

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Battle over Words

Acts 7

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PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: In what was intended to be a brief introduction Pastor Henry describes and develops the nature of truth and how various philosophical movements resulted in changing the meaning of words. But words must mean something or there is no hope to be found. And so we are invited to consider how this whole battle over words actually works itself out and how the gospel informs us of something far better than what is being taught in too many pulpits.

I. Introduction.

- A. We return to Acts 7 to consider another key aspect in the speech by Stephen and his resulting martyrdom.
 - 1. Last message I pulled the curtain back from what he was saying and what the reaction was from the listeners. In doing so I showed that it all flows from the absolute domination of sin in the lives of all people. The key difference between Stephen and his accusers and attackers was the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. Today is simply an introduction for the sermon next week. I plan on doing this by delving into some of the challenges we face in our culture today with regard to language and meaning. Out of that I hope we will see the importance of getting the meaning right when we approach the bible and what it teaches. In other words, using the words and ideas the bible uses in the way the bible actually uses them.
 - 3. Next week I want to show you how there is a common theme of deliverance and rejection flowing through this whole speech that is very purposeful and precise. Although the name of Jesus is not mentioned once, His presence is clearly seen if we will only slow down and look.
 - 4. My plan is then to deal with this chapter one more time next week to teach on what is martyrdom and why it matters for us today.

II. The necessity of language.

- A. Words mean something or nothing or anything.
 - 1. If they mean something, then we can communicate.
 - 2. If they mean nothing, then we no longer can communicate.

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3. If they mean anything, then when we try to communicate we end up talking past one another.
 4. Cultures are only as strong as their shared values and the ability to communicate those values. I would also argue that the closer any culture is to a proper, biblical worldview the better off it and its people shall be.
- B. We see this battle over words rising today in many different arenas of our society and it is creating great strain, division and confusion for many.
- C. This reworking of language and words is fully ensconced in the Church and its various institutions as well and, as such, it was on my mind as I studied this passage.
1. There is a growing influence in the American Church of what historically is known as “Liberation Theology.” It is a popular idea found in many circles but it is from the very pit of hell.
 2. If you were to study this deeply you would find that it is born out of various older philosophical and theological worldviews.
 3. One major influence came from a philosopher named Immanuel Kant, who made popular the idea that knowledge is something humans possess **autonomously** and is not contingent upon God and His revelation. In doing so he became another useful tool in the battle to dismantle the essentials of the Christian Faith.
 4. (I highly recommend a book by Nancy Pearcey titled *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*. She writes in a very accessible manner while showing how we got where we are today.)
 - a. Kant helped create this two-stage sense of reality and truth. There is one level, “facts,” and a second level, “values.” Facts deal with verifiable truth that is publically accepted. Values is a social constructed meaning of truth. (Repeat
- D. This philosophy led to the rise of the liberal Church there arose major thinker in the Church at large. In France and Germany, the schools bought into these ideas and out of them came a new type of scholar.
1. A key person was Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, bought into these ideas in the late 1700's, teaching that God could only be experienced through feelings. He was a major influence in shifting the understanding of how hermeneutics functioned.

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2. Key non-negotiables were established as the “fundamentals” of the Christian Faith (inerrancy, virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection and authenticity of miracles). They were good and right, but roundly ridiculed.
 3. Denominations were split, new churches were started and many people found that friendships were shattered in the midst of this battle. Over time the issue of fundamentalism subsided as each side went their own way.
 4. There are many other examples but this is enough for the point I am trying to make. We see the same thing happening again.
- E. This shift did not happen overnight; but rather, through a thousand cuts. The cuts started in academia, specifically the seminaries and then Christian colleges, where unique views and new perspectives were given space to be explored.
1. For the average person, academia seems so far removed from their lives that they find it easy to ignore. Until, that is, they find out that the next generation drank deeply from well of those ideas.
 2. We sent and continue to send our young adults to schools that promulgate these theories of knowledge and meaning in every subject. They come out of these places and then find that they moved beyond the small minded thinking of their parents and others.
 3. Academia is filled with those who would accept the words of philosopher Jacque Derrida, who argued “the speaker’s meaning has no more authority than the hearer’s interpretation and thus intention [of the author] cannot outweigh impact [of the hearer]” (as quoted in *Cynical Theories*).
 4. To see this in a current setting you only have to look to the term “racism.”
 5. This is such a hard thing to battle because often those doctrines and ideas are brought in through the most subtle of means. And always through the use of language. Amazing damage can begin to occur with the simple statement, “I am not saying this is correct, but I think it is worth giving thought and consideration.”
- F. Along with these influences and many more there arose the philosophy of Marxism within the world. This philosophy and system became entrenched in Latin America where the idea of **Liberation theology** took root in the 1960's.
- G. All of these groups use the same philosophical roots and all of them make the bible teach a whole different set of ideas than what is actually present in the bible.

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1. Sin = oppression, especially socially and economically, of certain groups of people. Salvation = is a learning to love your neighbor for there is no barrier of sin between man and God. Justice = to know God means you practice social justice.
 2. In this whole idea of Liberation Theology there was a need for a prism or filter through which to read the bible. It found that filter in Marxism and it was viewed as a helpful analytical tool in understanding both the bible and society.
- H. What is my point?
1. In the American church today this liberation theology is rapidly gaining ground.
 2. It is because schools and leaders have abandoned the meaning of words and are now recreating those words to mean whatever is the cultural issue of the day.
 3. **But**, you must understand that this is not even the real issue. There is a darker, more insidious reality that is going on in all of this verbal salad being tossed about.
 4. In the Garden back in the beginning of time Satan asks Eve, “Indeed, did God actually say. . . .”
 - a. At the core of all of this is a battle for truth and truth cannot be known by experience but only through words.
 - b. Words must mean something and when it comes to the bible and theology, words are utterly necessary.
 5. Liberation theology, liberal theology follow this long history of redefining terms. And a key one is what Stephen brings up in Acts 7. It is the idea of rescue, deliver and savior.
 6. Stephan chooses the characters out of the Old Testament carefully. These are some of the favorites of Israel.
 - a. These are the mighty men of faith, used by God in glorious ways for the good of the nation.
 - b. But they are also something else. They serve as shadows of something, or better, Someone else.

III. Conclusion.

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- A. Why did Jesus come? He came to save, to rescue, to deliver us out of a domain of sin and death and into life, true life.
1. This is the liberation the bible tells us about. A liberation from ourselves and our own enslavement in sin. A liberation that delivers us from the power of Satan. A liberation that takes us from the state of enmity with God and makes us His children. A liberation that declares that though our body may die, through Jesus Christ we shall be raised to life eternal.
 2. A true liberation. A glorious salvation.
 3. But to love this requires that you recognize that this fallen age has only one thing in mind. One thing only. It shall come in an incredible array of colors and shapes. It shall appear as if it were an angel of light.
 4. What happened to Stephen? Why was he arrested and lied about? Because he was preaching liberation that is found only in Jesus. What made them drag him out and be stoned to death? He showed them that God is the only true liberator and savior and they could not see it so they killed him.
- B. Beloved, what are your saviors that perhaps you hold to far more jealously than you do Jesus?
1. What or whom do you obey?
 2. What or whom captures your time, money and energy.
 3. When you speak to others about the events of the day, what is the hope you point them to?
 4. This is not a discussion that is merely conceptual. It is an issue of true worship and true deliverance.
 5. What are the wells from which you drink and find satisfaction? What do you day dream about that brings you hope?
 6. Think carefully beloved. Think carefully.

Benediction

May the Lord remind you all of the richness of His grace and the manifold blessings that belong to you in Christ Jesus our Lord. May you walk in His promises and by the power of the Holy Spirit as you engage this fallen age for God's glory. Amen