

The Language of Ashdod

Long before they entered the land of Canaan, God warned his people not to marry the pagan peoples in the land. They were told to drive them out and not intermingle with them.

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess.... You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 7:1-4)

Despite this warning, we find that God's people married pagan people anyway, and this led to idolatry and, captivity. (Psalm 106:34-42)

The close association with pagans corrupted God's people and even affected their speech. *"In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people."* (Nehemiah 13:23-24) Nehemiah's concern was about spiritual identity. The language of Judah was the language of God's people. The language of Ashdod represented the influence of a foreign culture that was replacing devotion to God. What started in compromises in God's law about marriage had resulted in children growing up disconnected from the faith of their fathers. Nehemiah saw a generation drifting away from God's word.

God revealed his message in words by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:12-13) Since the Holy Spirit chose the words, we conclude that they are especially important. How Bible terms are used have significance. *"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God... that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ..."* (1 Peter 4:11) Speaking as the oracles of God glorifies God. That would mean using Bible things in Bible ways. When Peter denied Jesus, one of the people came up to Peter and said, *"Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you."* (Matthew 26:73) Often times, our speech betrays us. If we claim one thing, but our speech tells a different story, there is a problem.

When our speech consistently reflects values and ideas that do not fit with Scripture, it may reveal that we are being shaped more by the world around us than by God's word. We ought to speak as the oracles of God and then teach our children to speak the language of the scriptures as well.

- by Josh McCord

Forgiveness and Consequences

One of the clearest teachings in Scripture is that we must forgive those who repent of their sins against us. Jesus said, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). In fact, our own salvation depends upon our willingness to forgive others. Jesus warned, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). No faithful Christian can harbor bitterness or refuse forgiveness toward a truly penitent sinner.

Sadly, some people find it difficult to distinguish between forgiveness and consequences. While God requires us to forgive, forgiveness does not necessarily remove all of the results of sinful conduct.

Consider King David. After his sin involving Bathsheba and Uriah, David sincerely repented and was forgiven by God (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51). Yet the consequences of his actions remained. His child died, violence plagued his family, and turmoil filled his household for years afterward (2 Samuel 12:10-14). Forgiveness did not erase those consequences.

The same principle is true today. A thief may repent and be forgiven, but he may still face legal penalties. A drunk driver may obtain forgiveness from God and from those he has harmed, but the injuries he caused may remain. A person who has lied, betrayed trust, or slandered others

may be forgiven, but the damage done to relationships can linger for years. This is especially important to remember in our personal relationships. Trust, once broken, can be difficult to restore. A husband or wife may forgive an unfaithful spouse, but the emotional scars may remain. Friends may forgive one another, but the closeness they once enjoyed may never be fully regained. Forgiveness removes the guilt of the offense; it does not automatically remove all of the effects of the offense.

This reality should motivate us in two ways. First, it should encourage us to forgive as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). Second, it should make us think carefully before we sin. Too many people assume they can commit wrongs, say "I'm sorry," and instantly erase all the damage. God's forgiveness is wonderful, but sin often leaves lasting consequences – and the same is true of our forgiveness.

Let us be quick to forgive those who repent. But let us also remember that sin is never harmless. Even when forgiveness is granted, the painful results of wrongdoing may remain. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Think!

- by Greg Gwin