Heavenspeak and Hellspeak

Perry Hall

TEXT: Ephesians 4:25-5:4

INTRODUCTION

I. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

A. John’s introduction to his prologue is one of the most well-known verses in the Bible declaring the divinity of Jesus. And how does the inspired John about this exalted task? By calling Jesus “the Word.” That is powerful for many reasons, but I want to focus on one auxiliary meaning. Calling Jesus the Word means that words are powerful and have meaning. Both God and Satan use words for powerful purposes because words are powerful and mean things. And Satan empties words of their power and meaning in order to make vain the power of God’s words.

II. Samuel R. Delany wrote,

“Words mean things. When you put them together they speak. Yes, sometimes they flatten out and nothing they say is real, and that is one kind of magic. But sometimes a vision will rip up from them and shriek and clank wings clear as the sweat smudge on the paper under your thumb. And that is another kind” (Equinox, 1973 novel)

III. Limbaugh often has said,

“One of my earliest philosophical pronouncements from the earliest days of this program: 'Words mean things.' We live in a time when many politicians utter words that are meant to beguile and fool, not communicate properly."

IV. Both men said something quite simple, yet very profound, one positive and other negative. Delany spoke about the meaningless of words and the power of words in the sense of the pen is mightier than the sword. The United States of American began with words, The DECLARATION of Independence.” Limbaugh spoke about how they can emptied of their real meaning and become powerful in a negative way, being emptied of truth and changed on purpose.

V. “Words mean things” is a simple truth and is even valid within the spiritual realm, or as Ephesians phrases it (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12): “the heavens” (HCSB); “the heavenly places” (KJV; NASB; ESV; ERV); “the heavenly realm” (NET); “the heavenly realms” (NIV; NLT; ISV). We today are living in “the heavens.” That idea should affect how we walk (5:15) which Ephesians shows us involves, thoughts, words, and actions. Take those three words and we see them as processes, steps, leading to the next. Thoughts lead to words, and words lead to actions. In fact even words are actions. That means “words mean things.”

VI. Let me test a theory with you. Do particular groups and organizations sometimes form their own languages, catchwords and phrases? Of course! Even kids have passwords to get into their forts and tree houses.

VII. Within nations, speaking broadly, English in England is vastly different from English in America or Australia. Often I have advocated we start calling our language “American.” “Dinner” in the South means something different than “dinner” in the north. There is a story in the Old Testament on how Shibboleth became a test word, not because of its meaning but because of its pronunciation (Judges 12:6).

VIII. Politically, the word “freedom” or “free” can mean different things to different political groups. Every political group speaks of freedom, but they mean vastly different things.

IX. In Religion, “sovereign” means something completely different in Reform Theology than it does in how I use the word. And how many words have totally lost their original Biblical meaning? Words like baptism, elder, church, pastor, believe, and on and on. The devil is in the word business.

X. Our speech says something about us:

A. Matthew 26:73 (NASB) And a little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are [one] of them; for the way you talk gives you away.”

B. Matthew 26:73 (HCSB) After a little while those standing there approached and said to Peter, “You certainly are one of them, since even your accent gives you away.”

XI. In George Orwell’s 1984 he coined the word “newspeak” which is the official language of Oceania, one of the 3 superpowers. Newspeak is ‘politically correct’ speech taken to its maximum destructive extent. The phrase “politically correct” was first used by Vladimir Lenin. Newspeak is based on Standard English, but all words describing "unorthodox" political ideas have been excised. There was also an attempt to remove the number of words, to limit the range of ideas that could be expressed. The most important aim of newspeak was to provide a means of speaking that required no thought what-so-ever. Saying “words mean things,” and “the pen is mightier than the sword,” and admitting that there is “politically correct language” is acknowledging that language is the ultimate weapon.

A. “George Orwell, like many other literary scholars, is interested in the modern use of the English language and, in particular, the abuse and misuse of English. He realizes that language has the power in politics to mask the truth and mislead the public, and he wishes to increase public awareness of this power. He accomplishes this by placing a great focus on Newspeak and the media in his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four. Demonstrating the repeated abuse of language by the government and by the media in his novel, Orwell shows how language can be used politically to deceive and manipulate people, leading to a society in which the people unquestioningly obey their government and mindlessly accept all propaganda as reality. Language becomes a mind-control tool, with the ultimate goal being the destruction of will and imagination. As John Wain says in his essay, “[Orwell’s] vision of 1984 does not include extinction weapons . . . He is not interested in extinction weapons because, fundamentally, they do not frighten him as much as spiritual ones” (343). (<http://www.berkes.ca/archive/berkes_1984_language.html>)

B. While Orwell was concerned with political speech, I hope to make a similar point that no one will think is too outlandish. Both God and Satan (2 cor.4:4) are called “God” and have kingdoms. Therefore we should not be surprised that Satan uses language to control his people much like the true God uses language to enlighten His. We could call God’s language “heavenspeak”. We could call Satan’s language “Hellspeak.” In this lesson I want to look at language of the devil, words that he wants his servants to use because words mean things.

XII. Text: Ephesians 4:25-5:4 (HCSB) (25) Since you put away lying, Speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. (26) Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, (27) and don’t give the Devil an opportunity. (28) The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. (29) No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. (30) And don’t grieve God’s Holy Spirit. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption. (31) All bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. (32) And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. (1) Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. (2) And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. (3) But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. (4) Coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks.

BODY:

I. Heavenspeak

I. Why We Should Speak Pure Words

A. In doing our overview study called, “Getting Acquainted with the Bible: Finding Jesus” we focused on finding the gospel in the epistles. The point was that the practical living sections were not separate from and distinct from the theological, but rather based upon it. So according to Ephesians why should we not speak rotten words?

1. Because We Are to Speak Positive Words
2. Because We Are Saved By Positive Words
3. Because We Are to Pray Positive Words
4. Because We Are United by Positive Words
5. Because We Are Commanded to Speak Positive Words
6. Because They Are The Opposite Of Positive Words
7. Because We Are Commanded to Put Away Negative Words
8. Because Words Are Actions
9. Because We Put Off the Old Self
10. Because We Are To Be Imitators Of God.

B. That is a list of ten, but we could make a longer list. Let’s look at these in more detail. Remember, words mean things.

1. Because We to Speak Positive Words

* Ephesians 1:3 (HCSB) Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.

Many versions say, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (NASB).” The word “be” is added and not in the original text. Plus the word translated “blessed” means to praise – “properly, ‘speak well of’; to celebrate by praising.” (HELPS – Word Studies)

“eulogētós (“blessed”) is only used of God the Father and Christ (God the Son), showing the Godhead is worthy of all our commitment. Indeed, only God is inherently praiseworthy, deserving every “good acknowledgment”!” (HELPS – Word Studies)

* Ephesians 5:18-20 (HCSB) (18) And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit: (19) speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music from your heart to the Lord, (20) giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

2. Because We Are Saved By Positive Words

* Ephesians 1:13 (NASB) In Him (lit., whom), you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,
* Ephesians 1:13 (HCSB) When you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed in Him, you were also sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

3. Because We Are to Pray Positive Words

* Ephesians 1:16-19 (HCSB) (16) I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. (17) I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. (18) I pray that the perception of your mind may be enlightened so you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints, (19) and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power to us who believe, according to the working of His vast strength.

4. Because We Are United by Positive Words

Ephesians 2:17-18 (HCSB) (17) When the Messiah came, He proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. (18) For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

5. Because We Are Commanded to Speak Positive Words

* Ephesians 4:15 (HCSB) But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head — Christ.

6. Because They Are The Opposite Of Negative Words

Notice the paralleling of opposites:

* Ephesians 4:25 (HCSB) Since you put away lying, Speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.
* Ephesians 4:26 (HCSB) Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger,
* Ephesians 4:28 (HCSB) The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need.
* Ephesians 4:29 (HCSB) No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.
* Ephesians 4:30 (HCSB) And don’t grieve God’s Holy Spirit. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption.

7. Because We Are Commanded to Put Away Negative Words

* Ephesians 4:31 (HCSB) All bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice.

8. Because Words Are Actions

“And words are not only acts going forward, marring God's glory, and injuring souls; but acts affecting ourselves, turning back upon the speaker. It is wonderful how we persuade ourselves by our own words; work ourselves up; talk ourselves into anger and vanity.” (W. E. Heygate, M. A.)

All through Ephesians Paul speaks of speaking, and also speaks of walking (2:2,10; 4:1,17; 5:2,8,15). We often talk about “talk the talk” because people say one thing and do another. Yet talking is it’s on kind of walking because words are actions. They either lift people up or hurt them, and both of those are actions.

* Ephesians 4:17 (HCSB) Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their thoughts.
* What do these points mean? Words mean things, and we are defined by our words.

9. Because We Put Off the Old Self

* Ephesians 4:22-24 (HCSB) (22) You took off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires; (23) you are being renewed in the spirit of your minds; (24) you put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.

10. Because We Are To Be Imitators of God

How do we hear God speaking?

Ephesians 5:1-2 (HCSB) (1) Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. (2) And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

We need to speak “Positive Speech:” (borrowed)

* 10 important words: “Let me make sure I understand what you are saying.”
* 9 important words: “I love you and care about you very much.”
* 8 important words: “Let’s be sure we always keep God first.”
* 7 important words: “What can I do to help you?”
* 6 important words: “Let’s all work together on this.”
* 5 important words: “You did a great job!”
* 4 important words: “What do you think?”
* 3 important words: “I am sorry.”
* 2 important words: “Thank you.”
* The most important word in communication: “YOU.”
* The least important word in communication: “I”

II. Hellspeak

A. Many years ago when my girls were small, they had some friends over at the house. Rachel and Ashley walked into my home-office with their friends and asked, “Papa, can we tell Katherine and Erin what the s-word and the d-word is that we don’t say?” Feeling uncomfortable, but realizing this was a “teaching moment,” to use a modern phrase, I gave them my permission. Rachel turned to her friends and said, “We don’t say stupid and dumb.” Not quite the s and d words I was expecting. And yet, we shall learn that my daughters had learned their parents’ lesson well, because there is more than one kind of “Hellspeak.”

B. How powerful are words? While we are studying Ephesians please see the power of words in the words of James:

James 3:2-12 (HCSB) (2) for we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body. (3) Now when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide the whole animal. (4) And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. (5) So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites. (6) And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell. (7) Every sea creature, reptile, bird, or animal is tamed and has been tamed by man, (8) but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (9) We praise our Lord and Father with it, and we curse men who are made in God’s likeness with it. (10) Praising and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way. (11) Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening? (12) Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

C. Why should we watch our language? One short answer is because God says so. That should be enough, but we also need to understand that God is not arbitrary in what He says. He commands because He loves. God commands to protect us, not to burden and enslave us.

D. Let’s look again at our text:

Ephesians 4:25-5:4 (HCSB) (25) Since you put away lying, Speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. (26) Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, (27) and don’t give the Devil an opportunity. (28) The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. (29) No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. (30) And don’t grieve God’s Holy Spirit. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption. (31) All bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. (32) And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. (1) Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. (2) And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. (3) But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. (4) Coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks.

F. For this lesson we are going to focus on these words: Foul; Coarse; Foolish; Crude Joking.

1. Why We Should Not Speak Rotten Words – What They Do

A. Why should we watch our language? There is a saying, “the positives outweigh the negatives.” I don’t think that is true when it comes to words. There is controversy over the following, but according to the Losada Ratio, it takes 2.9013 positive actions (including words) to overcome one negative. While I definitely am not an expert, common experience tells us we remember negative comments more easily, and they have more impact than positive statements. Picture this, if you are standing on a chair, is it easier to pull someone up, or for you to be pulled down? In the same way, it is easier emotionally to pull someone down with our words. Of course, this also depends on our personalities, how secure we are emotionally, and even the circumstances. I will never forget telling someone I had made the Nationals Dean’s list in college and the first words out of their mouth was, “Are you sure they didn’t make a mistake?”

B. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Many have called a big lie, and it is. Words hurt. Now, unlike sticks and stones, we do have some choice as to how much we allow words to hurt us.

C. Words mean things and sometimes they mean, mean things. The abuses of speech and the faults committed in conversation are numerous:

***1.*** Our language ought to be free from profaneness, from speaking contemptuously of God and religion, from ridiculing things serious and sacred, from excusing, praising, and encouraging vice and immorality.
***2.*** Our conversations ought to be free from immodest language. If our words were our clothes, would we be dressed modestly?
***3.*** In conversation, swearing by words and by religious frivolity is to be avoided, under which may be included curses and imprecations on ourselves and others.
***4.*** Our language should not include lying, that is, an endeavor to deceive others, by making them to believe that to be true which we know or think to be false.
***5.*** Our speech ought also to be free from railing and abusive language.
***6.*** Our speech should be free from slander and defamation.
***7.*** Our conversations should not consist in finding and dwelling on faults of others.
***8.*** Our speech ought to be free from ill-natured pride and arrogance, vain boasting, and rude contradiction which flow from these bad dispositions.
***9.*** Our language should not be to flatter, a fault by which we abase ourselves, and hurt those whose conceit and self-love we soothe and increase.
***10.*** Our words should not be designed to provoke others to anger, jealousy, or other base attitudes (Based upon J.J. Jortin, The Biblical Illustrator, Electronic Database; edited heavily.)

C. Let’s just do a quick Biblical overview of corrupt speech:

1. It reveals a corrupt heart; for "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19). It is thus the tongue "defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature" (James 3:6). It is "out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).
2. Corrupt speech is a fearful perversion of the noble acuity of speech with which God has endowed us. It is a melancholy fact that "out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing" (James 3:10).
3. Corrupt speech has the power of destruction. It takes root outside of us, perhaps in some young heart, which it "sets on fire of hell." How true it is that "death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21)!
4. Corrupt speech is irrevocable. No words of ours may be able to undo the mischief caused by it.
5. Corrupt speech is reserved for the fire of judgment. (Matthew 12:36) (T. Croskery, The Pulpit Bible; edited)

2. Why We Should Not Speak Rotten Words – What They Mean

A. When watching TV with my children, we would always point out “bad words.” My mother said, “You’re kids are going to know every bad word there is.” Maybe, but I have also noticed that kids, even adults, use words because they hear them, but they have no idea what they mean. I called someone a “wuss” and someone then asked me, “Do you know what that means?” Apparently it meant far more than what I knew.

B. Words mean things. Words are symbols. Whether the symbol is a word, phrase, monument or memory, there is meaning. In fact, the etymology of words shows that even how they originate is based upon meaning. The etymology of “cuss” is “curse.”

C. What are some synonyms for cuss words?

1. Cuss - The word “cuss” is related to the word “curse” which shows that at least in the original sense, to cuss out someone was to curse them.
2. Curse Words - An appeal or prayer for evil or misfortune to befall someone or something.
3. Curse Words - profane or obscene expression
4. Profane - treat (something sacred) with irreverence or disrespect.
5. Obscene - offensive to morality or decency; indecent; depraved: obscene language; causing uncontrolled sexual desire.
6. Vulgar - indecent; obscene; lewd

a. If we are not to be indecent, obscene; lewd in our dress, attitudes, and actions, then how can we in our speech (Gal.5:19)?

D. Let’s define some of these words:

* 4:29 – Foul (HCSB); Unwholesome (NASB); Corrupting (ESV); Corrupt (KJV) - "Perhaps the image which the word (corrupt) calls up was not distinctly present to the apostle's mind; but it might have been, for it is a very just one. The epithet is used to describe vegetables, meat, and fish which are beginning to go bad; and there are some people whose conversation is quite as unwholesome as food which is not quite fresh. Unsound itself, it injures the moral health and vigor of those who listen to it." (<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/homiletics/ephesians/4.htm>)
* 5:4 – Coarse (HCSB); Filthiness (NASB; ESV; KJV); Vulgar (NET) – shamefulness, i.e. Obscenity (Strong’s);
* 5:4 – Foolish (HCSB; ESV; KJV); Silly (NASB) - This is the "talk of fools, involving foolishness and sinning together" (R. Trench, 121).
* 5:4 – Crude Joking (HCSB; ESV); Coarse Jesting (NASB; NET) - "Sometimes it is lodged in a sly question, in a smart answer, in a quirkish reason, in shrewd intimation, in cunningly diverting or cleverly retorting an objection: sometimes it is couched in a bold scheme of speech, in a tart irony, in a lusty hyperbole, in a startling metaphor, in a plausible reconciling of contradictions, or in acute nonsense.... Sometimes an affected simplicity, sometimes a presumptuous bluntness giveth it being.... Its ways are unaccountable and inexplicable, being answerable to the numberless rovings of fancy and windings of language" (Barrow, Sermon 14, "Against Foolish Talking and Jesting." The whole passage is well worth reading).

E. Words describing the same thing can be categorized into levels: Technical – Gluteus Maximus; Benign – Backside; Crass – What words would make you uncomfortable? Vulgar – What words would shock you? Profane – If our bodies are temples, do we need to watch our words?

F. Does society play any role in defining what is sinful? At first, our response is negative, of course not; God is the author of what is right and wrong. But then again, let me ask a follow up question: Where in the Bible is the list of forbidden cuss words? Some might conclude, “If there aren’t any, then we can say whatever we want!” And yet, strangely, society even makes it taboo for children at a certain age to say certain words; or for coaches and teachers to say certain words to their players or students.

G. As bad as Hollywood is today, we know that if a certain word occurs even they restrict access to children. What place does a Christian have in using language even Hollywood says is bad?

1. MPAA - G rated films usually can have language beyond polite, but rarely, if ever, with [profanity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Profanity) (and even then it's always mild). PG rated films may have mild profanity. PG-13 rated films may contain stronger language and, depending on the target audience (rather than a film's actual age rating), one of the harsher sexually-derived words, provided that the word is not used with a sexual meaning. If the word is spoken more than once or used sexually, it is routine today for a film to receive an R rating. Also, the word [*…*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motherfucker) cannot be spoken at all in films rated lower than R because it is too offensive. Any explicit and grotesque sexual dialogue will require an NC-17 rating; in some cases, an R rated film will contain some strong sexual dialogue.

H. We have as a society digressed from “Gone with the Wind’s famous line by Clark Gable’s character to just recently The Wolf of Wall Street setting a new record for the how many times the “F-word” is used, 506 times in the movie.

I. Psychologists and sociologists apparently find the study of taboo words to be fascinating and worthwhile. Why? Sadly it partly defines our culture. For example, you might have heard that the Eskimos have many words for “snow” as many as around 50.

1. Central Siberian Yupik has 40 such terms,
2. The Inuit dialect spoken in Canada’s Nunavik region has at least 53,
3. The Inupiaq dialect of Wales, Alaska, Krupnik documented about 70 terms for ice that mark such distinctions as: “auniq,” ice that is filled with holes, like Swiss cheese.

J. The Association of Psychological Science’s Perspectives on Psychological Science just published an article that answers scientific questions in an article by Timothy Jay (2009). Jay notes that swear words (or taboo words, as he calls them) can include:

1. Sexual references,
2. Profane or blasphemous,
3. Scatological or disgusting objects,
4. Animal names,
5. Ethnic/racial/gender slurs,
6. Ancestral allusions,
7. Substandard vulgar terms and offensive slang.

K. Taboo words can be mildly offensive to extremely offensive, and people will often use a more mild euphemism to replace a swear word when in mixed (or unknown) company.

1. “Curse words have been only of brief and passing interest to psychologists and linguists. The absence of research on emotional speech has produced theories of language that are polite but inaccurate. Contemporary theories ignore the emotional intensification that curse words produce in language, as well as the issues involved in cursing. Curse words are words we are not supposed to say; hence, curse words themselves are powerful. The words contain and are produced by social practices. The articulation of a curse word thus has incorporated into it social rules about gender identity, race, power, formality, prohibition, etc.” (http://www.stanford.edu/class/linguist1/Rdgs/jay00.pdf)

L. What I find somewhat intriguing is how much has been written on why people curse and how good it is that people curse. It is as if the powers that be are searching for something esoteric to describe something so juvenile. “Heh, heh, I just used a dirty word.”

M. People will continually try to justify their actions and words. Here is an article in a major psychological magazine discussing the “benefits” of cursing: (7 Benefits of Swearing www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-seek/201205/hell-yes-the-7-best-reasons-swearing)

1. **Pain relief.**

2. **Power and control.**

3. **Non-violent retribution.**

4. **Humor.**

5. **Peer and social bonding.**

6. **Self-expression.**

7. **Psychological and physical health.**

N. Isaiah 5:20 (HCSB) Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

O. Should Christians use euphemisms? Euphemisms are like tofu, trying to be like the real thing without the bad parts. Obviously, if society deems what are taboo words, then that must become part of the discussion. Saying words such as gosh and golly instead of God; or darn or heck are not considered taboo. I appreciate Christians using these words instead of the forbidden words. But my personal opinion is that I don’t understand why Christians would want to use words that are even associated with the taboo words. While we should never make rules God has not, and we can go too far one way or the other, I prefer not to.

P. To show one attitude, both for information and instruction, let’s look at one extreme. In 2 Kings 21:10,13, every version I checked said that the charge against Naboth was that he cursed or blasphemed God. Check the Hebrew and it literally says “blessed.” Either the original speakers, or scribes did not even want to say “curse God.”

III. BIBLE WORDS TURNED ROTTEN WORDS

A. All through this lesson we have emphasized that “words mean things.” Now let’s turn that on its head because Satan takes words that have meaning and takes away their meaning. Let’s go back to the beginning where we spoke of Newspeak. What it tried to do was eliminate thought contrary to the leading political position. Also remember that we have stated that Satan has a kingdom too, and that as a leader of that kingdom he would use speech to control his people. One of the ways of doing this is to remove the meaning God has given words to desensitize people to their true meaning. Let’s consider some examples:

1. Hell – extreme disorder, confusion, chaos, a swear word for emphasis.
2. Damn – “The all purpose word” (Urban Dictionary)
3. God - “Religious profanity is called blasphemy”

B. Of these, I consider the divine words, the worst offense: God, Lord, Jesus, Christ. Should Christians go around saying “Oh my God?” I know one Christian who often would say, “Oh my Lord,” and when I politely corrected her, she said that was different than saying “Oh my God.” Today many will use the OMG (text speak) which can mean “oh my God” “Oh my Gosh;” “Oh my Goodness.” In times past, it has been common to use the 3rd of the 10 Commandments – “Thou Shalt Not Take the LORD’s Name in Vain.” Does that apply to meaninglessly using the phrase “Oh my God?” Let’s look at various translations of Exodus 20:7:

1. HCSB - Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses His name.
2. NASB - “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.
3. AMP - You shall not use *or*repeat the name of the Lord your God in vain [that is, lightly or frivolously, in false affirmations or profanely]; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
4. CEB - Do not use the Lord your God’s name as if it were of no significance; the Lord won’t forgive anyone who uses his name that way.
5. ERV - “You must not use the name of the Lord your God to make empty promises. If you do, the Lord will not let you go unpunished.

C. Questions about the use of this verse to condemn saying “Oh my God” are: 1) what does “vain” mean?; 2) If the name of God is Yahweh, then God is not a name but a description.

D. While Yahweh is God’s personal name in the Old Testament, He is also called “God” and “God” could be described as His name in the New Testament along with Father. Just as “Christ” is a title, it also became a name.

E. Oftentimes I have found that if there is a difference of opinion on what a verse means, then we can either argue over that one verse or try another approach. So let’s try another approach. Do you remember the discussion on blessing or praising God? Are we blessing or praising God by emptying the word God of all meaning? What about declaration “Be holy for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Jesus says in the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father who is in heaven, holy, or hallowed by Your name.” Are we treating God holy by emptying “God” of all meaning?

F. Let’s conclude this discussion on the power of words, over both ourselves and others, both negative and positive with a bit of wisdom:

1. Proverbs 12:18 (HCSB) There is one who speaks rashly, like a piercing sword; but the tongue of the wise brings healing.