**YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL
OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE**

Unless you have lived under a rock or joined an Amish commune in the last few months then surely you have become sickened by the political discourse in America. Not only is it the usual blood-sport of a presidential election year, with all its expected he-said / she-said venom, but the blame game since this pandemic hit has reached new heights (or, to be more accurate, new lows). The reviling accusations have no limit to their depravity. Surely the people of God have not resorted to this bitter gutter talk. Surely.

If you do see any brother or sister engaging in this name-calling I would like you to remind them that God has something to say about that. I want to show you a quote from Moses that Paul used during one of his trials. This is enlightening, considering the negative hate-speech we are hearing about our government leaders today.

In giving the Mosaic Law we hear God telling him to write these words:

 *“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people”* (Exodus 22:28).

While Luke was writing his Acts of the Apostles he inserted this story about Paul’s defense before the Jewish Sanhedrin council:

*1 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.
3 Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?” 4 And those who stood by said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?”
5 Then Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written,* ***You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people****.’ ”* (Acts 23:1-5).

Even though Ananias deserved this rebuke for violating the law, Paul apologized when he learned he was speaking to “*the* *ruler of your people*.” It seems Ananias was not in his priestly robes, therefore was unrecognized by Paul.

Paul’s example should grab all of us by the neck collar and shake us into breaking free of the negative garbage we are now hearing 24-7. Jesus hits us between the eyes by saying,

*“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* (Matt. 12:34-37)

I should not have to remind Christians of the role of government as being God ordained. You already know the place of “*the governing authorities*” in God’s chain of command. If you don’t, open your Bible and read Romans 13:1-7. Government leaders are “*God’s minister to you for good*” (vs. 4), and “*God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing*” (vs. 6). For that we render “*honor to whom honor*” (vs. 7). To the people of God, that settles it. The apostle Peter added, “*Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king*.” (I Pet. 2:13-17). For Christians, enough said.

Instead of the maliciousness being spewed out by the world against political leaders, disciples of Christ offer “*supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks for all men, for kings and all who are in authority … for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior*” (I Tim. 2:1-3). The world may speak, or write, or text, or email judgments and condemnations on others. We expect that from worldly minds. But from God’s people we expect more. *​“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness* (Prov. 15:1-2). Christians turn the thermostat down and bring the Prince of Peace into the dialog. “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they* (and they alone) *shall be called sons of God”* (Matt. 5:9).

Jesus had every right to call the religious leaders “*Brood of vipers*” (Matt. 12:34), and “*Hypocrites … a son of hell … whitewashed tombs … blind guides … fools and blind … sons of prophet-murderers … serpents*” (Matt. 23). While that sounds like the hate speech of our political landscape today, it is not. Why can Jesus talk this way and we can’t? Two reasons.
1) Jesus is desperately trying to wake them up as they walk to the brink of hell.
2) Jesus “*will judge the living and dead at His appearing*” (2 Tim. 4:1). As God Jesus can say and do what we are not capable of doing. Leave all judging to Him.

In summary, Jesus is trying to save their soul! That’s NOT what the language is we are now hearing on social media. Let the world say what they will. Saints (“the sanctified”) limit their language to “*Be reconciled to God*” (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

In closing, the stress level on our country right now is at a fever pitch. The quarantine, social distancing, unemployment and non-stop negative news cycles are playing havoc on our hearts and minds. It’s easy to get caught up in the war of words we are presently hearing. But we need to be gently reminded that God’s people have always been the real change-agents that brought tasteful salt and a beacon of light to a bitter and dark world (Matt. 5:13-16). We are the calm in the midst of the storm. We believe, then sing:

Angry words! O let them never, From the tongue unbridled slip,
May the heart’s best impulse ever, Check them ere they soil the lip.

Love is much too pure and holy, Friendship is too sacred far,
For a moment’s reckless folly, Thus to desolate and mar.

Angry words are lightly spoken, Bitterest thoughts are rashly stirred,
Brightest links of life are broken, By a single angry word.

Love one another, thus says the Savior, children obey the Father’s blest command.
Love one another, thus says the Savior, children obey His blest command.

Until tomorrow… let your speech be with grace, seasoned with salt.

I love you. Rick