

# "Shining as Lights II: Keeping Covenant IV" 2Timothy 1:8-13 "Hold Fast Sound Words"

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Since the first of the year I have been trying to bring overlapping messages on the meaning of the people of God being salt and light in the world. Jesus said that is what we are, because God has made us that. I have brought recently four messages on what it means to shine as lights, as Paul put it in Philippians 2. We have no light of our own, but our light is the gospel of the new covenant, which is contrasted with the old covenant by the Apostle Paul in Romans 10. The old is characterized by "the man which doeth those things shall live by them" while the new covenant is described, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." This faith that God sent His son into the world to save us from our sins is spread abroad by the preaching of the Gospel, for men cannot call on Him of whom they have not believed; they cannot believe on him of whom they have not heard; and they cannot hear without a preacher; and if God doesn't sent a preacher, they are lost. How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel and bring glad tidings.

I then brought three messages on covenant keeping. I first contrasted the light of the gospel with the darkness of the world, the darkness of antichrist who is already in the world, for John describes antichrist as anyone who denies that Jesus Christ is the savior and who resists the gospel of Christ. Our light shines in the midst of this darkness, just as He did, for when we bear witness of the Gospel, we bring Christ into the consciousness and understanding of men and if they believe, Christ is born in them. There is a present evil world that hates Christ and the truth and wars against it. We cannot be friends of this world that is based upon the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life for antichrist holds men in bondage because of these things. Ga 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: This is the message of the Gospel: the new covenant is at enmity with the world and cannot be reconciled to it, for the light is to shine in the darkness.

Then I spoke of covenant keeping as the the path of the righteous which is like the dawning of the light, but light which shines more and more unto the perfect day. It corresponds with another figure that Christ uses of being born again. We are born as babes into the kingdom of God, but must grow up into the maturity of Christ, and not remain babies in our understanding and moral sense. This is required in us and is accomplished in us by the Holy Spirit.

Then last week I spoke of the Victory of Faith. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world for it accepts the record that God has given of His Son, according to 1John 5. The man who has faith is kept from the evil one and cannot commit the sin unto death and cannot ultimately abandon Christ. His faith is witnesses by a threefold witness in heaven and a threefold witness on the earth, his faith itself being a witness in himself that He is born of God. The covenant of the Gospel is the covenant of safety and peace with God and it cannot fail, because of the witness of the Triune God, verified and administered by the Holy Ghost in the earth.

Today I want to speak of Paul injunction to Timothy that we read a moment ago: "Hold fast the form of sound words," which is the application of the precept, "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." The

testimony of the Lord is in sound words, that must be preached, spoken, confessed, believed, and lived. We are to submit ourselves to these sound words if we are to keep the covenant of our God.

I will begin by a quotation by John Calvin on the expression “sound words.”

“I rather think that Paul commands Timothy to hold fast the doctrine which he had learned, not only as to substance, but as to the very form of expression; for “sound words” — the word which Paul employs on this occasion — denotes a lively picture of objects, as if they were actually placed before the eyes. Paul knew how ready men are to depart or fall off from pure doctrine. For this reason he earnestly cautions Timothy not to turn aside from that form of teaching which he had received, and to regulate his manner of teaching by the rule which had been laid down; not that we ought to be very scrupulous about words, but because to misrepresent doctrine, even in the smallest degree, is exceedingly injurious.” --Calvin loc. cit

I would say that Calvin means that the words ought to really convey the truth and not be means to hide or corrupt the truth. One of the meanings of covenant keeping, is to keep the truth that was once delivered to the saints and not be drawn aside into error and evil speakings. This is the reason that Paul commanded us to “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.” Eph 4:25

In order to unpack this truth I would do three things: 1. Look at the immediate context in the commandment to Timothy; 2. Comparison the teaching of Jesus Christ on this subject. 3 Consideration of the solemn warning given by our Lord Jesus.

#### I. The immediate context

A. Paul affirms his own pure conscience by which he “from his forefathers” has served God, and calls Timothy to the example of his mother and grandmother and their unfeigned faith. It was not a pretended faith, but a genuine and real one. That becomes the theme of this whole letter. It is interesting that in affirming the future of the covenant, Paul is affirming the past also, for he recognizes that he served the Lord in the godly patriarchs of Israel, in whom he was included by covenant. He then calls Timothy to recognize the great heritage he had in his godly mother and grandmother. The men are not mentioned, because men are not required to validate the new covenant. Timothy’s father and grandfather are not worthy of being mentioned. Vs. 2-5

B. Then he affirms that God by His Spirit has given us power, love, and soundness of mind in order that we may affirm the testimony of Christ, partaking of the afflictions associated with that testimony, to which we have been saved and called by the purpose and grace of Christ. Although appointed before the world began this grace was now manifested to the world in the coming of Christ and the preaching of the apostles. Vs. 6-11

C. Paul is not ashamed, for he has a certain knowledge that what he has believed and trusted Christ for will not prove to be error. He committed his soul to Jesus Christ for safekeeping and will not be ashamed that he has done so. He trusts Christ for life and for death. He is safe in the hands of the Triune God through Jesus Christ. Vs.12

D. Timothy is therefore charged to keep the words that carry this faith and love that is in Christ that he

had heard from Paul. There is one faith that is confessed by all the church. You must never belong to a false church that does not confess this faith nor listen to a minister who does not speak sound words.

E. The “sound words” are “living logos” or as Calvin puts it “lively pictures” for words are symbols of ideas. The words must convey the true ideas of Scripture, the faith which was once delivered to the saints. The evil of idolatry is that other imaginations are substituted for the living words of Scripture. The words may be the same in spelling and in sound, but the meanings are altered and they become dead and confusing words for the saints. We are not to quibble over words, as Calvin says, although we hold to the very words of the Hebrew and Greek in order to preserve the meanings. But in our English churches, as words change meanings we must be careful that the words we use carry the freight they are intended to carry. This means that we are not to be constantly changing the words in our creds and our confessions or our translations of Scripture for truth is not a river of flux but timeless and unchanging.

F. Words are a covenant with the past, and it is a shame that education in this country has fallen to such a low point that young people cannot even read or understand the great historical heritage of their fathers. This has been deliberate, so that new ideas can be substituted for old ideas, but still using the words of freedom, justice, marriage, hope, reconciliation, faith, and love—but emptied of meaning and filled with new meaning.

## II. Comparison with the teaching of Christ in Matthew 12:31-37

A. These words show the awful depths to which the rulers of the Jews had fallen. Christ had healed a demoniac, casting the evil spirit from him. The people began to wonder if He was indeed the Messiah, their promised savior. The rulers were desperate, and had to explain the miracle. They said what they knew was a lie: “He casts out devils by the prince of devils, Beelzebub” This was so foolish that it was easily refuted by Christ. No nation can survive civil war. But if Christ is the enemy of the devil and is taking loot from his house, then the kingdom of God must be at hand. “If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils. . . . These words are significant: “by the Spirit of God” There was no answer to this argument.

B. Then Jesus testified about the meaning of words and how they reflect the true condition of the soul.

1. You cannot be neutral in your words. You cannot cut the baby in half. If you are not with Christ, then you are against Him. The context is words. There was a wonderful old name given to the martyrs: “Confessors.” They confessed the truth. They lived by the truth and died by the truth. Many times they could have saved their lives if they had lied and denied what they knew was the truth.

2. A good man will speak the truth; the bad man will not. Jesus gave us no wiggle room. Evil words come from an evil heart. The evil person, no matter how many times he is given the opportunity to come clean and tell the truth will wiggle off the point and lie, or will immediately renounce his confession at the first opportunity. How many times the rulers of the Jews had opportunity to confess that Jesus was the Messiah, but they kept finding ways to perpetuate the lie, until they came to the final absurdity: that Jesus was of the devil.

3. Because of this, men will be judged by the words they speak, even to the point of the condemnation of idle or empty words. “By your words you will be justified, and by your words

you will be condemned.” There is nothing hard about that statement.

4. One of three things happens when you and I open our mouths, and two of them are bad.

a. The good thing is when we tell the truth and do not deceive. Good and sound words indicate a good and sound heart: one with power, love, and a sound mind.

b. The first bad thing is when we do not tell the truth and deceive. Evil words indicate an evil heart, just as the fruit reveals the nature of the tree.

c. The second bad thing is when we say nothing, but simply chatter about nothing and foolishness. Empty words convey an empty heart. Empty words reveal an empty and evil heart, for the fruit reveals the nature of the tree.

5. Therefore we should heed the words of the wise Solomon: Ec 5:2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

III. Consideration of the awful warning of the Lord Jesus in vs. 31,32.

A. The unpardonable sin is speaking against the Holy Ghost. This is called blasphemy because the Holy Spirit is God.

B. But there is more here, because the Holy Spirit is separated from the other persons of the Trinity in the sin of blasphemy because blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has a special significance. Speaking against the Father may be forgiven; speaking against the Son may be forgiven; speaking against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. How can this be?

C. The knot is untied this way. The context is the work of the Holy Spirit. The rulers are claiming that the work of the Holy Spirit was the work of the devil, and that is the key to understanding the words of Christ, I believe.

1. Men might not understand the work of the Father, which is ordaining all things in the creation of the world and ordering the world, as the Apostles Creed says.

2. Men might not understand the work of the Lord Jesus, which was to come to the world, born of the Virgin, live a spotless life, die on the cross for sinners, and rise to intercede for them in heaven.

3. Men may be enlightened later and repent their ignorance, as the Apostle Paul did, for he said he did it ignorantly in unbelief when he persecuted the church. His sins against the Father and the Son were forgiven for he was enlightened later and repented.

4. But it is different with the work of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is precisely to enlighten and teach the understanding and mind. Blasphemy against the Spirit would be precisely in the area of knowledge and understanding and could be done only if the Spirit had given

enlightenment to them. That is what is indicated.

5. There are four warnings concerning the Spirit in the Scripture

a. Grieve not. Do not ignore his teaching, for this grieves Him

b. Quench not. Do not suppress his teaching and try to put out the flame of conviction. This is worse than grieving and is a warning of worse to come.

c. Resist not. Now warfare has broken out against the knowledge of God and Christ. There is now open resistance to the truth. The soul is in terrible condition and stands on the brink of hell.

d. Blaspheme not. This is when knowledge has come concerning Christ and His work, but now the rebellion is total: Satan has filled the heart and the ultimate lie is spoken: The work of the Holy Spirit is of the devil. There is no turning back from the abyss. Hell has closed her bars about the soul forever, though physical life continues for a time. The light has become darkness

e. If you worry that you have committed this sin, then you have not, for you still hear the voice of the Spirit. There is forgiveness for your ignorance and slothfulness, but do not neglect His voice. Seek the sound words that are able to save your soul and turn you in the way of the righteous and godly. Of course you have chosen the way of sinfulness. Of course you have done things you know are wrong. This is not what this is: you may have grieved the Spirit; you may have quenched Him, you may have even resisted Him; but you have not blasphemed Him and He still works in your heart to minister the things of Christ to you. Do not turn away from Him, but open your heart and believe the Gospel.

Amen and Amen  
God bless you.