

Last week, we looked at the ninth commandment –  
and I’ve generally been preaching just one sermon per commandment in this section,  
but I came away from last Sunday with the sense  
that all I had done was lay a foundation.

We talked about the importance of thinking charitably of others –  
we saw the need for speaking truth in love –  
but I felt as though we missed a couple of key points –  
points that are especially important in our day.

In one sense, every generation faces the same basic issues.  
But every generation has to think through these issues specifically.

It’s why I love the Larger Catechism’s approach to the ninth commandment.  
In one sense it says *everything* that needs to be said –  
but today I would like to think about how to apply it to our own day.

Q. 144. *What are the duties required in the ninth commandment?*

A. The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; **a charitable esteem of our neighbors**; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; **a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them**; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; **studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.**

Do we have a charitable esteem for our neighbors?  
Are we eager to believe the best regarding them?

Q. 145. *What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; **speaking the truth**

**unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of the truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, talebearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstructing intentions, words, and actions;** flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of infirmities; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any; endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 52.

Psalm 52 is *very unusual* among the Psalms  
in being addressed neither to God nor to the people,  
but to a wicked man!

Psalm 52 is “A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite, came and told Saul,  
‘David has come to the house of Ahimelech.’”  
Doeg not only ratted David out – but he also went on to slaughter the priests.

Doeg used words to destroy.

Psalm 52 opens with a lament about the tongue of a “mighty man.”  
Both in his speaking and in his acting,  
Doeg destroys David with his tongue,  
and the priests of God with his sword.

And so David sings to him:

*Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man?  
The steadfast love of God endures all the day.*

Psalm 52 is a song for those who are persecuting the church!

Should we write hymns like this?  
Should the church in Soviet Russia have sung hymns to Stalin like this?!  
I’m not quite sure how to do that.

But at the very least, we should sing Psalm 52 from time to time –  
and when we do, we should sing it to Doeg’s latter-day heirs.

It is the song of David as he laments the destructive plots of Doeg.  
It is the song of Jesus as he laments the destructive plots of Judas.  
And it is the song of the church as we lament the destructive plots of the peoples today.

Sing Psalm 52  
Read James 3

A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.  
How do you attain righteousness?  
Make peace.

When we are suspicious of the motives of others –  
when we fear what others may do to us –  
that often reveals how we are not loving our neighbors!  
We are not seeking peace.

What does it mean to be a wise person who speaks well?

### 1. “A Charitable Esteem of Our Neighbors” – the Heart of the Ninth Commandment (Proverbs 25)

Proverbs has a lot to say about how to be a wise person.

I chose Proverbs 25 because this chapter has a lot to say about how we *speak*.  
In verse 8 we are counseled to be careful about what we say in court.

You may *think* that you know what happened.  
But do you know the whole story?!

*What your eyes have seen*  
<sup>8</sup> *do not hastily bring into court,<sup>[a]</sup>*  
*for<sup>[b]</sup> what will you do in the end,*  
*when your neighbor puts you to shame?*

How often have you been outraged about something –  
only to discover that there was more to the story?

Proverbs was warning about partisan bickering 3000 years ago!  
When you see a video posted on social media – it probably shows something outrageous.  
Think twice before jumping on the bandwagon!  
Fake news is nothing new.

I saw an email this week that made me really upset.  
But I noticed a curious omission.  
This email was calling attention to a horrible decision  
made by certain politicians –  
and it called for action –

but I couldn't help but wonder,  
the way the email was worded,  
it sounded like these politicians were just evil, wicked people.

Whenever I see that, I try to do a little digging.  
And sure enough, when I read their explanation for their decision,  
I realized that the question was more complicated than my friend had suggested!

Beware of using information to engage in social climbing.  
To achieve success at the price of your own integrity or another's well-being –  
is to destroy yourself and others!

Instead (v9):

<sup>9</sup> *Argue your case with your neighbor himself,  
and do not reveal another's secret,*  
<sup>10</sup> *lest he who hears you bring shame upon you,  
and your ill repute have no end.*

Go to the person directly.  
Don't be a gossip.  
Don't spread secrets.

If you have a problem with someone,  
go to them and work it out!  
Deal openly and fairly with your neighbor.  
Don't use information against them.  
Use your knowledge of a person – use your knowledge of the situation –  
to *love* that person!

Be careful how you use information – be careful what you repeat.  
Make sure that you only repeat someone else's sin and misery  
in an effort to *love them better*.

How do you do that?!  
I'm glad you asked!  
Because v11-12 help us:

<sup>11</sup> *A word fitly spoken  
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.*  
<sup>12</sup> *Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold  
is a wise reprover to a listening ear.*

Earlier, in Proverbs 9, wisdom tells us that

If you reprove a wise man, he will love you!  
Do you like to be rebuked?  
Proverbs challenges you!  
If you are wise – then you will love those who rebuke you!  
If you are wise, then you will think of those who reprove you as beautiful –  
and valuable!

Learn to be one who speaks wisely – one who both gives reproof well,  
and hears reproof well!

You need someone who can say the hard things that you need to hear –  
but you also need to hear them! –  
you also need to be the sort of person who accepts correction.

Because if you do all these things –  
if you are not a gossip –  
if you are good at rebuking (and accepting rebukes) –  
if you are faithful in doing what you say you will do –  
then you have a shot at verse 15:

<sup>15</sup> *With patience a ruler may be persuaded,  
and a soft tongue will break a bone*

Tonight we are starting a sermon series on the book of Esther.  
Esther illustrates this point beautifully.

Queen Vashti doesn't try to persuade Ahasuerus.  
She simply refuses him.  
But Esther uses patience – and a soft tongue.

If you are too hot-tempered to rebuke *well* – and too proud to listen to others –  
then you won't be around very long.

But if you are wise and faithful in your words and deeds,  
then *with patience* a ruler may be persuaded.

Bones are rigid.  
Bones do not bend.  
But even the most rigid, inflexible ruler may bend to a soft tongue –  
to gentle words –  
whereas harsh words will not accomplish much at all!

In contrast (v18),

<sup>18</sup> *A man who bears false witness against his neighbor*

*is like a war club, or a sword, or a sharp arrow.*

Be careful how you speak!

You may *think* that you are in the right –  
but if, in fact, you are in the wrong –  
then you are destroying others with your words!

Verses 23-27 talk about how good things often go awry.

- <sup>23</sup> *The north wind brings forth rain,  
and a backbiting tongue, angry looks.*  
<sup>24</sup> *It is better to live in a corner of the housetop  
than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.*  
<sup>25</sup> *Like cold water to a thirsty soul,  
so is good news from a far country.*  
<sup>26</sup> *Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain  
is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.*  
<sup>27</sup> *It is not good to eat much honey,  
nor is it glorious to seek one's own glory.*<sup>[c]</sup>

Rain, marriage, a fountain, honey –  
all of these are supposed to be good.  
But the north wind isn't supposed to bring rain.  
Marriage isn't supposed to bring quarreling.  
A spring or a fountain isn't supposed to be muddy.  
Honey is supposed to be good for you.

But good things can go astray.

This is a reminder that we live in an estate of sin and misery.  
I think that conservative churches tend to do well at pointing out sin.  
Liberal churches do well at talking about misery.  
But our problem is that we live in *an* estate of sin *and* misery.  
These are not two different problems!  
It's not that if you solve the sin problem the misery problem will go away –  
neither will focusing on misery take care of sin.

But this is why verse 25 is at the center of this final section:

“Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.”

The gospel comes to our thirsty souls like cold water on a hot day.

Jesus came to deal with our sin – he offered himself as the atoning sacrifice –  
the one who died in our place – who cleansed us from our sins!

But Jesus also came to deal with our misery –  
he joined himself to our humanity, in order that he might join us to God!

God did not leave us to perish in the estate of sin and misery.  
He sent his Son to be our Redeemer – to solve our sin problem *and* our misery problem.

And the key for us – as verse 27 points out – is not to seek one’s own glory.  
Rather, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness –  
and all these things – all the things that we need for life and godliness –  
will be added to you.

So Proverbs 25 reminds us of how we are to speak truth in love.

## 2. “Devouring Words” – the Peril of Reviling (Psalm 52/1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Psalm 52 – as we saw – is the song of David as he laments the destructive plots of Doeg.

It is the song of Jesus as he laments the destructive plots of Judas.

And it is the song of the church as we lament the destructive plots of the peoples today.

But what I want you to see is that Doeg – this “mighty man” –  
is a reviler.

The reviler is one who uses words to destroy people.  
Listen to Psalm 52:2-4 –

<sup>2</sup> *Your tongue plots destruction,  
like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit.*  
<sup>3</sup> *You love evil more than good,  
and lying more than speaking what is right. Selah*  
<sup>4</sup> *You love all words that devour,  
O deceitful tongue.*

Think about this language:  
“words that devour.”

We talk about “back-biting” in English.  
To bite someone’s back is an odd phrase –  
but very many languages have similar ways of saying it.  
The mouth devours.  
And so words that destroy have the effect of “eating” a person.

“Sticks and stones can break my bones...”  
but words?  
Words can break my heart.

David’s heart was broken when he hears that Doeg *told* Saul  
“David has come to the house of Ahimelech.”

All the rest of Doeg's evil stems from what Doeg said –  
because Doeg loved evil rather than good –  
because Doeg loved deceitful words rather than truth.

Of course, someone might say:

Whoa! Wait a minute!

Doeg simply spoke the truth!

Doeg simply answered the question of the King – the LORD's anointed!

Why does David say that Doeg loved "lying more than speaking what is right"?

Doeg simply spoke the truth – he gave the king an honest answer!

The rest of Saul's servants were hiding the truth from Saul!

But that is because the rest of Saul's servants understood that Saul wished to harm David.

If you know that someone wants to use the truth to destroy someone,

then you need to be silent!

Yes, Doeg was also the one who used his sword to slaughter the priests –

but David sees clearly that Doeg's tongue was a far sharper sword!

Doeg (on his own authority) could never have killed a priest!

But because of his words – because he used his tongue to persuade the king –

he could slaughter and destroy with impunity.

This is what the reviler does.

Nowadays there are lots of different terms for this –

"verbal abuse" – "gaslighting" – "narcissism."

But there is something useful about the old language.

The reviler is one who uses words to destroy.

What's the big deal?

Why is this so important?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,

nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy,

nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers

will inherit the kingdom of God."

How you use words matters for your eternal destiny!

Paul says that the reviler will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If you use words to destroy people,

then you will not see the kingdom of God.



When we talk about how we use words,  
we need to distinguish between political “freedom of speech”  
and what God requires of us!  
The U.S. Constitution often protects reviling.  
The Judgment Seat of Christ does *not*.

And in some respects that’s appropriate.  
You don’t want your government trying to be Jesus!

But in other ways, this can get us in trouble.  
How many of us *actually* know what we are talking about  
when it comes to the motivations of our political leaders?  
Do you know Bernie Sanders?  
Have you ever had a heart-to-heart conversation with Donald Trump?

Or do you rely on someone else’s opinion?  
And if so – why do you trust them?  
Is it because they are close friends of Joe Biden –  
and they understand him well?  
Or is it because they agree with your political views?

If you repeat someone else’s reviling – you are still a reviler!  
“Oh, but I didn’t know!”  
Then you shouldn’t have repeated it.

If you share a post on social media –  
make sure that you *know* that it is true.  
Otherwise, you are endorsing its lies.

And right now – we really need people who are *truth-tellers*.  
Not just “I think it might be true” – or “I like the approach of this author.”

This is a big reason why I stopped posting on social media.  
I realized that I didn’t know whether I was posting truth or lies.  
I was posting because it made me feel important.

People liked what I posted – they wanted to hear more –  
they trusted me...

In other words, I was falling prey to the algorithm.  
I was supporting the reviling industry!

Paul also has comforting words for us!

After warning that revilers will not inherit the kingdom of God,  
he adds:

“But such were some of you.

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified  
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (v11)

I think that it is safe to say that Paul is not talking about our “ongoing” sanctification here.  
Paul says you *were* sanctified.

Not “you are being sanctified” –

Paul makes it clear that he is referring to a definitive, once-for-all act of God.  
*You were sanctified!*

You were set apart by God as holy.

We usually think of sanctification as a process.

But Paul teaches us that there is a part of our sanctification that is definitive, once-for-all.  
Paul looks at this messed up church in Corinth that still needs *a lot* of growth in grace –  
and he says, *you were sanctified!*

In your inner man, you are no longer who you once were.

The old man is dead.

Your old identity is gone.

Maybe you *were* a homosexual.

Maybe you *were* an adulterer.

Maybe you *were* a drunkard.

Maybe you *were* verbally abusive (a reviler).

But you were *washed* – you were *sanctified*.

You were justified.

You have been declared righteous by God, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Justification has to do with our legal standing before God.

Our legal problem is that we are unrighteous – we are “unjust” – before God.

We are guilty.

And the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.

We are justified by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus has come and taken our sin and guilt upon himself.

Our sin was credited to Jesus –

and Jesus’ righteousness was credited to us.

So we are no longer *guilty* before God –

we are now declared righteous in Jesus Christ.

You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified  
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

So if you realize that you have been guilty of reviling –  
then you need to repent!

There can be a tendency in the modern day  
to assume that once a person is an “abuser” –  
they will always be an abuser.

The narcissist – they say – cannot change!

But Paul’s says “such *were* some of you.”  
In Christ, there is hope for change!

You can repent.  
You can acknowledge that you have used words to harm others.  
And then you can turn away from those patterns –  
and you can learn to use words to love – you can seek peace.

There is no sin so strong that Christ cannot break its power over you!  
At the same time, *you* have to repent!

It’s the beauty of John Owen’s line –  
“be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.”

It’s not that sin will just up and disappear.  
No, you have to keep killing it.  
It’s like a weed that keeps coming back!  
You *think* that you’ve uprooted it –  
but next year – there it is again!

### **3. “The Tongue Is a Fire” – the Meekness of Wisdom (James 3)**

This is why James 3 says,

*“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers,  
for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*

<sup>2</sup> *For we all stumble in many ways.*

*And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man,  
able also to bridle his whole body.*

<sup>3</sup> *If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us,  
we guide their whole bodies as well.*

<sup>4</sup> *Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds,  
they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.*

<sup>5</sup> *So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.*

James is reflecting on the same thing as Psalm 52.

At the heart of the deceitful tongue is a misdirected love.

“You love evil more than good.”

And when you love evil more than good, the result is deceitful speech.

As James goes on to say:

*How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!*

*<sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.*

*The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body,*

*setting on fire the entire course of life,<sup>[a]</sup> and set on fire by hell.<sup>[b]</sup>*

*<sup>7</sup> For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature,*

*can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,*

*<sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue.*

*It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

*<sup>9</sup> With it we bless our Lord and Father,*

*and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.*

*<sup>10</sup> From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.*

*My brothers,<sup>[c]</sup> these things ought not to be so.*

*<sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?*

*<sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs?*

*Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.”*

All of you have experienced the brutality of the tongue!

As children you have been hurt by another child's lies.

As teenagers you experience how slander and gossip destroys friendships.

And as adults you have felt the razor-sharp tongues of colleagues and friends!