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# **[Week 7] War of Words - Speaking for The King Manuscript**

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# **Introduction**

Good morning and welcome to the 7th class in this AM seminar series, *War of Words*. If this is your first time joining us, we are glad that you are here. This AM seminar series aims to show us how the gospel transforms our talk. All of us have deeply offended and have been deeply offended by words and therefore the importance of this class cannot be overstated. The solution is however not found in sharpening our vocabulary or correcting our tone. The solution is found in having our hearts transformed by the gospel. In Luke 6:45, Jesus teaches that *“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”* And so, these series of classes are targeted towards unearthing the underlying heart issues and seeking to address them by the Gospel.

Last week we had the opportunity to consider how our words and communication are shaped by our wrong motives for following the King. We saw how with our minds we can acknowledge His sovereignty, but in our hearts we are the ones that are truly sovereign. We easily claim that we follow Jesus but only to the extent that His reign does not interfere with our agenda. And so our words are marked by a selfishness that seeks to use Christ to establish our agenda rather than a humility that seeks to submit God’s agenda. The main text we looked at was John 6 where Jesus rebuked a crowd He had fed for only seeking Him only for physical bread and not spiritual bread – which He was the spiritual bread, the Bread of Life. Jesus was not King, even though they professed him to be so. Their stomachs were.

And so this morning. We continue with this theme of Jesus as King. We will consider the King’s agenda for our talk. If you notice at the back of your handouts, this is the title of the second part of the AM Seminar. This is to therefore say that today’s class is where we will look to properly expound God’s agenda for our talk. In other words, we will seek to answer the question: *What does God really want with my words?* The end goal for our communication is not simply to be a nice person with polished words. God has a mission for our mouths that is way bigger and more important than this that we will be looking at in our class today.

# **Ambassadors for The King**

During our time together we will mainly focus on the text in your handouts under the heading *“Ambassadors for The King”*  – 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

***2 Corinthians 5:11–21 (ESV)***

*[11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. [12] We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. [13] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. [14] For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

*[16] From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. [18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

What do we notice from this text? Several things.

The first thing we notice is that Paul describes us as Ambassadors for Christ. Notice the first part of verse 20, *“[20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. …”* It is interesting that he would use the term ambassadors in this context to describe our relationship to God. What does the word ambassador mean? *[Have people answer]*

1. A political ambassador is someone who has been called from his or her homeland to live in another country and represent the message, methods, and character of his leader (president, king, prime minister, etc.) in that country. Paul's message here is radical and dramatic: we have been called to be ambassadors of the King! God has put us just where he wants us to represent him. If we are ever going to speak as he has ordained for us to speak, we must be aware of our ambassador status. We are where we are because we are called to represent the Lord. Paul says that for the Christian, the old life that was structured around self-interest is gone. We are new creations; the old has passed away. Dead and gone is the life in which we only served our own interests and did just about anything to get what we wanted. No, Paul says we have been reconciled to God and this has given us a new ministry-his work of reconciliation.
2. We are not free to advance our own interests with our talk. Our communication must always have an ambassadorial agenda (the mission, methods, and character of the King). But we need to be honest here. There is no situation in life without a struggle between our own interests and the Lord's. There are always things we want in certain ways and at certain times. It is always easy to move away from God's purposes toward our own. The shifts between the two can be subtle and deceptive, especially since as believers we are still not free from the sin of self-interest. It remains one of the fundamental heart sins that lie beneath our words. This tendency toward self-interest is what the position of ambassador so pointedly addresses. You cannot be a successful ambassador if you are primarily motivated by your own interests! You cannot be an ambassador part-time. You must always remember that you are where you are because you are a representative. You have been sent by the King to speak for him.

Another way to look at this ambassadorial role is to consider how we have been called to Represent Christ in a way that incarnates Him. To incarnate means to embody in Human form. In John 1:18, John testifies of how no one had seen the Father but Christ has made Him known. In much the same way we could say that no one has seen the Risen Christ and therefore we ought to make Him known. Think of what a great privilege this is! Jesus the Son was a sinless person who also was God, representing a sinless person, the Father who is also God. But we, a sinful people in need of saving have been bestowed an ambassadorial status by which we are to represent a sinless Savior. This can only be by grace through the power of the Spirit.

And so, let us be aware of this and not treat it lightly. Paul says that God is *“making his appeal through us.”* See your words as contributing to this agenda that is bigger than all of us. Our speech should reflect the mission of the King, the methods of the King and the character of the King.

In a practical scenario, you are a parent and you walk into your child's messy bedroom and you seek to correct them. Before unleashing a war of words, consider, “Does what I am about to say capture words that are valuable to the Lord? Does it reflect his mission?” Yes, correcting a child is a God-given responsibility for a parent, but are you using the methods of the King in addressing the situation? Would the Lord Jesus Christ respond in this manner to this situation? What about Christ’s character, am I representing his attitude?... This scenario applies across the board: a husband and wife, an employee with their boss and vice versa, an employee with other employees.

*[So in our next point we will consider in more detail the Mission of the King, and the Methods and Character of the King. But before that, any questions or comments about our role as ambassadors for Christ?]*

# **The Mission of The King**

So what exactly is the mission of the King? The second part in verse 20 tells us, *“[20] …We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”* God’s ultimate purpose and desire for humanity is reconciliation to Him. This is why Christ came. A better way to put it is verse 15, *“[15] and he [Christ] died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”* God's focus is on our hearts and our tendency toward idolatry. In previous classes, we saw that the most powerful and pervasive of all idols is the idol of self. All sinners serve it in some way. Like Adam and Eve, every sinner has the desire to be God and to have the world operate according to his or her pleasure and will. Jesus lived, died, and was raised again to break our bondage to this idol. His goal for us is that we who once lived for ourselves would be turned, by his grace, to worship and serve him alone.

Notice that the target of our mission is the heart, which is the seat of worship, either of God or of idols. As God's ambassadors we must speak with the heart in focus. This does not come naturally to human beings. Most of the time, we talk about the physical stuff of life—jobs, homes, cars, people, and possessions. Our words reflect our attempt to get what we want or our frustrations when we fail. Examples: A husband yelling at his wife when she is taking too long getting ready. A mom yelling at her daughter over her messy room, or a son complaining that his clothes make him look awkward. A toddler throwing a tantrum when he does not get to visit his favorite toy store, or a father blowing up because he can't find his newspaper.

All of this communication focuses on the physical world and flows out of hearts that worship and serve the creation more than the Creator. Because this talk is itself idolatrous, God will never use it to accomplish his mission, which is freeing people from their bondage to all kinds of idols.

God's agenda in these moments is fundamentally spiritual. He knows that only when he owns our hearts unchallenged will we relate to the world in the way he has ordained. For this reason, God is focused not only on the momentary solution to our problems but on a long-term change of heart He wants to recapture the hearts of his people so that they will serve him alone (see Ezek. 14:1-6). To accomplish this, he is willing to sacrifice our personal comfort. He will permit situations to "push our buttons,". He wants our heart sins to be revealed because we need to see them in order to repent! Very often, our hearts are most clearly revealed by our words. When our words do more harm than good, most likely we are speaking at cross-purposes with the King. Most likely, we are serving our own self-interest rather than his redemptive agenda. This is what God is concerned about most of all.

Application: So when you find yourself in any situation be aware of the fact that it is an opportunity to participate in God’s redemptive agenda. You are Christ ambassador for reconciliation to your children, to your parents, bosses etc…

Next we consider…

# **The Methods and Character of The King**

So how do we go about the mission of seeking a changed heart in people? Do we go about it in our own way? In other words, does the end justify the means? Clearly the answer is no, the end does not justify the means. An ambassador is called not only to say what the King would say, but to say it in the way he would say it. We are not free to accomplish God's mission any way we see fit. The way we do what we are called to do must be consistent with his character and purposes. Again, this is part of being incarnational: our method of speaking should reflect the way God deals with his people.

So again I ask, How do we go about seeking to produce change in people? Do we use our tools of anger, guilt, condemnation, threat, and ultimatum? Our tools of manipulation and flattery? These tools are different from the tools that Christ would use. The do not present his character in a situation. They may produce short-term change but are ineffective in producing the long-term change of heart that is supposed to be our goal. Proverbs says that harsh words stir up anger (Prov. 15:1). They escalate hostility and defensiveness rather than produce the atmosphere of receptivity and openness that a gentle answer can produce.

How does God produce long-term heart change in us? Or as Paul says it, how does he "compel" us away from living for ourselves to living for him? Second Corinthians 5:11-2]clearly teaches that the thing that compels Paul-—and us-is the love of Christ. Ultimately, the thing that turns us is not just God's sovereignty, his holiness, his anger against sin, or his mighty power. It is the kindness of the Lord that leads people to repentance, we know from Romans 2:4. Paul says the same thing to the Corinthians-it is the love of Christ that draws us away from self and motivates us to live for him. Christ's glorious, substitutionary love is his most compelling argument for change-and his most powerful means of accomplishing it.

Think about this for a moment. In every setting and circumstance of life, we have been called to speak in a way that pictures the love of God. What a high and humbling standard!Who of us can say, "Yes, Lord, I am doing this"? Who among us does not need to honestly cry out and say, "Lord, I fall so far short of your calling. Come and be my strength or I will never speak in a way that makes your glory and goodness known"?

We need to humbly admit that the methods the Lord uses-and calls us to use-are very different from those we would naturally select. It is not my natural first response to bless the person who mistreats me (Rom. 12:14). It is not my tendency to forgive the person who is confessing the same sin for the seventh time that day (Luke 17:3-4). It is not my first choice to fight evil with good (Rom. 12:21) or to forsake revenge for peacemaking (vv. 17-20). I find it hard to be patient, gentle, humble, and persevering under provocation(Eph. 4:2). I would rather wait for the person who has offended me to come to me instead of going to him (Matt.18:15-17). I find it difficult to settle issues and restore relationships before the sun sets; I want to hang on to offenses,and to replay the offense over and over again in my head(Eph. 4:26-27). I want to move people by the force of my hurt and anger, rather than by patient, humble forgiveness (James 1:20)

# **Conclusion**

And so, what does God want with our communication? He wants our words to be echoes of His Words. He wants our words to primarily represent His reconciliatory agenda for lost and sinful humanity. He wants to make His appeal through us. He wants us to be His ambassadors.

Next week we will consider, getting to the destination: practical steps towards reflecting the ambassadorial status Christ bestowed upon us when He redeemed us. And so do not be discouraged by how far you seem to be. God has brought you near in Christ.

**Getting Personal: Speaking as an Ambassador**

1. Where in your life do you find irritation, anger, or frustration that reveals a commitment to your own agenda and not the Lord's?
2. Where are your opportunities to be part of what God is doing in others?
3. In what situations do you tend to fight using the weapons of the world?
4. In what ways is God calling you to personal sacrifice in order to be his ambassador?
5. Are there people in your life that you have failed to forgive?
6. Where is God calling you to speak as an agent of reconciliation?