

June 13, 2010
Pastor John Bronson

“Grace or Grief: Which Do You Give?”

Ephesians 4:29-5:1

Order of Worship for June 13th, 2010 (Father’s Day)
Pre-service Song
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: (perhaps a VBS promotion?)

Call to Worship: 1 John 2:12-14 and prayer

Songs of Worship:

“How Great is Our God”

“Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down”

“Holy God, We Praise Thy Name”

“Let All Things Now Living”

Overhead

Song # 227

Song # 2

Song # 794

Offering

Special Music

Message: “Grace or Grief: Which Do You Give?” (Ephesians 4:29-5:1)
By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “Find Us Faithful”

Song # 456

Parting Word of Grace

Enjoy refreshments and conversation in the Fellowship Hall
Then join one of the Discipleship Hour classes

Vespers at 5:30pm in the Music Building

“Seek Social Justice #3: Serving the Whole Person – Churches and Ministries”

“The Prayer Closet”

June 13, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **The Nakamuras:** that all members of the mission will share a common love for Christ and the Japanese and will love one another; that ties of faith and friendship in the faith will be stronger than family ties and tradition in the Japanese; that summer will be a time of refreshment and renewed focus for family and ministry
2. **President Obama:** that he will set the good of the nation ahead of advancing his own preferences and opinions; that the Spirit will ensure he discerns the difference between wise and foolish counsel; that he readily receives God healing grace and forgiveness
3. **Small Groups and Leaders:** that the spiritual bonds will be nurturing and enduring; that leaders will have clarity regarding future direction; that new leaders will step forward for the fall in anticipation of new groups forming

Military Personnel of the Week: TSgt Pete Gibson (husband of Marjorie Gibson): (husband of Marjorie Gibson): that the commander at Beale AFB will give consent to host Operation Homefront’s Freedom Walk

College Student of the Week: Ryan Boettcher at California State University, Sacramento (son of Bob and Karen Boettcher): Please pray for Ryan's renewed fellowship at church during his summer at home and for safety while traveling, visiting friends, and working.

“Grace or Grief: Which do you Give?” The passage [for today’s message] is Ephesians 4:29-30. I will read those verses. *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* If you are tracking along in this study, you know that this is the fourth of Paul’s practical applications of the spiritual truth of the renewed life that is ours in Jesus Christ. I want to briefly remind you of those applications, the three that we have already looked at. The first is that he spoke of telling the truth; we are to tell the truth. Look to verse 25, *“Therefore having put away falsehood let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor.”* So we are to be truth tellers. After that he spoke about anger. He says, settle anger quickly: be angry but settle it quickly and outsmart the devil. Recognize that when your soul, when your inner spirit, your inner man is in the grip of intense anger you are very vulnerable. You will want to move quickly from anger to some other place in dealing with the issues that have caused that anger to arise. Then in the next section Paul spoke of the transformation of the thief from a taker to a giver. That you will find in verse 28, *“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”* The thief is to move from being a taker to a giver. Most of humanity measures its self-worth by what they can get. But those of us who are in Christ measure our worth by what we can give. Because we have experienced the liberating power of the indwelling Spirit of God who has made known to us the riches of God’s grace we realize we are not impoverished people who need to heap up as many goods as possible, piling them up around us so that we feel like we are something. Rather we recognize that anything we have got we are privileged in our God to be able to give to those who are in need. We find ourselves wealthy according to our capacity to give rather than in counting what we have got. It is a profound transformation.

In much the same way when we come down here to the fourth of these applications. This concerns the way we talk. The way we talk is to give grace, it is to bless, that is what we are called to do, not to cause grief, but blessing through how we use our tongue. In this section you will see that once again Paul follows the pattern that he has set up before. He gives a negative: no corrupting talk. Then he gives the positive: only good talk. In this case he actually gives us two reasons as to why we should commit ourselves to this discipline of the tongue. The first is, we do not want to grieve the Spirit of God. The second is, we want to give grace, unmerited favor, blessing beyond what they deserve – that is what grace means – to those who hear. We are going to look at this a little bit.

If you are well acquainted with the New Testament, instantly I would think you would have in the back of your mind what James tells us about the tongue. I want to read that section: please turn to James 3:2-10. Obviously speech involves the tongue. I have recently been with my three grand-children. They are infinitely superior, as I have already mentioned. Even at the gentle age of only eight months my grandson is already proficient at communicating. It is not exactly words, but he is highly effective at getting what he wants. And we are highly effective at giving him what he wants. This is what James says:

“...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 the whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 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. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 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, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, or reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”

Those are powerful words, daunting words. Indeed I think we would probably agree that there is a sense in which the challenge posed to us by our tongues encapsulates the whole spectrum, the whole picture of our difficulty in

striving to be a godly people. Our powers of self control are simply not equal to the challenge of living the holy life as we desire. We are constantly falling short. As James says, no one can tame the tongue.

This is an admission of defeat. You and I ought to own that admission. But at the same time, while it is an admission of defeat, we need to not give in to despair. Why not? It is because we are Christians. The Gospel is a message of hope for those who are willing to accept the judgment of God and therefore acknowledge the extremity of their personal need for God’s sustaining grace. As we lay hold of God’s grace, we are able to heal the wounds that come from our own mouths and gradually experience the inner renewal on a continual basis that cleanses us and restores us in our minds. We are those who live constantly returning again to the cross, passing by, receiving the benediction of His shed blood that we would be cleansed and put into our right minds once again, and thereby go and correct what we broke with our tongues. So we do not despair.

But how does this hope come to us? For some the answer is that if I cannot control my tongue, certainly the Spirit of God can control my tongue. Dying to self and living to God is the call of the gospel. I am to crucify myself; I am to die to myself. That is Romans 8. So the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit that lives within me. This is Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. . .”* That is the affirmation given by Paul. Then Paul goes on and he says, *“ . . .and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”* You see it there. You see how Paul conducted his life by a constant return, a constant reminder, a constant going back again to the foundation upon which his life was built. My life is built upon Jesus Christ and I remain there constantly, drawing my strength and wisdom from Him. Now some good folk say that this is the equivalent to the divine substitution, equal to Jesus’ death for us on the cross. Jesus died for our sins. He paid the price for what you and I have done. We don’t pay the price: He paid the price. Therefore we receive the benefit of His freely given gift of righteousness before God. I suspect most of us in this room have reason to lay claim to that promise just from what happened in this past week.

Christ now lives, some say, instead of me. This goes a step further. Sometimes this teaching is summed up as “Let go and let God.” But I want us to pay attention to what Paul goes on to say. Notice that Paul goes on to say that he now lives in the flesh by faith. In Galatians 2:21 it says, *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died needlessly.”*

There are two different kinds of challenges that we face when we attempt to take up and make the grace of God that by which we live. As Paul dealt with the Galatians the problem that he had is that they were convinced that having been cleansed from their sins they were now strong enough, able enough, clear enough in thought, strong enough in character to themselves be righteous and to fulfill the Law. Therefore they could establish themselves now as righteous. There is a nice illustration of this. Not too long before Nini and I and Caleb were preparing to leave on our vacation, which involved driving from here to Grand Junction, then flying to Minneapolis by way of Denver and then flying back again. And when we got back we were going to drive our son Joshua and his wife Lina from Grand Junction to Denver. Some of you may know of a place called Glenwood Canyon that runs through the Rockies in a very narrow defile. At that point Interstate 70 actually is built is on two levels and the upper level is cantilevered over the lower. It is absolutely gorgeous. It turns out a rock fell on the road, a large rock. As a matter of fact it was a rock as large as a semi-truck, and it looked as if we were not going to take I-70 and instead would have to take a 250 mile detour. Well, the Galatians’ view of grace was that they had to rely on the Colorado Dept. of Highways to remove the rock, for there was no way they could move that rock. But once the rock was out of the way, they could handle the rest of the road. That is a very dangerous assumption. That is the problem with the Galatians. But it is not the only problem that troubles Christians in their application of grace. The other group is the “Let go and let God” group. They are the ones who say, not only does God have to remove the rock, but He is going to have to drive my car. In the meantime, I am just going to sit here and let Him take care of everything.

Really? Grace means that God becomes the animating power of my life? Beloved there is enough truth in that statement to be confusing. Let me address it.

Come back again to James' comments on the tongue. He asks this question: should a spring give both sweet and brackish water, or, should a tree give two kinds of fruit, good and bad? The answer is obvious, it is a rhetorical question: no, of course not. Consistency, not self-contradiction is the true pattern of Christian living. James goes on at once to speak of wisdom. We are now looking at James 3:13 and 17. James 3:13 reads like this: *“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”* There is a worldly wisdom, James goes on to point out, and there is a heavenly wisdom. James 3:17 says this: *“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* Then the question arises: according to James, who is wise? Is God wise? Of course God is wise; but we are not talking about God. We are talking about the believer being wise. Are you wise? Who makes peace? Well God makes peace. But he is not talking about God right here; he is talking about believers. The believer makes peace. Do you make peace? It will not do to sit and say, “God will take care of the matter. I will wait until God takes care of the matter.” God says, “Get up and take care of the matter. I want you to be wise. I want you to make peace! And I want you to control your tongue.” The dynamic of grace, the way it works, is that God does not decide to live instead of me; rather God says “I will enable you to live.”

The challenge in Ephesians 4:29 is that we are to make our recalcitrant tongues instruments of grace in the world. That is a hard challenge. James says we are sinners. We stumble, and stumbling, he would imply, is characteristic of humans. James does not specify why [this is so] but the answer is not hard to find. For a person to walk it helps to have a well marked path and a clear idea of where you are going. It is especially helpful to have good lighting. One of the disastrous consequences of staying in someone else's house, we stayed first in one son's house and then in the other son's house, is that sometimes old people get up at night – how many of you get up at night? – and when you get up at night you don't particularly want to turn the light on, because that would announce the fact that you are getting up at night. So you walk about in a dark room, which is inconveniently arranged! So in most cases it is good to have light. That is just a very helpful thing. Now, not only, you see, is the world occupied by sinners, but the world itself is a dangerous place. If you don't have light, you run into stuff. I have another illustration from my trip. Joshua and Caleb and I had an opportunity to take a hike. We hiked up to mount Garfield. Mt. Garfield is a two thousand foot climb that you make in two miles. It is called a leg burner. When we got up there near the top, the trail goes underneath about a hundred foot high band of limestone. Beneath the limestone is loose, crumbly type soil. You wonder why those great solid rocks stay up there while you are on the loose crumbly soil beneath them. As you walk along, it is steep, steep enough so that if you fall, you won't stop, you will just go, approximately eight hundred feet. Then you look up and the rocks actually lean out over you, and they are full of cracks! You say, “This is why they don't let you know how to find the trail [head]; they don't want you coming up here!” People want light so you don't misstep and roll eight hundred feet down the slope. Having good light is very important.

Jesus said something very important about light. Usually we think of light as something external: the sun, the moon, spotlights, flashlights. Jesus says something very different in the Sermon on the Mount. You might want to turn and look at [Matthew] 6:22-23. Jesus is sort of in the habit of saying things we didn't expect to hear, and in this case Jesus does not disappoint us. Jesus says, *“The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.”* Well, we're tracking with Jesus, no problem whatsoever. We expect that sort of comment. This is where He turns. *“But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”* Well, that's still ok. Then He says, *“If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”* That is what we did not expect. Jesus here does not talk about walking through darkness. He does not talk about finding yourself suddenly in a room without light and trying to navigate through the unknown objects in that room. He does not talk about finding yourself on some mountain trail, and you can't see clearly to the left or the right and you are

fearful of making a misstep. That is not what He says. What He says here is that the light in you is dark! That is a deeply disturbing image. The deceived heart does not simply suffer from unclear thought; it actually thinks wrongly. It thinks wrongly because it does not see the world according to the truth. What the deceived heart thinks reveals the truth about things in fact obscures the truth, and so false conclusions are drawn regarding actions, relations, results and consequences.

This, as a matter of fact, was the condition of the Pharisees. You can go and look at Romans 10:2-3. The Pharisees believed they had the light. The Pharisees believed passionately that they had the light of truth from God. It came to them through the bloodline of Abraham and was confirmed through their own careful observance of the law revealed by God through Moses. That light which they were convinced was theirs blinded them to the truth of Jesus as the suffering Messiah sent to die for their sins. That light blinded them to their need for such a Messiah. Notice how Paul puts it in Romans 10:2-3; *“...I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”* The light of the Pharisees was dark.

Let us go back to James. In James 3 and 4, he speaks about both wisdom and prayer. He contrasts heavenly wisdom with earthly wisdom. In chapter 4 he contrasts differing kinds of prayer. Now beloved, all people pray. But both their prayers and what they pray for are not the same. They pray for different things, and they pray to different gods. As to determining to what god or power a person prays, James 3:15 would imply that what we pray for says more about the god to whom we pray than our doctrinal statements. The desires of our heart define what we worship. In [James] 3:15 James says, *“This wisdom is not that which comes down from above but is earthly, natural, demonic.”* Now very few people consciously pray to demons. James however implies that those who are driven by jealousy and selfish ambition in their hearts actually do so, for it is demonic. In chapter 4 James expands on prayer. This is what he says: *“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”* We are talking about tongues. We are talking about speech. We are talking about using our tongues to give grace and not cause grief. James is saying, depending on what we pray for and the god to whom we pray, our tongues fall to quarreling. Quarrels are bitter speech. Quarrels rarely give grace. James also here says that if in fact the desires of our heart indicate that [you] are in love with the world, and that your yearnings are yearning after the things of worldly renown, if indeed we are finding our identity by sidling up to and getting close with and walking in harmony with...well then what we are doing is we are making ourselves hostile to God. People who are hostile to God rarely give grace in their speech.

Where we go, you see, is where the Bible wants us to go; that is to recognize that the taming of the tongue is heart work. Taming the tongue requires setting the heart free from deceitful desires and the terrible power of sin. Jesus says this in Matthew 12:34, *“The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”* So as we reflect upon the activity of our tongues, we recall the speech that has flowed from our lips, we should say to ourselves, *“This is a CD of the condition of my heart.”* Consequently we need to deal with what fills my heart. What does my heart desire? What do I put in my heart? As I said, we were in Minnesota, and my son has a lovely home. It really is a lovely home in Minnesota and around this lovely home is a beautiful garden. I am very proud of my oldest son because he is doing what I do and that is really good. Ian is proud of his garden and he works hard to make it a kind of showcase, and it is outstanding. If you drive by you say, *“Look at that house! It looks great.”* Ian has two daughters, Lily and Cece. Sometimes Lily and Cece like to help dad in the garden. Sometimes their helping falls short of the mark. Sometimes Lily and Cece like to play in garden. While we were there we were sitting on the back patio, they have a deck back there, Cece walks up and has a handful of flowers. Dad said, *“Cece, where did you get those flowers?”* If

they step on a flower, or mistakenly pull one out thinking it was a weed, Ian responds with the gentleness of heavenly wisdom, because there is no bitter jealousy or selfish ambition. Instead there is love for his daughters. O that our tongues would be under the control of such a love!

The Pharisees presented themselves as lovers of God and righteousness. We are told they made a great show of their piety in making prayers and giving alms in most public manner. They were in fact in that day widely admired as the most godly of people, often in the synagogues and often in the Temple. They were very serious practitioners of Psalm 119:11, *“Your word have I treasured in my heart that I might not sin against you.”* So it seemed. The trouble was, as Luke tells us in 16:14-15, *“The Pharisees, who were lovers of money...”* scoffed at Jesus. Jesus responded to them by saying, *“You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.”* Jesus said, *“You cannot love God and mammon.”* The tongues of the Pharisees were like knives, slicing others with accusations and condemnations, bathed in their contempt for those who did not make the grade. So the question arises, loving money, to what god did the Pharisees pray? Was it perhaps a demon working a grim and twisting and inescapable blindness in their hearts? How dark was the light in the Pharisees’ heart? Today, beloved, there are men of science, there are those who persuade themselves that God is love and there is no fear of judgment for them, for they have discovered the secrets of success and happiness and have thrown over the old ways and the old truths which were the dark and troublesome speaking of sin and guilt and the need to die to the world, as if one could not be both a good Christian and pursue all the world’s pleasures: of course you can! Many today consider themselves far wiser than our forefathers, wiser even than those who wrote the Bible. They speak with ill-concealed contempt to and of those who hold to the faith which as Jude said, (Jude 3), *“...was once for all handed down to the saints.”* There are many such false lights in the world today which blind people to their need for the truth regarding Jesus as Savior. And beloved, their tongues do not give grace.

At the dedication of the Music Building some weeks ago I spoke of the marvelous gift of music from God. But beloved, music is not the glory of man. That glory is the mind. And the premier instrument of the mind is the tongue. In Matthew 12:34-35 we read, *“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word...for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* Those are Jesus’ words. They call for sober reflection—every careless word? Every careless word!

What, therefore beloved, do we put into our hearts in order that our tongues would give grace? Let us pray: Our heavenly Father, grant that we by Your Spirit might hear, and in hearing, Father, resolve in the strength of Your Spirit to do, to no more let our minds idly feed upon things unworthy of our attention; to no longer, Father, give our eyes and our senses over to have excited in us the desire for things unacceptable. Teach us to love holiness, to prize goodness, to desire righteousness and in all things, our God, we will seek to please You and not grieve Your Spirit as we give ourselves over to the empty desires of a fallen world. May indeed we be those by Your grace be those who give grace through our tongues and joy to our God. We ask this, Father, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Does your tongue often get you into trouble? Do you have a favorite proverb or saying regarding the tongue?
2. What is your interpretation (understanding) of Galatians 2:20 and how might this relate to “tongue control”?
3. How might your speech be more grace-giving? What have you tried?
4. Have you ever struggled with “dark light” in your understanding? How might this lead to bitter speech?
5. Have frustrated desires led to bitter quarrels in your life?
6. Do you consider your words as important as your deeds to others? To God?
7. Are you ever troubled by “the thoughts and intentions” of your heart? Have you ever found your heart “held captive” by some desire (s)?
8. Which of these three is most challenging to you and why?
 - a. Knowing the gospel and biblical wisdom well enough to share with others
 - b. Seeing and hearing others compassionately so as to be helpful
 - c. Treasuring God’s grace so as to desire God’s grace for others
9. What do your words reveal about your heart? What are you willing to do about it?