Nine!

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[0:00] We are working our way through the Ten Commandments. We're on the penultimate Commandments night, number nine, and it's about our words, about our speech.

Let me read to you a couple more verses from Proverbs, Proverbs 6. This is the famous place in the book of Proverbs where God lists seven things that he hates, the seven deadly sins as he actually recorded them.
And this is what they are. It says, the Lord hates, haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, devising wicked plans, feet that run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, one who says discord among the brothers.
Now at least three of these in some commentators say four. Four of the seven are about speech, about words. So he mentions a lying tongue, a false witness, and one who says discord with their words amongst a group of people, amongst a church, for example.
Three out of the seven, maybe four out of the seven, that's 40 to 60 percent. That's a lot. Why? Why is it that the seven things listed that God says he hates, he fights against are about the way we speak, our words, sins of speech.
[1:15] We've looked at the past couple of weeks at Thou Shall Not Murder, and there's so much depth in that command, but most of us are not struggling day to day with acts of violence.

Most of us, most of us are not getting in fistfights regularly. We looked last time at Thou Shall Not Still, and most of us today, we went to lunch maybe with our friend here, our neighbor, did not walk away with the silver spoon, right?
But all of us struggle to leave the house of our neighbor and not say something critical about them, gossip about them. See three or four out of the seven, and it's because we all struggle with our words at a rate, a rate so much greater than any of the rest of the issues that we face probably.
And when we believe the gospel, when you come, when Jesus comes into your life and you're changed, he says that out of the heart the mouth speaks. And so he's signaling there that the gospel comes and changes all of who you are, but it begins with the heart.
It starts in the inside and flows outward. And yet, despite believing the gospel, we struggle. We struggle with the sins of speech. How can we change?
[2:31] Is that fireworks? I think so. How can we change? We struggle so much. A wise friend once told me that you can see how much the gospel has affected a person's heart in the way that they speak to the waiter at the restaurant.

You can measure a person's character by the way. They speak to the wait staff when they go to the restaurant. I think that's probably true. Why haven't we changed? How can we change when it comes to our words?
Let's think about it. First, what is forbidden in this commandment? Secondly, why are words so important? And then finally, what is required of us from this commandment?
Okay, so first, what's forbidden in this commandment? Thou shall not bear false witness. What's forbidden? Well, do not bear false witness. And what is in view here in the word witness is a judicial setting.
So this command is all about the judicial setting, the setting of the courtroom. That's the most surface level reading of it. It's exactly what the words mean. It's a judicial language.
[3:38] So it's saying, don't bear false witness in the midst of the courtroom, and you have places like Proverbs 25 or 18 that says a false witness in court in particular is a swinging sword, a brutal club.

False witness in court is like a swinging sword everywhere. Somebody's going to get cut, meaning there's going to be an injustice that takes place because of witnessing in the wrong way in the midst

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of the court, telling lies in the midst of the courtroom.
A lie, it's saying that the command is saying can bring about a great injustice. And so tell the truth, be a truthful person. That's the idea. Now, that's why we read so many other passages because you've got to get beyond the ninth commandment to really understand the ninth commandment. And the ninth commandment has so much more depth that the reference on the surface to just the judicial courtroom setting is commanding, calling on us to become people of the truth in general at a broad level.
And so when you read the Westminster Confessions, larger catechism on this, they, in every single one of the commands in the 17th century, tried to make a list of all the ways you could keep the command or break the command.
[4:49] And by far, the longest section is on the ninth commandment. And they went to all these other places across the Bible to see all the different ways that you can keep the commandment or break this commandment.

Here's one of the things they say, they say, we're being called here to, we're being warrant here not to, I should say, speak the truth unseasonably. That is, don't speak the truth at the wrong time unnecessarily.
They say we're being called here to never maliciously speak the truth. So speaking the truth with the wrong motivation. We're being called here to never pervert the truth, to twist it into the wrong meaning, to misrepresent the truth.
So they're saying this commandment means more than just tell the truth all the time. It's saying actually being a truthful person means knowing when to tell the truth, how to tell the truth, and all because you know why you're telling the truth.
It goes all the way to the bottom of the human heart. And so the biggest emphasis you see in the way these Westminster theologians talked about it is they said, don't damage.
[5:54] They said the ninth commandment teaches do not damage anybody's name or reputation unnecessarily. You see what they were saying? They were saying actually becoming a truth telling person means knowing when not to tell the truth about somebody.

Means not, in other words, they were saying no when the gossip should just stop with you. Don't damage other people's reputation unnecessarily. They said it's the biggest takeaway from the ninth commandment.
They said that if you know something less than flattering about somebody in your life, here's the quote, sorrow over it and cover their infirmity.
Do everything you can to be broken by it with them and to cover it. In other words, to walk alongside them, but to never extend the gossip. You see how they took it?
Martin Luther said the ninth commandment means always try to give the benefit of the doubt to somebody else. Now here's the point. That means that the ninth commandment is so important being a truthful person who knows why they're telling the truth, who knows the wisdom of when to tell the truth, who knows the wisdom of protecting the truth.
[7:05] Because we all know that a healthy society and a healthy life and a prospering and a flourishing life and a life of peace and a nation of peace and a society of peace depends on all of that.

It depends on truth telling. It's words that start wars. It's telling the truth at the wrong time in the wrong ways that can begin a war, that can begin a great conflict.
And so there's so much depth here, I should say, about being truthful. This is a short sentence. And so you've got to get into other places in Scripture to really mine the depths of it.
Now let me do that by going to Proverbs and James. We read from those two places, Proverbs and James. And when you do that, when you look at what Proverbs and James says about our speech, the big thing that comes out of it is that God wants us to know across the Bible that He wants us to see the power in our words, in our speech.
So let me remind you of Proverbs 12, 17. We read it just a moment ago. It says, speaking rashly is like a sword thrust, like a death wound, like a dagger.
[8:12] But speaking truth, on the other hand, is like a healing balm or a medicine. Now do you have a memory in your life of that time that that person said that thing to you?

And you've never forgotten it. A time where you were struggling and you were suffering and you were low and that person came and gave the death blow. Proverbs 12 says a rash word is like a

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dagger wound.
You know, saying something that's true but that's motivated in the wrong ways at the wrong time can be the final wound that cuts somebody down. Do you have a memory like that or do you have a memory on the other side that you've never forgotten that person said the kindest word to you when you were at your lowest?
Where they said that one thing that brought you back to life when you were in the midst of feeling the pangs of death. And Proverbs 12 says a kind word is like medicine applied to a great wound.
In other words, it's saying words are like knives. Words are knives and you can use your words to cut like a dagger blow.
[9:21] You can bring death into somebody's life with your words or you can use your words like the surgeon's scalpel where you slice them in just the right way in order to heal them again. They go either direction.

You say your words have the power of death or the power of life built right into them. Now James chapter 3, we read that verses 2 to 10.
The idea there is what can our words do? And James gives us all these metaphors, illustrations. He says verse 3 to 5, your tongue is small but it can do great things. See that emphasis?
Power. Your speech has so much power. Here's the three metaphors he gives us. Your mouth is like the rudder of a ship. You know, a rudder of a ship is so small but the person driving the ship can turn a massive ocean liner with just a small rudder.
Great power, you see. It's like the bit and bridle of a horse. You can have a horse sitting at 16, 18 hands. That's a very big horse. And you can turn it with just a little bitty piece of metal in its mouth.
[10:23] Or my favorite one, your tongue is like a campfire, a small fire, it says. And you know, when you go camping, when we go camping, we bought a, here we bought a little V shape fire pit to take camping.

It folds flat. You can take it anywhere. You can hike to the top of Monroe with it. It's so light. It's wonderful. But why? Why do you buy something like that? Because you know that when you go out into the wilderness and the conditions are dry, if you do not have that fire protected, put in exactly the place you need it to be, it can become death.
It can spread. You know, a little campfire can become a forest fire and a city fire and a nation fire and you can burn the world down, right? And that's exactly what Proverbs 12 is saying.
That's exactly what James 3 is getting at, that in your speech, your speech is a campfire. You know, and when you have a campfire, exactly where it should be, you can roast marshmallows over it.
It can be a wonderful night. You know, you can bring healing, good things, sweet things into people's lives. But if you let it get out of control, if it's not bounded, if the motivations of the heart are not in the right place, then it can destroy, it can bring death to so many people.
[11:39] It even goes, James goes so far as to say, our words can set hellfire. That's what he says, go henna fire. They're that serious. Now here's the important text and we'll move on to the second thing.

Proverbs 18, 21 summarizes it all for us. It says, our words have the power of life and death. So there it is all very clearly forced.
Do you know that tonight? That your speech, your words have the power of life and death in this world.
Have the power of life and death in people's lives all around you. Every single day, every single moment, your ability to speak and communicate wields such power in the midst of this world.
How do you minister to others? What are you ministering to others with your words in your day to day life? James 3 verse 8 says, no human being can tame the tongue.
[12:41] Do you hear that? Nobody can, what are you ministering with your words? And James comes and says, death. Nobody can tame the tongue. He says, it is a deadly poison in the midst of human hands as a human instrument.

He says, oh boy, what are we to do? He says, there's no help for us. Our tongues are deadly, he says. And Jesus comes in Matthew 12, 36 and says, I tell you on the day of judgment, every single one of you will give an account for every careless word you've ever spoken.
For by your words, you will be justified and by your words, you will be condemned. We will all give an account before the King of Kings of every careless word that we ever spoke.

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Now, secondly, why, there's good news coming. Why are our words so powerful? Why is it that, before we get to the good news, why is it that our tongues, our speech has the power of life and death?
Why are they so serious? All right, stick with me. I know the fireworks are there. Keep going. We're getting there.
[13:52] Why are our words so powerful? Hear that? It stopped. James chapter three, verse nine tells us, here's why our words are so powerful. We have a little hint.

James chapter three, verse nine, with our words, we bless God, James says, and then we curse people who are made in the image of God. And he says, brothers and sisters, that ought not be so. So he's saying here that we come to worship and we bless God's name and then we leave and we curse people, human beings made in the likeness or the image of God.
Now he's trying to do something there. He's trying to take us all the way back to Genesis chapter one and say, here's the reason why your words are so powerful. He says, we curse people made in the image of God.
And there's the idea. Our words are so powerful because we were made in the image of God. Genesis one, 26 to 28 tells us that. And that means that when you read Genesis one, you're supposed to think about something very specific, James three says, and that's that when God created the world, he did it with words.
[14:58] God made the world in the beginning and he spoke the world into existence. And so the very word of God, the words of God's voice come out of his mouth and through that he gives us the instrument of life itself.

God can speak and make nothing become something. And then he turns and says, now I'm making all of you in my image. And that means I'm giving you the possibility of communication, of speech. And so one of the first things we should think about the image of God, what does the image of God means? It means that you are a speaker, a communicator. God spoke in the beginning and you can speak.
It differentiates you from the animal kingdom in a significant way. It's one of the most fundamental aspects of who we are as being made in the image of God. And you, when you speak, you are being like God.
And when you speak words of medicine, words of life to people, you are really being like God. Your words are being used as an instrument of life, like God used them to create the whole world.
[16:01] That's what it means to be made in the image of God. Now that means in the 10 commandments, remember you can blaspheme God, you can bear God's name the wrong way by speaking curses against God.

You can blaspheme the name of God. And then in the 9th commandment we learn that means you can also blaspheme the image of God by cursing the image of God. You can do both.
You can blaspheme people and you can blaspheme God. You can blaspheme people because they're made in the image of God. They're like God. You can do both with your mouth. You can bless God and bless people or curse God and curse the image of God at the same time.
Now there's a very helpful illustration of this in the Old Testament. In the original form of the Old Testament it had three sections and one of those sections is called the writings.
And in the writings we have what we today now call the wisdom literature. And there were four books in the writings all grouped together, Job, Esther, Daniel, and Ruth.
[17:08] And the reason for that is that when you read in the wisdom literature about what it means to be wise, the Bible gives you four illustrations of wisdom. Two men, two women.

Job and Daniel illustrate for the men, illustrate for all of us, but for men what it means to be a wise man. And then Ruth and Esther give you the two illustrations of the wise woman.
They go together like that. Now one of those four is the book of Daniel. And in it we have probably the greatest illustration of the damage that can be done in using our speech in the wrong way. Nebuchadnezzar is the king and he walks out in Daniel chapter four onto his porch and he says, is this not Babylon the great which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for my glory and for my majesty?
And then the text says, and at the words of his mouth, when the words of his mouth, the words of pride and the words of curse against God, that's how Daniel reads it. A blasphemy against God came out of his mouth.

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[18:12] It says he was driven away from humankind to dwell with the beast, to eat grass like the cattle, to grow hair like a bird, to grow nails as long as birds' claws.

Now James chapter three says, we contain every single beast of the earth except the tongue. We can control every animal that God has ever made we human beings, but we cannot control the beast that is our speech.
And you see as soon as Nebuchadnezzar spoke words of blasphemy, building himself up over God himself, words of blasphemy, words of curse against the living God, what happened?
He became a beast. God sent him into the wilderness and he became beastly. And James is putting something together between Genesis one and Daniel four and then James chapter three and saying when we use our words to speak ill of others, to curse or blaspheme God or other people, we become beastly.
In other words, he's saying that sinful speech dehumanizes. Sinful speech dehumanizes the speaker and the person spoken about. It undercuts the image of God.
[19:24] The image of God, that's what it means to be human, but when we curse the image of God, we dehumanize. We try to take away the image of God from somebody else and so it's saying our sinful speech ultimately dehumanizes ourselves and other people as soon as we do it.

Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you. Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can kill your soul.
Words can destroy you. Words are so much more powerful than sticks and stones. You can go to the doctor for the sticks and stones, but not what do you do with the words? The words that curse you, the words of pain, the words that you've never forgotten that that person said to you at that time, in that place, in that year.
Words are so much more powerful than sticks and stones. Friends, have you made mistakes with your words today?
Have you made mistakes with your speech this past week? Have you said something in the past month that you say, man, I wish I could take that back?
[20:31] Have you ever said anything in your entire life where you say, if only I could, if I could bring those words back and hold and change my motivations and change the words I chose to speak?

Is that you? Is that you tonight? On the one hand, Jesus Christ says, we will stand before Him and account for every careless word we ever spoke.
On the other hand, John's Gospel says, Jesus Christ is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.
Now that means that in John's Gospel, God is telling us that Jesus Christ is the very speech of God the Father.
We speak and have the power to give medicine, instruments of life, but Jesus Christ, you see what He's saying, He is the very instrument of life. He is the speech of God the Father.
[21:25] He is the Word, John tells us. And the Word became flesh and has come down and dwelt among us. And what does God's Word say? In other words, He's saying, look at Jesus and you can see what God is saying to you about your words.

And what does it say when you look at Jesus? Here's what God says. God says of Jesus in Isaiah 53, and Isaiah 53, this is what God says of Jesus, that He is the one from whom we had to turn our faces away.
And you see, it's saying in Isaiah 53 that He would be like a sheep led to the slaughter. And when that happens, you would have to turn your face away.
You couldn't look. You see, you couldn't look. You couldn't look at what? You couldn't look at the fact that He came to be dehumanized.
Jesus Christ came to be treated like a beast. He came to be dehumanized. You see, every single careless word we've ever spoken dehumanizes.
[22:30] And Jesus says, you're going to have to be held to account for that. And then Jesus Christ came to be ultimately dehumanized. He came to go to the cross to be treated like a beast for every careless word we've ever spoken.

That means that He's saying that at the cross, when the Son of God was dehumanized, He got what our sinful speech deserves. He took it into Himself.

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The cross tells you what every careless word deserves. That's what we see when Jesus goes to the cross. It tells you what God gave in love to overcome the pain of your sinful speech.
Today is the day. Night is the night, I should say, to mourn your sinful speech, but to look and lift up your head and look at the cross. Now listen, let me ask you a few application questions about this. Can you say tonight, do you know tonight? Do you look to Jesus tonight and know that every single sinful word and thought really did die with Him when He died?
[23:35] So if you think back to that thing you said at that time and it still breaks your heart, do you know tonight, do you rest tonight in the fact that every single careless word you've ever spoken, today, yesterday, this month, last year, and for your entire life, really did die when Jesus died?

It went to death. It's gone forever. God has forgiven you. It's over with. Now let me take this a step further. Jesus Christ was forsaken.
He heard silence from God the Father so you could hear a word of peace. Some of us come tonight not just struggling over the speech we've said and the need we have of forgiveness for that.
For the things we've said, the things we never said, maybe. There's forgiveness in Jesus for all of it. And some of us tonight also come struggling because we have years and years of speech that have been hurled at us.
Years and years of being made fun of, years and years of being cut down, years and years of being told something very damaging to our hearts. So some of us come tonight and we carry that.
[24:53] And it's not only that we're sinners with our speeches that we've been sinned at many, many times by other people's speech. And let me just say this. If God the Father would go to the length of giving his son to death, utter dehumanization for you, do you not know tonight that God says a different story about you that God sings over you?

You know, all the things that that person said to you that hurt you and broke you and destroyed your heart. Do you know tonight that God the Father sings words of delight over you? That's what the cross says, that he joys.
He gave his only begotten son so that he could sing over you. If you've been named son or daughter by God himself, then you're okay.
You're okay. Now those things are so painful. So painful. But God the Father, tonight he sings for you. He sings words of delight over you. He says, my son, my daughter, did you endure years of silence?
Does it that there are things in the past that somebody never said that they should have said? Words never spoken that should have been. You never heard, I love you.
[26:07] And you should have. And tonight the Father says, I love you. I love you. Now let me close with this.

What is required of us in just a couple of minutes and we'll be done. What is required of us tonight is to go forward now and grow in wiser speech. So just a few things and I'm just going to list them here and we'll be finished.
Here's the first thing. First, remember tonight your words can be forgiven. And if you look to Jesus tonight for hope of forgiveness for your careless speech, that means that we've got to go from this place and be willing to forgive other people for their careless speech.
You know, if we say, I've been forgiven so much for all that I've said, I've got to be ready to forgive what other people have said to mean about me. So the Lord's prayer, remember it says that we go forward, forgive us our debts, O Lord, as we are forgiving.
All right, so we have to go forward being willing to forgive other people. Secondly, at the same time, we've got to go forward from here knowing all our words, words also at the same time are irrevocable.
[27:15] And they can't be taken back. And so every single thing that we ever do with our speech that is simple can be forgiven. Yet there's a stickiness in our speech.

And we really can minister death or life to people with our words. And whatever we do with our words, we can't get it back. Once they've gone out, they never can come back in.
And so though words can be forgiven, there's still our consequences. And so that's a call and an invitation to say tonight I just want to be renewed and being more serious about the things I say, more serious, meaning I think about it more carefully.
Okay, how? Third, third, very simple. There actually has to be a moment of decision, which is to say, I want to tonight, tomorrow morning, I want to use my words today to speak life to people, to be

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medicine.
So in some sense in your morning communion with God, you've got to have a time where you say, I want today, Lord, my words to go forth and heal. Because our hearts are still sinful.
[28:24] And so if we don't do that, then the natural disposition of the heart will be to default, to the sins of speech that we normally struggle with. Now all of us then need to say, I need to actually identify the sins of speech that are most common patterns in my life.

So we could say all sorts of things, speaking the truth unseasonably in the wrong time with the wrong mode of selfish ambition and words that come from that flattery gossip, little lies that have become big lies.
It could be anything identifying and deciding I'm putting this away. I want to pursue words that heal, not destroy forth. Finally, there is a paradigm in the Bible.
There's a paradigm in the Bible for why speech and growing in why speech. And it's found in Ephesians 4, 1 John 1, John 14 to 17. And it's simply this, good speech, good words always combine together truth and love.
So the only way to speak good words is to speak words of truth for the motivation or reason of love.
[29:33] In other words, the point is that speaking the truth in the Bible is not just an issue of accuracy, of saying the accurate thing.

It's actually an issue of saying the right thing at the right time to the right person for the right reason. And so we have one example here. I can just give one and I have to close from Proverbs 27 verse 6.
Wounds from a friend are faithful, but an enemy multiplies kisses. Wounds from a friend are faithful, but an enemy multiplies kisses. You see it's talking about the issue of truth and love.
Wounds from a friend are faithful, meaning when a friend loves you enough to tell you the truth, it's like a surgeon's scalpel. The wound of a friend is faithful.
They love you so much that they tell you the truth. I'm worried about you. You're running away. You're doing this damaging thing in your life. They come and tell you the truth. They confront because they love you. But then it says, but an enemy multiplies kisses.
[30:35] You know you have an enemy in your life when they're always flattering you. You see that's love without truth. Truth and love always go together. That's why speech, the final word, patterns of sinful speech have to be conquered by recognizing that they are just that patterns, patterns, meaning if you give in to gossip, gossip gets a little bit easier the next time.

And if you give in to unhealthy criticism, a critical attitude unnecessarily, criticism becomes easier next time. And if you lie in small ways, then lying in big ways becomes easier and easier and easier the next time.
And that means that the final word is that to conquer these habits and these patterns, we need one big thing. And that is to bathe, to swim, to wash ourselves in the counter habits, the counter habit of actually bathing and swimming in good speech.
And where do we find that? The word of God. Come to the word of God and read it and learn how to speak well.
Truth and love. Look if your words have the power to give life or death, how much more does reading God's word have the power to change your heart?
[32:17] Have the power of life in the midst of your heart? Just pray now and ask God to change us when it comes to our words. Lord, we come tonight and ask that you would teach us to speak wisdom, truth and love.

And we do come tonight hoping in the fact that Jesus Christ became someone we couldn't even look at at the cross because of our sinful speech.
And without that, what hope could we possibly have when we really think about what we've done with our words and our lives? And Lord, some of us come tonight too needing deep healing because of things that have been said to us.
And so we come long for that, God. Would you use the power of the gospel and the power that you, O Father, have spoken words of joy over us and acceptance to be the healing balm that puts away the ways we were made fun of, we were jabbed at in ways that actually were deeply harmful, the silence that was always so painful.
Lord, you have spoken. Your word is bigger than everything. So we come and rest on that tonight. In Christ's name, amen.

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