter the greatest hope of all. But it is not in us or in our potential. It is in the Word - and specifically his presence, his power, and his promises. Because Jesus has come to live, die, and be raised for us, there is hope that we can speak as God has designed.

In light of that, Paul's words in Ephesians 6:12 could not be more practical. When Paul writes about spiritual warfare at the end of this letter, he's not changing the subject. He is summarising everything he has said before (including all that we’ve just seen him say about communication). Paul is zealous for us to realise that *life is war*, not with other people, but with *spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms!* This is what is being played out in the home, the church, the workplace, and the community that he’s just outlined in chapters 5 and 6. This war is what makes each of these arenas difficult. We're not fighting only to get along with one another. Far more importantly, we are fighting to withstand the Devil's schemes against us! That’s the war beneath the war of words.

Life is war. A dramatic conflict is underway between the forces of the Great Speaker and the Great Deceiver. While God is seeking to root us deeper in his life, his peace and his truth, Satan seeks to uproot us by deceitful scheming, plausible lies, and cruel trickery. Like all wars, this war is for control. It is a war for our hearts. And if this spiritual war were not going on, there would be no war of words.

This amplifies our understanding of the gospel, our understanding of why it was necessary for Jesus to come. Jesus, the living Word, came as Revelation and Redeemer so that we would have what we need to stand our ground in the midst of this conflict. In ourselves, we are no match for these “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” So Christ came, not only as the Word but as the second Adam. We touched on this in our conclusion last week. The first Adam represented us all, and when he faced Satan, he believed his lies, succumbed to his trickery, and fell into sin. Christ had to come as the Second Adam, again as our representative, to face Satan. Thus before his public ministry, Christ faced his foe. Three times he was tempted with the same old lies and trickery. Three times he defeated Satan, demonstrating his power over the forces of evil, and accomplishing a great victory for us (Matthew 4:1-11; 12:22-29; Romans 5:12-21).

Through his work, Christ empowers and equips us for the battle so that when the evil day comes, we will be able to stand firm, letting nothing move us away from the life to which he has called us. This life includes speaking in a way that is worthy of the gospel. Jesus’ victory gained for us the ability to live at peace with him and one another.

This gives us a completely different perspective on the fight about who gets to use the bathroom first or who ate the last slice of the family's favourite cake. The problem of these moments goes beyond these surface issues. We are what is wrong in each of these situations. We are the common element in all of our communication problems. And it is vitally important that we neither minimize our problem (by saying that these problems are not important), nor give in to cynicism (by saying that there is no real hope for change). These little moments do matter, for they are where we live every day. Yet there is hope of substantial change because Jesus Christ, the Word, the Redeemer, has given us every resource we need to speak as we are meant to speak.

Section 4 in your handout: What has the Word given us so that we can speak up to God's standard and according to his design? In a brief prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul uses four dynamic words to capture the resources that are ours because of Christ's redeeming work.

The first word is *hope* in v.18*.* In the Word we find hope for our words. This hope is not a dreamy wish or an unfounded expectation. No, biblical hope is nothing less than *a confident expectation of a guaranteed result.* In him, we can win the war of words. We do not have to settle for bitter, angry, destructive, divisive communication. We can have high standards and set lofty goals, not because of who we are, but because of what he has done. So we refuse to settle for the status quo, we refuse to let the creeping cynicism of hopelessness cause us to give up in the face of struggle. No, we live and speak with faith and courage, believing that something better can be achieved because of what he has done.

As a wife, you cannot let yourself believe that your marital communication will never improve. In the Word there is hope. As a husband, you cannot give in to your anger and the words that it dictates. There is hope. As a friend, you cannot refuse to talk in your moment of hurt, believing it won't matter. There is hope. As a parent, you must believe that you can minister to your children, even out of your own hurt and exhaustion, because the Word has come and, with him, hope. Dear friend, ask yourself, “Does my communication flow out of my confidence in the resource-giving work of the Word?”

What is our hope of speaking in a godly manner when a rebellious teenager is resisting us? What is our hope of speaking as God designed with a distant husband, or a critical wife, or a bitter Christian friend or a contentious neighbour? Where will we find the strength to speak rightly to a hard, demanding, unthankful boss, or self-centered, complaining children? What hope do we have for wholesome communication when we enter a difficult conversation, already tired and discouraged? What will we do when we struggle with our own bitterness, when we are angry or struggling with wanting our own way? What will help us when we feel falsely accused, unappreciated, unnoticed or taken for granted? What is our hope of speaking in a way that promotes the work of God rather than the desires of our sinful natures? Our only hope is the Word. His work on our behalf totally alters the way we can respond to the struggle of words.

You know how it works. Most of our daily communication isn't organised and scripted. We are constantly thrust into moments that were not part of our agenda for the day.

Case in point, consider a dad whose son approaches him one Thursday night one hour before bedtime and says, “Dad, I have a science project due tomorrow and there are a few things I need.” Bear in mind, he has known about this assignment for weeks! Trying to keep his composure, the dad asks him what he needs. “Well, I need a poster board,” the son says tentatively. “That’s not too bad,” the dad thinks. “We can piece together some cardboard from some empty boxes around the house.” “Anything else?” the dad asks. “Well, I kind of need some markers,” says the son. The dad can feel his irritation rising, but he reasons that he can probably pour some water into some dried up markers lying around the house.” “Anything else?” the dad asks. And with a frightened mumble, the son blurts out, “Three frogs and a kilo of chicken feathers.” At this, the dad cannot believe what he’s hearing!

In a flash, the war breaks out – not between him and his son, but within his heart. He’s angry and frustrated. He’s tired of the minefield of unexpected difficulty. He feels a powerful impulse to deal with the situation by beating his son with words. He wants to tell him how stupid he is and that his son is crazy if he thinks he is going to help him. He wants to tell his son that back in his day he never procrastinated with school projects. There is a lot that this dad wants to say, and in this moment, he had better have a hope that enables him to stand against everything that he instinctively wants to do in his flesh!

If the war rages in our hearts in these little, mundane moments, how much more will it be present in moments of marital anguish, or parental disappointment, or disillusioning failure in the body of Christ! Many of these moments cannot be avoided, but you will face them in a radically different manner if you believe that because of the work of the Word, there is hope for us. The next three words Paul uses describe that hope.

The second word that Paul uses in Ephesians 1:15-23 to capture the present benefits of the work of the Word is *riches,* also in v.18*.* Paul says that there are “glorious riches in Christ.” What is he talking about here? Peter captures it well when he says in 2 Peter 1:3 (no need to turn there) that “his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Not a lot of things, not more than most, but *everything* we need. Consider the words here; the verb in the passage (namely “has granted”) is in the perfect tense, which indicates an action in the past that has continuing results into the future. It means that Christ has already placed in my storehouse, everything that I need. “To do what?” you may ask. Peter says “everything for life and *godliness.*” I have been given not just everything I need for eternal life, but everything I need to live a godly life from the time I am saved until the time God takes me home to be with him! Let the power of these words sink in. The Lord will never put you in a situation without giving you everything you need to do what he has called you to do.

Let's say that you are a wife who is in a very difficult conversation with your husband. There are riches in your storehouse for this moment. Or perhaps you are an employee struggling with a very critical boss. Everything you need to speak in a godly way has already been given. Parent, you are facing another day with a rebellious and disrespectful teenager. All the riches that you need to move beyond your own hurt (H-U-R-T) and anger and to function as an instrument of the Lord have been given. The Word has come in the flesh, and in his hands are glorious riches. His supply is the only thing that will tame the human tongue!

The third word on Paul's resource list is *power.* Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 1:19: “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.” Because of the work of the Word, we have power to win the war that fuels our struggles with words. We’ve said *do not* struggle with communication simply because we lack the skills or vocabulary. Our problem is powerlessness. Our problem is inability. That's why James asked the rhetorical question, *Who can tame the tongue?* The best biblical answer to that question is: No one this side of the Word! But Christ *has* come – the Word has come – demonstrating his power in his ministry, exercising his power over evil on the cross, and blessing his people with power in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul says that God, who can do much, much more than anything we could ever ask or imagine, *is at work* by his power *within* us (Ephesians 3:20 in your handout).

Consider this for a moment. God hasn't issued us a series of grand and lofty directives and then sat back to see if we would obey them. No, he understands that our sin has rendered us powerless, and that we will not *know* what we need to know and cannot *do* what we need to do apart from him. So he has unzipped us, if you will, and gotten inside us by his Spirit. His inconceivable power is *within* us! And it is not only within, it is *at work*! Paul says that we have been given power that can be compared only to the power by which Christ was raised from the dead.

This changes everything! The Word has made us his dwelling place so that we would have the power to speak as he has designed. In him, the impossible becomes possible. The war becomes winnable. The tongue becomes tameable, no longer an instrument of evil but a producer of good.

What makes this seminar different from other seminars on communication is the gospel. It radically changes the way we understand and wage the war of words that is so much a part of the human struggle.

The gospel prevents us from having a communication model of *independent strength* that assumes our problems can be solved with the right insights and skills. The gospel forces us to face our inability. At the other end of the spectrum, the gospel also prevents us from having a communication model of *weakness and inability* that would cause us to look at God's goals and say, “If only we were able!” In Christ, we embrace both inability and ability. The Word comes to fill us with his power, precisely because we are so weak. But in Christ, we who could not stand now stand able!

Apply this to your world of talk. Power has been given. It resides with you by the Spirit and reaches to the point of your deepest communication weakness. Wife, it is a denial of the gospel to look at your husband and say to yourself, “Why bother? He can't change.” Husband, it is a denial of the gospel to be self-righteous and defensive when your wife tries to talk to you about sin in your talk. Parents, you deny the gospel when you allow your communication with your child to be ruled by unrestrained emotions and desires. Because the Word has come and has given us his power, we can step forward in courage, believing that we can gain new ground in our world of talk.

Because of the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, there is hope that the tongue can do the good God has ordained. None of us can say that we are too weak (ati “If only I had more faith,” or “If only I had a little more courage,” or “If I could only think of the right things to say”). None of us can blame our personalities (ati “I'm just an extrovert,” or “I'm just too shy,” or “I'm sorry, I'm just not a morning person”). None of us can blame our past (ati “I was never given a good example of communication growing up,” or “I was always taught to fight back,” or “My parents never really spent any time teaching us”). None of us can blame people around us (ati “If I just had children who are more compliant,” or “If my husband were more loving and affectionate, then I would <fill in the blank>” or “If my wife weren’t always criticizing me,” or “If my boss were a little more appreciative of what I do for her every day”). None of us can blame our present situations (ati “If only I had more time,” or “If only my job weren't so demanding”).

Yes, we are living with sinners, our schedules are busy, many of us were raised in negative environments, and we have all been given different personalities that help and hinder us in various ways. But this is the point: God has given us his Spirit, not in spite of, but *because* of these realities. The Holy Spirit was given so that we can do the will of God even though we are sinners in a fallen world; so that his life and strength would overwhelm all of the effects of our own sin and the sin of others against us; so that we can actually do the will of God! His power is not distant and dormant; it is *at work* within us! We can speak up to God's standard and according to his design because he lives within us with mighty, active power!

The final word that summarizes the resources we have been given in Christ is *rule.* Paul says in Ephesians 1:22-23 that Christ is “*head* over all things to the church, which is his body.” There is no situation we will ever encounter that is not ruled by Christ. Our lives are not out of control. Christ carefully administers them for our benefit and his glory.

This idea of Christ's headship and rule goes right to the place in our communication where we often get into the most trouble. Often our words reveal an attempt to control things for our own good. We are moved by a personal sense of what we want or what we think would be good, and so we speak in a way that guarantees we will get it. We defend, accuse, inflict guilt, manipulate, rationalize, argue, cajole, beg, plead, or threaten – all for the purpose of controlling a person or a situation.

Sometimes we do this out of fear. It really does feel as if our lives are spinning out of control. It does seem as if the people around us are standing in the way of what is best. It seems right to take control; if we don't, then what will happen? But fear-driven talk forgets one of the most precious promises of the gospel: that Christ right now, at this moment, is ruling all things for our particular benefit as his children. I may not always see his hand and I won't always recognize the good he is doing, but he is active and ruling all the same. Communication that attempts to find personal security by taking control, forgets one of the sweetest provisions of the Word: God's control over all things for his children.

Another way to say this is that our words often reveal that we are not so much trusting in the Lord, as we are trying to *be* him. We are attempting to do with our words what only he can do. When we do so, we will fail, hurting ourselves and those around us.

For example, a parent must not be so afraid of what will happen to his child that he tries to do with his words what only God can accomplish by his grace. Remember the example from last week of using threats: “If it's the last thing I ever do, I will get you to respect me!” Or what about using guilt: “Think of all of our hard work as your parents, think of all the money we have spent, think of all the time we have invested in you – and this is the thanks we get?” Or what about manipulation: “Remember that motorbike you asked for on your birthday? If you do ABCD, you never know – you might just find yourself holding the keys.” In each of these examples, the speaker is trying to turn the child’s heart with some kind of verbal tool.

But verbal attempts at control don't always flow out of fear. They often flow from pride. As sinners we tend to be selfish. We tend to struggle with contentment and enter every situation loaded with our own desires.

When I get up in the morning, very often, the first person I think about is me! I'm already filled with my own desires, rehearsing in my mind what I would like the day to be like. When I’m at work and the phone rings, I often think, *What now?* fearful that someone is going to interfere with my plans. When I'm driving home from work in the evening, I can find myself dreaming about what my ideal evening will be like, wondering what derailment others will have brought into the house that will destroy my dream. Our words often reveal how utterly self-focused we are and how intent we are on getting what we want from others.

“Can't I just have one night of peace!” the father screams at the child who has asked for his help on an all-night project.

“I don't think you really love me!” says the wife to her husband right as he's rushing out the door. He’s already late and now he’s angry and frustrated as well. Her words to him are self-focused, ill-timed and indifferent to the needs of her husband.

“If I didn't live here, half of my problems would be gone!” yells the teenager who has been confronted with her poor attitude. Driven by what she wants, she is striking back at parents who always seem to be in the way.

The gospel speaks to this struggle as well. Christ calls us to an agenda higher than our own pleasure. Christ rules everything for us, but his rule has not been established primarily so that we would get what we want. We are called to submit ourselves to Christ so that we would be holy and so that our holiness would bring him glory.

The Word has come and brought to our world glorious, comprehensive, faithful, redemptive control. Our talk must flow out of the rest that we have found in his rule.

These resources of Christ that we’ve just considered, are our only hope that our words will be spoken up to his standard and according to his design. In the Word we find 1. hope when all seems hopeless, 2. riches when we feel poor, 3. power when we see our weakness, and 4. rule when everything around us seems out of control.

The wholesome talk of the body of Christ at home, church, or work is rooted in the glorious realities of the gospel. The Word has come and brought with him everything we need to live a life of godly talk. Because he has come, we can have hope that our words will follow the pattern of the Great Speaker rather than the Great Deceiver. He has come to deliver us from the horrible damage of the Fall, where the wonderful gift of communication became a terrible world of trouble. Christ has come to tame what man will never tame. He has come to use for his purpose what seemed unusable. The Word has come to endow us with glorious riches and incomparable power, so that our tongues can be used as his instruments of righteousness. Our world of talk does not have to be a world of trouble, for this one, reliable reason: The Word has come.

Examine your communication with others this week. Was it built on the solid foundation that Christ has established for us? For example:

1. Do you humbly admit your inability and seek the Lord's help before important times of communication?
2. In your primary relationships, are you seeking to accomplish with words what only the Lord can do by his grace and power?
3. Do you fall prey to hopelessness, such that you either give up speaking when your words are needed, or give in to patterns of sinful talk?
4. Are you willing to admit your communication weaknesses, recognize recurring themes, confess to God and those you have offended, and commit to new patterns of talk? (All of this is based on embracing Christ's promise that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.)
5. Are you able to humbly consider what others point out as sin in your talk? Or do you deny, rationalize, turn the tables, shift blame, or wallow in your failure?
6. Do you daily thank the Lord for his provision, and the hope it gives that you can speak in a way that blesses others and glorifies him?

For our closing prayer, let's conclude by reading Paul’s prayer inEphesians 1:15-23 one more time. As we do so, ask the Lord to open your eyes to the glorious benefits of Christ's work and the hope it offers for your words. Ask him to show you where change is needed and step out there in faith. Finally, rest in the reality of what John says about the Word: In John 1:16 he says “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace,” and believe that his ever-flowing stream of grace can radically change your world of talk. **READ Ephesians 1:15-23**

**Q&A**