

God Words

By Steve Brown

Henri Nouwen once wrote, “I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. The leaders of the future will be those who dare to claim their irrelevance in the contemporary world as a divine vocation.” I think I can do that.

The Apostle Paul made a powerful comment that I’m going to take a bit out of context. Evidently, one of the criticisms of Paul was that he was all talk. So Paul was angry and defending himself when he wrote, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” (1 Corinthians 2:2-4).

I’ve been thinking of late about words in general and God words in particular. Those words are the words from which we create theology, doctrine and truth about

God. Words are also what we do when we defend, denounce and destroy in God’s name. Words—even God words—can often be irrelevant.

Jesus made a scary comment—especially for someone like me who talks all the time. “I tell you,” he said, “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). Why would he say something like that?

Paul said to the Ephesians “Let no one deceive you with empty words...” (Ephesians 5:6). People lie all the time about God. They do it for a variety of reasons...power, prestige, money, etc. If I can convince you, for example, that God is a monster and can make you feel guilty enough, I can take up a big collection and build an empire. That is fairly obvious.

But there’s more. Second, words are not reality but only point to reality. There is only one purpose for biblical doctrine and theology, and it’s not so we can know as much of it as possible in order to

impress others. The purpose of doctrine and theology is to point to Jesus. Insofar as words do that, they are good; and insofar as they don’t they are about as valuable as a “bag of chicken feed.” It’s what Jesus meant when he quoted Isaiah; “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8).

There is another reason for Jesus’ scary words about words. Third, words must become flesh or they don’t mean anything. Of course, John 1 is the perfect example when God not only talked about love but “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) and loved us. Then you’ll remember what Jesus said of the Scribes and Pharisees, that the crowd should listen to what they said because they “sit on Moses’ seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you” (Matthew 23:2-3).

Then in the rest of the chapter, Jesus says some very harsh things about the very people he had just said ought to be listened to. Why? Because their words didn’t reflect the reality of their deeds.

I fully believe that at the judgment seat of God when all

God's people stand before a righteous God he will have a lot to say about words. "You were all wrong," I suspect he will say, "and some of you were **really** wrong. But I've talked to my Son about you and he says you're covered. So welcome Home."

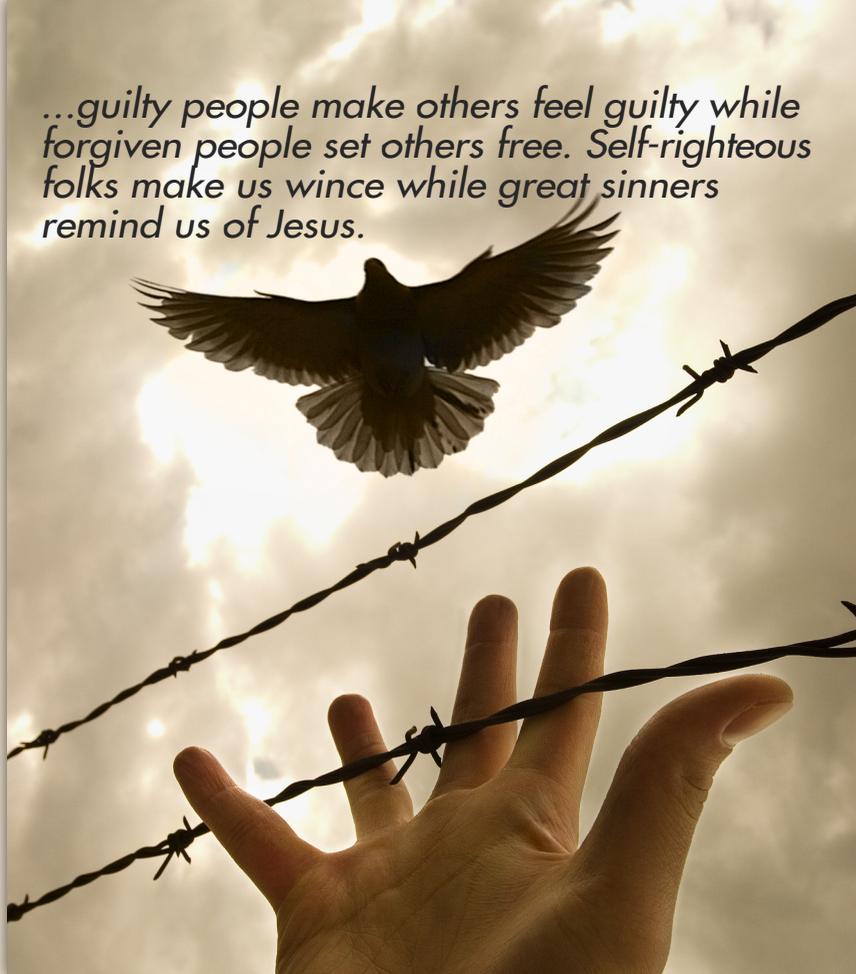
When our words reflect the "covering of Jesus" then those words are not ones that will judge us. They are words out of which we write a hymn of praise to God for the finished work of Christ. I'm not talking about "walking the talk" or being nice just to please Jesus.

Nobody has words that reflect their own goodness, purity and faithfulness. That's because nobody is that. I'm talking about the fact that loved people normally love more—guilty people make others feel guilty while forgiven people set others free.

Self-righteous folks make us wince while great sinners remind us of Jesus and our words reflect all of that. True Christianity is not just something you say—it's something you are. □

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