

Courage to Speak the Word of God (Part Two)

By Jay Wegter

We saw in part one that the divine mandate to speak God's truth to one another is undeniably clear. Scripture bears witness to the fact that godly men and women were filled with resolve to speak the Word of God in their conversations. This 'truth-speaking' is to be normative among the people of God and not relegated to the pulpit and the classroom. "Whoever speaks *is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God*; whoever serves *is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies*; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 4:11).

Rather than viewing our obligation to speak the Word to one another as merely a duty—we need to realize that our obedience in this matter is connected to our eternal joy. For, in regards to his ministry to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul exclaims: "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thess 2:19-20).

In part of this one part series, we covered the first two of the 5 biblical ways to increase our courage to speak the Word of God. By way of review, the first two points are:

I. Courage to speak the Word of God comes from abiding in Christ (Jn 15:4-5). *The more our hope and expectations are centered in Christ, the more Christ's cause will become our cause—we will build with Him. And the more we will be delivered from the approval and fear of man.*

II. Courage to speak the Word of God comes from a clear conscience (Acts 24:15-16). *To abide in Christ is to be controlled by the massive guilt transfer accomplished by our Lord at the cross. The clear conscience of the person who abides in Christ will show itself in courage (Acts 24:15-16).* This leads us to the final three ways that we may increase our courage to speak the Word:

III. Courage to speak the Word comes from obeying God's purpose to be transformed by His Word (the 'transformation mandate'). "And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove **what the will of God is**, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (Jn 17:17).

In addition to the transformation which comes from personal contact with Scripture (in study, memorization and meditation), there is also a corporate element. God has set forth a clear plan in Scripture that fellowship be spiritual fellowship. This involves edifying one another so as to build with Christ, and not merely gathering for social fellowship. The strength of any individual local church depends upon whether or not its members are committed to Christ's mandate to grow fully formed disciples through spiritual fellowship (Mt 28:18-20).

It is remarkable just how many N. T. commands govern how believers are to speak to one another. Some of the most common imperative verbs are *encourage, exhort, comfort, admonish,*

implore, edify, stimulate, and speak to one another, etc. Not only must God's truth be communicated from the pulpit, but also within the 'relational space' of believer to believer in the expression of spiritual care and parenting.

Obedience to Christ's discipleship mandate is only possible if we prayerfully speak the Word of God to one another and train one another in righteousness. "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, **with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another** with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Col 3:16-17). "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and **able also to admonish one another**" (Rom 15:14). (NOTE: in this passage, Paul links this ability and practice of mutual admonishment to the health of a local church.)

To *admonish* is to warn by making an appeal to the mind to lead a person away from a false way of walking. But the warning includes instruction, reminding, encouragement, and teaching. Through these means conduct is corrected. Thus, comments John MacArthur to *admonish* is to both encourage and to warn. Every believer is responsible to encourage and strengthen other believers by means of the truths of Scripture—for every genuine believer is divinely equipped to do so (MacArthur Study Bible, p. 1722).

The chief pathway of Scripture to be communicated verbally is to be from believer to believer. "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, **being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments**, grows with a growth which is from God" (Col 2:18-19).

This 'pathway' (of the Word from believer to believer) is the biblical pattern for spiritual maturity: "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; **but speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph 4:14-16).

I am reminded of the very sobering words of Christ, that the evaluation of our lives on the last day will in great measure be an examination of our speech. "The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the Day of Judgment. For **by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned**" (Mt 12:35-37). Yes, salvation is all of grace, but God will vindicate His holiness on the last day by evidencing the genuineness of your faith by means of a public record of your Christian life—including your speech.

Our fellowship is designed to build with Christ that we might move each member to maturity. "**We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man** with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Col 1:28-29). Sanctification and progress toward spiritual maturity is a 'group effort'. By forming partnerships for discipleship, the saints are trained and empowered to wield the Sword of Truth spiritually influencing others with the truths of Scripture. **Men must take the lead in**

this; believing men are called by God to devote themselves to Bible doctrine so that they might grow to be **examples** in exercising spiritual leadership (Titus 1:9; 2:1, 6-8, 10).

Now how does our commitment to the *transformation mandate* begin—and how does it become a lifestyle? It will take place IF we love God’s truth in the inner man—which brings us to our fourth point:

IV. Courage to speak God’s truth comes from loving God’s truth in the inner man. In order to excel at speaking the truth, the believer must be accomplished at using the Word, the Sword of Truth on himself (which is loving the truth in the inner man) (1 Tim 4:15-16).

Believers who are able to wield the Sword of Truth in their relationships are **animated by God’s truth in the inner man**—they desire what God desires—that is **God’s truth in their innermost being (Ps 51:6)**. “O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and **speaks truth in his heart**” (Ps 15:1-2).

The godly person rejects the notion that truth for the believer need not rise above mental assent/agreement and admiration. In the book of James we read: “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was” (James 1:21-24).

The biblical order is: love the Word; obey the Word; speak the Word. God’s truth has no power over a person unless the truth is loved and obeyed (*The Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards). **Where God’s truth is loved, it will be central in our conversations** (Zech 8:16; Mal 3:16; Deut 6:4-9; 11:18-19). Only when God’s truth is loved can it **dominate exceptionally** in our lives so as to renew us and transform us (Rom 12:1-2). The man of God ultimately can only preach and proclaim with conviction what he has first preached to his own heart. He can only call for repentance only where the truth has produced repentance in his own life.

Loving God’s truth in the inner man equips us to speak His truth (Ps 145). “One generation **shall praise Your works to another**, and **shall declare** Your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate. Men **shall speak** of the power of Your awesome acts, and **I will tell** of Your greatness. They **shall eagerly utter the memory** of Your abundant goodness and will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in loving kindness. The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall give thanks to You, O LORD, and Your godly ones shall bless You. They **shall speak** of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power; to **make known** to the sons of men Your mighty acts and the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom” (Ps 145:4-12).

“Then those who feared the LORD **spoke to one another**, and the LORD gave attention and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. ‘They will be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare *My* own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’ So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (Mal 3:16-18).

We could summarize this point by saying: “What must be uttered from the mountain tops must begin in the heart.” This law of truth applied is known as the *principle of the enlarged sphere*. There is a logical progression in the enlargement of a Christian’s sphere of spiritual influence. Each step of progression is stipulated on faithfulness in the previous step: **1.)** First: you **speak the truth in your own heart**—that is you love the truth in the inner man. You apply the truth to yourself in ongoing repentance. **2.)** You **speak truth in your home and in your relationships**. You speak truth in the Body of Christ in your conversations. **3.)** You begin **to live a lifestyle of edifying the body of Christ**. You are able to encourage, exhort, and admonish your fellow believers (Rom 15:14). **4.)** You **speak the truth of the gospel with boldness to a lost and dying generation**.

Power in evangelism must be built upon the principle of the enlarged sphere. For each step not only prepares a believer for the next step, but also reveals your own relationship to the truth. Out of these spiritual disciplines (our first four points) comes ACTION. Obedience doesn’t develop in a vacuum, each act of faithfulness leads to the next. “. . . the people who know their God will display strength and take action” (Dan 11:32).

V. Courage to speak the Word of God comes from our initial acts of obedience.

First we must know and believe that the cross produces zeal for good works in every true believer (Titus 2:14). In the parable of the soils, genuine faith is tied to the Word of God which dominates exceptionally so that it brings fruit to harvest (Mt 13:23). Self-examination is appropriate at this juncture (2 Cor 13:5). If you are apathetic about serving God, if you are unconcerned about fruit-bearing, and if you are listless about abiding in Christ and building with Him, then that does not bode well that you have a genuine living faith (Jn 15:6; Ja 2:20; 1 Jn 2:28). Saving faith is a ‘*zealous for good works*’ kind of faith.

Let’s review for a moment. Your determination to obey the Lord and be a truth speaker may be expressed in three stages of growth in obedience. The **FIRST STEP** addresses your relationship to God through Scripture. In this, the foundational stage, there is an attitude of heart which ought to characterize every Christian: “I cannot live without the Bible. I have to know what it means. I have committed myself to study it and understand it—my life is utterly dependent upon it.” That’s called building upon the Rock (Mt 7:24ff.). “My relationship to the Word is my lifeline in my walk with God. The Word feeds my faith and worship; the Word gets me to God in communion and fellowship.”

And then there is **STEP TWO**: “I have to apply the Bible to my life and allow it to define and order every area of my life, prioritizing my world, and controlling my affections and decisions. I will walk by the Spirit so as to make it my ambition to be pleasing to the Lord (2 Cor 5:9). I will see myself as living in the presence of God, presenting myself back to Him daily because He bought me and I am not my own, He has taken possession of me” (Rom 6:11-13; 1 Cor 6:19-20).

So, a life characterized by **conformity to the truth** sets us on a path or direction, which Jesus called the Narrow Way (Mt 7:13-14). The ability to enter **STEP THREE** in our obedience depends upon the prerequisites of living obediently in steps one and two. Step three means that you wield the Sword of Truth on others by way of encouragement, edification, exhortation, and admonishment (2 Tim 3:16-17). This is only possible because you have become experienced at wielding the Sword of Truth on yourself (you are becoming masterful at biblical self-confrontation).

So many Christians are unfruitful because they are biblically mute—their swords are permanently corroded and held fast to their sheathes by years of rust and disuse. They’ve just been neutralized, they’re not spiritual influencers; they are paralyzed spiritually (they have ‘side-lined themselves’). They have forgotten that to follow Christ is to wage war with the Word of Truth. That’s what a Christ follower does—brings the knowledge of God to others by means of the Word—our ‘divinely powerful equipment for battle. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, **for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.** *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:3-5).

Perhaps you do not as yet see yourself as Christ’s warrior. You may feel unqualified to march in obedience under His banner, taking your orders from Him, and tearing down fortresses raised up against the knowledge of God. What is the solution? We can begin by obeying in **small doable steps**. Consider asking questions which create opportunities to bring the Word into your conversations. When speaking with believers: *What has the Lord been showing you from Scripture? Where have you found the hottest part of the spiritual battle field in your life? Is there a ministry idea you want to pursue? Who are you discipling? Who is discipling you? How may I pray for you? May I share with you how God has been encouraging me from His Word?*

Start with encouragement. Everyone needs encouragement; discouragement is one of the enemy’s greatest weapons to neutralize the people of God. Determine that you will obey God and be a blessing to others in the Body. Determine to move your conversations from mundane and casual to meaningful by prayerfully speaking God’s Word and truth into the lives of others. Take that first step of obedience by ‘steering’ the conversation in the direction of divine truth. As a former zoology major during my university days, I can draw upon countless examples from the creation which give testimony of the infinite wisdom and goodness of God the Designer. It is so enjoyable to bring these wonders of God’s creation into my conversations.

Think ahead of time about what you may share (“premeditate”). “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such **a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear**” (Eph 4:29). “. . . and **let us consider** how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Heb 10:24). That’s premeditation!

Our faith is both strengthened and challenged when we see the faith of others expressed by means of the truths of Scripture. Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes that when we hear others speaking the truths of Scripture to us, it strengthens our faith. “For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, **that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine**” (Rom 1:11-12). By speaking the Word of God in our relationships, we are able to connect life in the Body of Christ to the Great Commission. Our unity and maturity in the Body depend upon it. Howard Hendricks said it well: equipping one another through the Word results in *unity of the body, maturity of the saints, and conformity to Christ.*

In the final analysis, God is the source of our courage. We are to *allow our hearts to take courage.* “Wait for the LORD; be strong and **let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD**” (Ps 27:14). The ability to act in courage is a function of waiting on the Lord. Faith’s object is the goodness of the Lord and the confident expectation that He will preserve the faithful, and empower them to bear

witness to the truth (Jn 15:26-27).

Those around us need our courage in speaking the Word of God. It was a penitent King David who prayed, *“Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee”* (Ps 51:11-12). The next generation is depending upon our courage to speak the Word. They are waiting for our faithfulness. They will not put their confidence in God unless they see the faith of their fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters—hearing from them the joy of God, the works of God, and commands of God (Ps 78:3-8).

Questions for review, understanding and application:

- 1) Why does Scripture have so much to say about our conversations?
- 2) Why is it impossible for a genuine believer to have a ‘casual’ relationship with Holy Scripture?
- 3) What is the connection between a clear conscience and the courage to prayerfully speak the Word of God into the lives of others?
- 4) Why does every believer need to develop ‘first hand convictions’?
- 5) Why are the most important sermons the sermons we preach to ourselves?
- 6) What is the connection between our ambition to please Christ first and our courage to speak the Word?
- 7) Why is no believer exempt from Christ’s command to ‘build with Him’?