

Words Are Necessary!

Joe Slater

“Preach the gospel at all times. And if necessary, use words.” Rightly or wrongly, the saying has been attributed to “Saint” Francis of Assisi and is often paraphrased, “Preach the gospel; use words if necessary.”

Let me be the last to discourage anyone from setting a good example. I understand the gist of the lines from Edgar Guest’s poem: “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day; I’d rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.” Countless doors for the gospel have been slammed shut and permanently locked due to poor examples and outright hypocrisy of professing Christians.

That being said, your kindness, morality, pure speech, and honesty cannot inform anyone of their need for salvation, much less answer the question, “What must I do to be saved.” **Words are necessary!** Nobody will know who Jesus is or what He did for us merely by seeing your example. Peter didn’t say to Jesus, “You have the **example** of eternal life.” He said, “*You have the **words** of eternal life*” (John 6:68).

The quip, “Use words if necessary,” strongly suggests that words probably aren’t necessary and may not even be desirable; it translates into a comfortable excuse to disobey the divine directive to **speak** the truth in love. “Use words of necessary” ignores God’s own stated goal and wish: “*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe*” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Yes, there’s a message to be preached, not just an example to be set. Nobody will know of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, much less how to respond to it, simply by seeing your example of clean living.

You open the door with your good example. Then go through that door with the **words** of the gospel!

Gopher Holes

A couple of weeks ago, I looked out the front door and saw a small mound of dirt toward the front of the yard. I thought it was a new ant mound and said to myself, “I’ll put some ant killer on that thing tomorrow.” Well, as it would be, I forgot about it for a couple of days and the next time I looked it was now three mounds of dirt. “That’s a gopher run, and he’s heading straight toward Ms. Janet’s daylily bed!”

Funny thing about those gophers, they make their advancements incrementally instead of one straight shot. They move toward their goal a little at a time and, before you know it, they’re in your garden or flower bed.

There’s another pest that uses incremental steps to achieve his goals, the old devil himself, Satan. He places small temptations in front of us like bread crumbs on a lost man’s trail. Just little indiscretions, nothing terribly noticeable, like an advancing gopher hole. It may be a wanting glance at the pretty girl, excusing the curse words we hear on our favorite TV series or movie. It could begin with missing a church service or not reading our bibles daily. The thing is, Satan is most successful when he works slowly and gradually. As we get used to these “little sins”, we become desensitized and as 1 Timothy 4:2 says, we’ll have our conscience seared with a hot iron so that sin no longer bothers us. We must be constantly on guard of Satan’s devices (2 Corinthians 2:11) and the tricks he uses to fool us into complacency (Ephesians 6:11).

So, when you see one of those gopher holes Satan is putting in your way, remember the words of James, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

--Jay Launius (Maud, TX)

Give Or Take

Two basic philosophies of life boil down to a single question: “Are you a giver or a taker?” Does your life revolve around getting or giving? We live in an age of entitlement. Many have been deceived into believing that we are the center of the universe – that our perceived needs must be met by those around us – by the government, by the church, and by society itself. If slighted, overlooked, or offended in any way, we have been conditioned to believe that it is our right to take by force what we believe should rightfully belong to us. This godless, anarchist behavior is symptomatic of a moral and spiritual sickness infecting our society with greater and greater pervasiveness and, left to run its course unchecked, will bring an end to what was once was a great nation.

But these rather ominous tones can be quickly brought into balance by reflecting upon the true source of every blessing, God Himself. Scripture reminds us that “*Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow*” (James 1:17). God displays His love and generosity by giving what inherently belongs to Him (Psalm 24:1). The government has nothing to give but what has been received from the populace through taxation. Governing authorities exist for the purpose of punishing evildoers, including those who recklessly and violently abandon moral restraint in pursuit of their own desires (Rm. 13:1-6). When a government ignores its sacred stewardship, it will answer to God in real time.

While Christians live in the world, they are not of the world (John 15:19; 1 John 5:19). While we acknowledge having been given life and breath and all things from His Majesty in the heavens (Acts 17:28), as His children we want to develop a give rather than take mentality. As stewards of the manifold grace of God, we serve others through the strength and resources of God (1 Peter 4:10-11). This makes for a happy, joyous, and purposeful life. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This is the kind of life He will reward when we stand before Him in judgment (Matthew 25:34-36). Give it some thought. Are you a giver or a taker?

--Glen Elliott (Greenbriar, AR)