

Christ and Communication

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[0 : 00] So Christ in Communication, and if we were to subtitle the sermon, it would be Redeeming Eloquence for the Glory of God.! So I want to pause right there to ask for your prayers, because what I'm essentially battling against all morning is speaking well for any purpose other than the glory of God.

Which is tough when you're actually talking about speaking well. So if you'll join me in praying and continue praying for the grace to get through this and to do it well, I would appreciate that. Let's petition the Father now together. God, you're a great God, an awesome, mighty God, sovereign over all things.

Yet you've chosen to use your servants to accomplish your will. You've chosen human means to accomplish divine purposes. Let it be so this morning that you move powerfully in each of us, through each of us.

Use the words that I've prepared and the words that I speak to impact all of us in such a way that we might live more to the glory of God.

[1 : 19] That we might experience the joy of loving and serving Christ more through this message. What's the reading of your word? What's this time that we might all be filled up?

Not only challenged to change, to repent, but encouraged to fight the good fight. In your name, amen. Okay, so I have... I'm notoriously long-winded.

I know that, and I'm trying to work on that. With that said, I've cut quite a bit of the sermon that I prepared, but you can get the full thing on my website.

We'll talk a little bit about using resources like the internet this morning. But westshallnot.com sometime tomorrow. I'll have all my notes up there. So I'm going to talk as fast as I can without stumbling to try to get through what I feel like is really powerful truth.

The truth that I've had to really wrestle with this week. So we're going to dig into it, and I'm going to really be moving fast. So if you're keeping notes, I'm going to give you the four main bullet points up front.

[2 : 32] And then you can fill the rest in as we go, or you can go online tomorrow. So let's go ahead and work on a definition of eloquence, and then we'll look at the text. For today, purposes of today, eloquence is going to be defined as a style of speaking or writing that is intrinsically pleasing.

Okay. Style of speaking or writing that is intrinsically pleasing. Eloquence seeks a powerful verbal impact through an artistic, surprising, provocative, or aesthetically pleasing application of language. So if you're taking notes, here are the four points that I'm going to try to work out today. Basically, that there are right and wrong ways to use eloquence as Christians.

The wrong ways are anti-oratory. We're going to talk about what that means. And over-eloquence. Anti-oratory and over-eloquence. And the right ways are self-humiliation and Christ-exaltation. Self-humiliation and Christ-exaltation. Okay. Now, but before we talk about eloquence, we have to discuss the building blocks of eloquence, which are words.

[3 : 41] And the Bible is slap full of commandments on words, and of course it's made up of words. The Bible has a lot to say about words, so we're just going to focus in on one part of Scripture as it relates to words, and that's the Gospel.

So the Gospel as it relates to words, first, God has holy standards for how we are to speak and listen to words. If we were to look at Matthew 12, verses 36 through 37, Jesus says, I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every careless word they speak.

For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Also, in Ephesians 4, 29, Paul says, 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.

Second, outside the completion of our sanctification, the Bible teaches that we won't fully live up to God's holy standard regarding the use of words. We see that in James 3, 8, where James writes, No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Next, we see in Scripture that Jesus fulfilled what humanity failed to do. His words were perfect words, without sin. By his substitutionary death, his words became ours.

[4 : 55] His punishment for our words, indeed his punishment for all of our failings, the punishment that we deserved, he took on himself. So we see in Hebrews 4, 15, Jesus is our great high priest who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

And in 2 Corinthians 5, 21, For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew, knowed sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God. The final point that I want to talk about regarding words and the gospel is that our day-by-day failure to use words properly, catch this, our day-by-day failure to use words properly comes from a functional rejection of Christ, the one true word.

If we accept that God has given us words for his purpose, which I hope by the end of the day we will, then when we reject the purpose of words through the way that we use them, it proves that we have rejected the giver of the words as well.

So I'm going to illustrate what I mean. Let's say that Nathan were to give me a Gibson J45, which is an acoustic guitar. It's like the acoustic guitar. Elvis played it, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan.

It's the rock and roll acoustic guitar. So let's say that Nathan gave me a mint condition, 1965 J45. And the next time he came over to my house, I showed him the J45 that I had cut a hole in and turned into a wall caulk.

[6 : 21] That would be not only the stupidest thing I've ever done, but it would prove two things. It would prove I didn't really care for the gift, and that I wasn't considerate at all of the giver.

The same thing is certainly true of the way that we use words. If we view words as a gift from God, and then we misuse them, then we're not only proving that we don't care about the gift itself, but that we don't care about the giver or the intention of the giver.

We have to accept that language and words are God's. He used them first. They were his idea. In fact, he created all that is through using words.

And beyond that, he has a very specific purpose for words, which is not primarily to make our lives more comfortable and convenient. So any time that we use words, we're always borrowing from him.

If we find that we habitually misuse his gift of language, we can know something about ourselves. Luke 6, 43-45.

[7 : 35] Jesus said, For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good. An evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. So when our words get us into trouble, it's only ever secondarily because of our minds.

What I mean by that is that our poor vocabulary or inferior diction or total disregard for proper grammar get us into trouble, but only secondarily. The trouble in communication is primarily a concern of the heart.

Our words get us into trouble because our hearts crave anything but Christ. Paul David Tripp said, I am my greatest communication problem. The greatest difficulty, the greatest danger, and the everyday traps of communication that we fall into exist inside of me, not outside of me.

He went on to paint a picture of two kingdoms, of my kingdom and God's kingdom, and pointed out that our words are tools. They're just tools that we use for communication.

[8 : 48] Those tools always serve the king of the kingdom. And if I'm the king of that kingdom, then it's a pretty small kingdom. It's just as small as my life, my mundane life. And in fact, those words die with the kingdom.

But if God is the king, then the words serve an eternal kingdom, and they fulfill the purpose for which God's grace of words to us was given. So Dr. Tripp concluded, you know nothing about the kingdom of God unless you understand that it is a kingdom of love.

When you are filled with the glory of that love, when your heart is taken up by the mystery of that love, when what daily fills your heart is deep in worshipful gratitude for the miracle of divine love,

then your words begin to be words of love, words of service, words of grace, words of encouragement, words of peace, and words that heal.

So if we find that our words are serving us and not Christ, if our words are hurting others and not helping, if they're tearing down instead of building up, if they're propelled by anything other than love, then we can be assured we need Jesus to repair not our tongues, not our speech, but our hearts.

So if you find that that's the case with you, then pray to him now where you are. I'm yours, Lord. Save me. There is no greater joy than to be his, to be redeemed by his blood and secure forever.

[10:04] Remember, don't let such an opportunity pass by because we're not guaranteed another. Confess your sins to God. Turn from them. And believe that Christ has been crucified on your behalf, substituting the righteous for the unrighteous.

He's now seated at the right hand of God the Father, interceding on behalf of his children. Make no mistake, one word meant for the harm of another person, one word meant to bring any attention to you rather than Jesus as an offense against the eternal God and is therefore deserving of eternal punishment.

So before I talk about eloquence, start at the beginning. Words are a matter of the heart. Do not delay in turning from the disastrous course of rebellion to the delightful path of his grace.

Words are a matter of the heart. God, I pray that that would be the case if anyone here stands apart from your grace, that you would regenerate their hearts, that you would give faith to them, that you would move in our congregation in a powerful way this morning because Christ is all and in all.

God give light to the rest of the circle that those who do know you might be challenged to live more light. Words are a matter of the heart.

[11:30] Let's revisit our definition of eloquence because I do want to get into talking about that.

Eloquence is a style of speaking or writing that is intrinsically pleasing. Eloquence seeks a powerful verbal impact through an artistic, surprising, provocative, or aesthetically pleasing application of language.

Our text this morning is 1 Corinthians 1. You'll turn there. 1 Corinthians 1.

We're going to read verses 10 through 31, and then I'll refer to just a couple of the verses as well as give some background to what Paul was talking about. 1 Corinthians 1, beginning in verse 10.

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

What I mean is that each one of you says, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ. Was Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or will you baptize in the name of Paul?

[12:41] I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I did not know whether I baptized anyone else.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom.

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

[13:42] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to the worldly standards. Not many were powerful.

Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might

boast in the presence of God.

He is the source of your life, Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the world. So pay special attention to verse 17. Paul says, For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. So remember, we're talking about eloquence, and Paul here seems to be treating eloquence with a fair amount of negativity, and we're going to talk about whether or not there even is an appropriate way to use eloquence by our definition of it, but to begin with, let's talk about the wrong ways, anti-oratory over eloquence.

[15:02] I want to clarify a statement, and I hope you'll agree with me, that sin is by its very nature anti-social. Sin, in the case of eloquence, sin works itself out by alienating our hearers from our message.

So if we're sinning in the way that we speak, we're alienating people from either ourselves or from the message, the truth. And it does that in primarily these two ways, anti-oratory being the first. John Piper said that eloquence can either be what he called high eloquence or low eloquence. What he meant was that our words can either be distractingly over people's heads or they can be distractingly dressed down and messy and profane.

Ephesians 4.29 says, 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. So anti-oratory is an application of these types of words or word styles, which is aimed at harming either the message or the hearer, in many cases the reader.

While dulling the clarity of the idea conveyed either by intentional misuse of language or by habitual neglect of one of God's greatest physical gifts, brains, anti-oratory portrays the speaker as crude and careless.

[16:25] The scope of this way of communicating, this very base way of communicating, spans from grammar and vocabulary all the way to posture. Being that we're in the deep south, I'm going to just guess that I don't have to belabor this point because I'm sure that most of you at some point heard your mom say, watch your mouth.

And you know what I'm talking about when I say distractingly dressed down, messy, full-bane, this language. But, because a lot of us are probably in our minds kind of replaying worn-out recordings of some southern preacher rattling off a list of mortal sins that include drinking, smoking, cussing, hanging out with people who do.

Let me take just a moment to kind of clarify something about that. And it is an aside, but I hope we'll see the value in it. All language is necessarily socially defined.

That's to say that words are culturally generated symbols that convey ideas. Just like different cultures use different words to describe the same ideas, such as Spanish-speaking and English-speaking people describe the same ideas with different words.

Different cultures also use the same words to describe different ideas. And profanity is not the only example, but it is an example. I work with a lot of international students at Truett, and let me just tell you that if I wasn't aware of the fluidity, cultural fluidity, of the meaning of words, I could have definitely gotten my feathers rough a couple of times because people in Europe use language differently than we do.

[18:01] They regularly use some words in their homes, which when I was growing up, if I had pronounced some of the words that I've heard them use on the phone with their parents in the room, I would have had a bar of soap in my mouth for four hours.

And I would have been standing up because I would have been too sore to sit down. But they can use that kind of language because culturally speaking, it's more acceptable.

It has a different meaning or a different emotion when they say it because they're in a different culture. Just because a person speaks English, that doesn't mean that their words mean the same thing as yours or mine, vice versa.

There's no such thing as a universally defined cuss word. That's a gray area in our speech that permits us to use words to best communicate our ideas to our intended audience.

Now here's the word of caution. While some words that are considered bad words are really just generally impolite words, there are some words which in our culture are intended only to hurt, not to build up.

[19 : 04] There are condemning, judgmental, ungodly words as well as graphically sexual words that bring to mind terrible ideas and there is no place for words like that in the Christian dialogue at all.

I'm not going to make a list. I think we can piece those together. But I don't want you to miss the point that the biblical principle of Ephesians 4.29 is that wholesome communication must not be reduced to a certain set of words.

The biblical standard is the intention of the heart. It's much higher than a list of you can't say these things, you can't say these things. Just like the biblical calling on Christians is much higher than you can't do these things, you must do these things.

There's a lot of liberty to please God with the way that we speak. Furthermore, our calling as Christians goes way beyond what is culturally acceptable.

So just because some words, culturally speaking, may not be inerrantly wrong, our calling as Christians goes beyond what is culturally acceptable and love always willingly sacrifices our own rights, even our rights to vocabulary, in order that we might give grace to others.

[20 : 13] And that's the point of that text in Ephesians. So if you use, if you can use any word in a way that gives grace to your audience, then do it. But if not, don't.

Okay? So let's look at over-eloquence. And this, I think, for most of us, because of where we've grown up, I think this is a greater temptation. This certainly is a temptation for me.

I think that this is a great temptation among anyone who can speak well. And the temptation is to use that gift in such a way as to elevate themselves.

This was the case for a certain group of people whom Paul was addressing in our text. So if you look back at 1 Corinthians 1, verse 17, he's actually talking about a group of people called the Sophists.

That's where we get our word sophisticated from. The Sophists used eloquent language, style of speaking, as a goal in itself, an intrinsic end.

[21 : 15] And I get that phrase, intrinsic end, from Dennis Donahue. He wrote a book called On Eloquence. And he defined eloquence very similar to the way the Sophists would have. He said, eloquence is a style of speaking or writing that is intrinsically pleasing without any reference to other aims.

So he made a distinction between rhetoric, logic, which had a goal in mind, a place that the audience needed to get to. He made a distinction between that and eloquence just being beautiful language for the sake of beauty.

Like a lot of art is just pretty to be pretty. And the Sophists really focused on using form of speaking and form of writing just to be beautiful. Now we've already charged that Christians' speech is to be propelled by love of God and love for others.

Since love was defined for us, primarily in the act of the crucifixion of Jesus, we know that our words will always be a misuse if they don't come from a desire to see God magnified and others served.

That's what Christ was doing on the cross and if we're to love people with our words, then that's what we must do with our words. It doesn't matter how much they deserve our love. It doesn't matter how much they might be able to reciprocate our love.

[22 : 28] That's the calling that we have and that's the way that our words need to work themselves out in love. But 2 Corinthians 5.15 teaches us that sin causes us to live for ourselves instead of for others.

But Christ died to free us from living for ourselves and that is central, central not only to the way that we speak but the way that we live as Christians. We live for ourselves.

We need to understand that we're living in slavery and that Christ has already died to set us free from that. So back in our text, the Corinthians had bought into this sophist idea that eloquence was an end in itself.

And so what we find them doing is that they were aligning themselves within the church with their favorite preachers. And this never happens in America so it's not that relevant.

Totally kidding. Look at verses 10 and 12, 10 through 12. Paul says, I appeal to you brothers by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you.

[23 : 30] that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment for it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you my brothers. What I mean is that each one

of you says I follow Paul or I follow Apollos or I follow Cephas or I follow Christ.

So two things to note here. One is that Paul's opponents had openly mocked him for a lack of eloquence. Which when you read Paul today I'm like are you kidding me? He's a really eloquence writer.

But by the standard of his day he really wasn't. And we see that in 2 Corinthians 10.10 if you're taking notes. Acts 18.24 tells us that Apollos was a very eloquent speaker.

He was from Alexandria which is where Philo had worked. And Philo was kind of like the front runner of the Sophist movement. So history tells us that there was a strong infiltration of Sophists in the education system of Alexandria.

And Apollos no doubt being from Alexandria being noted as a well speaker. He spoke like a Sophist. He was slick-tongued. Very enjoyable to listen to. To clarify that doesn't mean that he was a false teacher.

[24 : 34] Just that he was good. He was a clever wordsmith. And people were gravitating towards him because of the way that he spoke rather than because of what he said. They were doing the same thing with Paul and with Cephas and Paul just said that's enough.

We're not putting up with that. Paul rebuked them for caring more about the way that the gospel was presented than about the gospel itself. The trap that these Sophists had fallen into and that these Corinthian believers had fallen into was that they were seeking their own glory or the glory of a person as their achievement.

Their message wasn't Emmanuel God with us. Their message was me. Not me with you. Me over you. Me better than you. Smarter than you. And unreachable by you.

John Piper said pride-sustaining, self-exalting use of words for a show of human wisdom is incompatible with finding your life and your glory in the cross of Christ. So what Paul did was he didn't try to dress up the gospel to make it easier to understand or easier to swallow.

He spoke plainly about Christ crucified. He expected the Holy Spirit to do the work of conviction, of regeneration, and of sanctification. He fully understood that his words were only a conduit of God's grace.

[25 : 53] And that there was no point in him trying to persuade people or to trick people into believing because ultimately it's the Spirit that does that. Derek Webb said it's not like I'm some kind of Holy Ghost come to change people's hearts.

And that's really what Paul's getting at here. He said, I'm not going to play your games. I'm not going to try to dance around some of the harder issues of the gospel. I'm just going to tell it to you. And then God will work. And the snare of over-eloquence has its roots in a deep sin.

It's the same sin as ethnocentrism, which is just the common human problem of refusing to empathize with other people groups. Assuming that our way is the best way, our culture is the best culture, everybody else just learned to be like me and they'll be better.

It's the sin that led to the Holocaust. It led to America's aberrant brand of slavery and it leads to modern-day racism and hate crimes every day. It's the sin of selfishness and self-worship.

I struggle with this a lot. I hate it. This study, in fact, has made me more aware of my problem. Even in writing these words, I was aware that I want to lift myself up.

[27 : 06] I want you to see me as intelligent rather than see Christ as magnificent. I believe it's one of the most pervasive sins for me and for us because it's infected us on a more core level down into the fiber.

We actually believe we're better than others at something and so we act and speak so as to try to persuade others to believe it too. It's the darkest of lies and if we're to give grace with our words then we have to cut the head off of that serpent.

The serpent lives in our hearts. It's not something outside of us as we've said before. Remember that communication problems are heart problems and I'm telling you that my heart problem when it comes to communication is selfishness and pride.

I hate the number of times I had to plead for forgiveness and plead for grace in writing the sermon because I was choosing words that were the best words for the idea rather than the best words for you to understand the idea.

I was thinking about myself rather than you. The sin of self-worship worked out and over eloquence had us teach English to whole tribes of Native Americans give them Christian names and rob them of their cultural identity in the name of evangelizing the people group rather than becoming all

things to all people learning their culture and their language and preaching the gospel to them in their words.

[28 : 28] the story some of some The problem is self-worship.

It tells us that we're better than others. It tells them that if they want to be right, then they have to be like us. And ultimately, it elevates the way that I present my message over how important it is that you hear the message.

It shouldn't matter to me as much as it does that Christians use proper grammar all the time in their online posts.

It shouldn't matter that we disregard classical grammar rules. I mean, so what if the rule of the official language demands a comma?

If people don't understand my eloquence, then I may as well be speaking to them in another language. I may as well be speaking to them in a language that nobody knows but me. Their ignorance of the gospel is infinitely more a hazard than their ignorance of how to use the thesaurus.

[30 : 01] In North Georgia, this means that most of us need to familiarize ourselves with Spanish so that we can speak words of grace to our neighbors rather than allow our laziness to all but ensure their eternal definition.

It means that some of you who have gifted minds for understanding language should take courses to become experts in exotic languages that don't yet have a translation of the Bible in order that God's lost sheep in other parts of the world might hear and read the gospel of Jesus Christ in words that resonate with them.

It means that others of us, most of us, learn the language of our day, the way that people best connect with it, and in the method that they best connect with in order to cross the cultural barriers of age and technology and inject truth and love and grace into their lives.

Did you guys know that Ruth Cantrell has an email address? She, I don't mean to throw you under the bus, Ruth is the oldest person, oldest woman in our congregation, and she's an email theme.

I mean, she will light you up with some emails. But if Ruth can use the internet to encourage the members of the church, then you can learn to use Facebook for the glory of God.

[31 : 15] And not just to build imaginary kingdoms or to gather and disseminate the latest gossip, but to actually glorify God. I know, I fully will confess to you that I'm not the best example of redeeming the internet and what that looks like.

Not by any stretch. I've put my digital foot in my proverbial mouth countless times after tweeting or blogging something. And it doesn't matter how truthful the words were.

I've said things online that have hurt my brothers and my sisters. I'm trying to do better about that.

I'm trying to use the tools of our day to communicate words of grace to people in their language and by their cultural means.

And you should too. A refusal to meet people where they are is absolute selfishness. It's the opposite of love. It's blatant sinfulness. And it's not at all following the model of Christ.

So we should avoid, at all cost, eloquence that is base, is lower eloquence. But we should also avoid eloquence that's high eloquence.

[32 : 29] We should not try to speak underneath people or over their heads. And two ways to judge our use of eloquence, whether it be good eloquence or not, are self-humiliation and Christ exaltation.

And we're wrapping this up. I know we all have physical limitations and attention is one of them, so bear with you. But self-humiliation is the first.

And we see that in our text, 1 Corinthians 1, 26-29. It says, So God's design in the cross and in election is that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

So two questions you can ask yourself to consider if your eloquence is self-humiliating the way that it should. These questions are, Do my words feed boasting? If the answer is yes, then don't use those.

And do they come from an ego in search of exaltation through clever speech? If the answer is yes, then don't use those words. The positive is Christ's exaltation.

[33 : 58] We see that in the final verses of our text, verses 30 and 31. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

So God's design in the cross and election and in regeneration is that all boasting be in him. The question that we can ask ourselves is, Do my words exalt Christ, especially him crucified on my behalf?

And if the answer is yes, then that's a proper form of eloquence. We can use eloquence in a way that glorifies God. It shouldn't altogether be avoided as long as it meets those criteria.

In fact, the Bible is full of eloquence. I want to read one passage to you from Deuteronomy that's absolutely beautiful. Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew. Let gentle rain upon the tender grass and like showers upon the earth. For I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Ascribe greatness to our God.

[35 : 09] Eloquently, the scripture. In fact, Proverbs 15, 23, 25, 11, and 26, 7, as well as Colossians 3, 17, actually encourage and command us to speak well, to give thought to the timing, appropriateness, and potential impact of our words, and to make every one of them an honor to the name of Christ.

So we have to accept if we're going to be true to scripture that God is absolutely sovereign over all things and yet He chooses to use human means to accomplish His will, just as I prayed earlier. Now, He certainly doesn't need our eloquence. That's what I'm getting at. But, He can and does use it to accomplish His ends. If we use eloquence properly, we can hope for at least five positive, God-glorifying outcomes.

I know some of you are going, I'm kind of hungry for five good points, but I promise these will be brief and easy to swallow. If we use eloquence properly, we can hope at least for five positive, God-glorifying outcomes, knowing full well that it is the Holy Spirit who convicts and regenerates and sanctifies, and that He may at any time and in spite of our eloquence or lack thereof, intersect our dialogue and work in the life of our audience.

And when I say audience, I don't necessarily mean this kind of audience. An audience can be one-on-one. Okay. So, five potential positive outcomes of Christian eloquence. I'm borrowing these from a book called *The Power of Words and the Wonder of God* by John Piper and Justin Taylor.

[36 : 38] If you're, the word you need like me, you'll really enjoy that book. But those five positive outcomes are keeping interest, gaining sympathy, awakening sensitivity, speaking memorably, and increasing power.

I'm going to run through those just in brief. The first is keeping interest. And in Matthew 26, near the end of that chapter, Jesus is taking the disciples up to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, and they all fall asleep.

And He says to them, the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. He highlights that we all have a physical weakness. The implication is, I know you guys wanted to pray with me.

Maybe if you got more rest earlier, you could have stayed awake and done. We, in our speaking, need to help people's physical weakness. If the word is a spring of life, then eloquence is a well-paved, beautifully adorned road through the spring's garden that not only leads to the water, but beckons travelers to drink.

Do you see that? My presentation of truth has no bearing on the reality of that truth. But whether you hear it is in very large part a factor of how well I present it.

[37 : 53] Eloquence may keep people awake or focused because they find it interesting or unusual or pleasing for reasons that they can't articulate. Sleeping people or distracted people don't hear the word.

And faith comes by hearing and hearing the word. Therefore, eloquence is like a good night's sleep. It won't save your soul, but it might keep you awake to hear the word which can.

So the second possible outcome is gaining sympathy. Nathan talked about this a little bit last week. A writer and blogger named John Acuff describes people as having a rock in their hand and that rock is made up of all of their cultural and experiential baggage.

It's a rock that they intend to clobber us with. The moment that we begin to act like they expect us to act is the fact of whatever stereotype that rock represents. Well, if that's true, then eloquent language can take the rock out of their hand.

It can disarm them. Eloquent language isn't always speaking in a high way. It's communicating people's common language and doing it well. So when we begin to connect with people on a verbal level, it disarms them.

[39 : 05] It replaces their anger or boredom or resentment with respect and attraction and interest concentration. So, possible and positive outcome of eloquence is gaining sympathy.

The third thing is awakening sensitivity. Eloquence may not bring about regeneration. Certainly it doesn't. But as a means to that end, it may awaken the emotional and intellectual sensitivities for more serious and beautiful things.

That's why we see David writing in Psalm 19. He says, The heavens declare the glory of God. And then a little bit later he says, In them he is set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

So why would he compare the rising sun to a bridegroom and a runner? To help the dull mind awaken to the joyful beauty of the rising sun. In the hopes that this natural kind of awakening might lead to a spiritual sight that nature is all about the glory of God.

So speaking beautifully can awaken people's awareness of beauty in order that they might see God who is ultimate. Fourth is speaking memorably.

[40 : 21] Certain kinds of eloquence like cadence or parallelism, meter, rhyme, alliteration, even brevity, which I haven't displayed a lot of today, may not only interest and awaken the heart, but increase the impact of the message by making what is said memorable.

Finally, we can hope that our eloquence increases the power of our message. John Piper said, the attempt to craft striking and beautiful language makes it possible that the beauty of eloquence can join with the beauty of truth and increase the power of your words.

When we take care to create a beautiful way of speaking or writing about something beautiful, the eloquence, the beauty of form, reflects and honors the beauty of the subject, and so honors the truth.

So there's a synergistic power of two things working together to accomplish a greater good in combining beautiful presentation with beautiful truth. And that's why fajitas taste so good.

You guys didn't? There's an example of eloquence. You didn't expect that, did you? Fajitas do taste good, though, and the reason is that because before we ever get to taste it, all of our senses are telling us this food is going to be good.

[41 : 35] And we hear it come out of the kitchen. We smell it, it's bright, and it's exciting to look at. And when it gets to the table, the waiter drops a shot of tequila and lights it on fire. I mean, what's more exciting than your food being literally on fire in front of you?

We've become so engrossed in the experience of being served the food that we're able to most fully appreciate its flavor because our attention has already been drawn to the excellence of the food before we taste it.

People who can't yet see the beauty of Christ should receive in our language both a witness to his beauty and an invitation to behold it with us. They should, in effect, hear us say, the beauty of my words is a shadow.

Christ, who created and sustains and thankfully, mercifully, accepts imperfect beauty as the substance. Turn to him. Go to him. And that's the calling for each of us as we fix our attention once again on Christ, crucified on our behalf, becoming sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

As we prepare to take the Lord's Supper, turn to Christ, look to Christ, just as our words are symbols that convey meaning, the elements of the Lord's Supper are elements that convey meaning.

[42 : 55] They're symbols. The bread represents his body that was broken for us. The juice represents his blood that was spilled. So, as we consider the extreme offense of the cross, but also the beauty of what was happening, I would plead with you to turn to Christ.

Go to him. Pray with me.