

Matthew 12.33-37. Jesus & Civility

Introduction: Pg. _____. RK dismiss (60 kids last week!); NEXT - plan to stick around - just go ahead and commit. :) Matthew 12:33-37.

Why a sermon on Civility? Why would we take a Sunday to examine the wisdom of Jesus on this topic?

- We live in a day where division is rising politically and socially.
- We live in a day where we draw deeper lines in the sand and often possess an unwillingness to cross those lines to even have a conversation with someone on the other side. Don't get me wrong, we'll happily launch grenades over the wall with incendiary comments, but that's not really a conversation, is it?
- We live in a day where demonizing someone with a position contrary to our own it is acceptable and even applauded.
- We live in a day where tolerance has been redefined.
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There is incivility in the workplace. A survey of US workers revealed that 25% of workers experienced rude or disrespectful treatment on the job (in 1998). By 2005, it rose to 50%. In 2015, the results were far worse.

Incivility in politics.

- Who could disagree with Brian Jones in his article published in the Harvard Law and Public Policy Review, when he says, we have "presidentialized incivility." Follow @realDonaldTrump on Twitter and it won't take long to see what he means. Is it possible to make great America great again while consistently offending Americans in the process? (I mean no disrespect. We have to pray for President Trump. I'm just calling a spade of spade, and I'm doing so with sadness, not arrogance.)
- But it crosses both aisles. One Democratic senator from MO said last month, and I quote: "I hope Trump is assassinated." What?! Here's a tip: when in doubt, don't. Here's another tip: impeachment would be more civil than assassination. Wow. Incivility is rising in our culture.

This doesn't account for incivility in the media and social media.

When we talk about civility, we are talking about being polite, showing kindness respect and common courtesies to others. The People at The Institute for Civility in Government take it a step further: "Civility is about more than just politeness, although politeness is a necessary first step. It is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one's preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same. Civility is the hard work of staying present even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and fierce disagreements."

We need to restore civility to our civilization, and it should start, I believe, with the people who follow a very Civil Savior, named Jesus Christ.

"Jesus & Civility" Matthew 12:33-37

I. Civility flows from our character. (12:33-35)

Context:

- The Pharisees were on a mission to tear Jesus down.

Matthew 12.33-37. Jesus & Civility

- They tried to entrap him at the beginning of chapter 12 by charging his disciples with unlawful action for eating a little grain out of the field on the Sabbath, the day set aside for worship and rest in the Jewish culture.
- Then, beginning in verse 22, Jesus heals a demon-oppressed restores the sight and speech of a man who was blind and mute, and rather than rejoicing and being absolutely amazed like everyone else in the rest of the crowd, the Pharisees are standing there meaning mugging Jesus, not happy!
- The crowd was saying” Can this be the Son of David?” (The Messiah, the one God sent to bring us salvation), and these religious leaders say in verse 24: “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”
- It is in light of these words, that Jesus continues in verse 33 to speak about the reality of our words.

Read 33-35.

- These are imminently instructive words from Jesus, but make no mistake, these are strong words and they are words of love.
- On the heels of the Pharisees accusations, we understand Jesus calling the crowd to distinguish the evil words words of the Pharisees and his own good words.
- And just like the crowds, we are called to make a decision about Jesus. Was he merely a good man, merely a good prophet, or was he the Son of God, Creator and Redeemer of all things? If he’s the former, he can take or leave him and his words. If he’s the latter, we better hang on every word and follow him in every way.

With this teaching, we once again see the eloquence of Jesus. In short form, he provides wisdom that is relevant every time we open our mouths to speak. Jesus teaches us that our words reveal who we are. That is why we are saying civility flows from our character.

- Jesus says good trees produce good fruit, and a bad trees produce bad fruit. Logical enough. The health of the source determines the health of the output.
 - Good speakers produce good sound.
 - Good apple trees produce apples. (Fall is here, this week, New England)
 - Fruit flows from and accords with the nature of tree.
- Do you see what Jesus is saying? Our conversations actually reveal our character.

Is it amazing? With a few words Jesus essentially explains the actions of every person in every place at all times, but let’s go a little deeper. Look back at the end of verse 34: “For out of the abundance...”

- When Jesus talks about our hearts, he is referring to the totality of our inner person: thoughts, emotions, desires, affections (what we think, feel, want, and love).
- He says, whatever fills our heart, will come out in our actions.
- **Principle of Inescapable Influence: “Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over the person’s life and behavior.” – Paul Tripp**
- Don’t miss the phrase, “abundance of the heart,” or some translations say (and I really like) “out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.”

From our hearts, we will either speak words of life, which are words of truth AND love. OR we will speak words of death, which are words that are either untrue or words that are true but not loving. It is that drastic.

- **Proverbs 18:21 says: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”**
- And Jesus says, the Pharisees speak words of death. He calls them a “brood of vipers!”
 - He means they are “spreading poison” and their poison is a deadly poison. If a viper bites you, you are a goner within hours.

Matthew 12.33-37. Jesus & Civility

- These leaders spoke words of death. Their words kept people from the life God wants us to experience.
- We often wrongly think that our words are independent of our character. We are quick to dismiss our flawed speech. That's what I said, but not what I meant. We can absolutely destroy people with words and then walk away with a smile thinking we are great people.

Please catch this principle of inescapable influence and Jesus' principle of overflow (or abundance). In short, if our hearts are full of Christ, we will most often (not perfectly) speak words that reflect Christ. When our hearts are full of garbage, our words will stink! Garbage produces that stank stank, that stankonia. :)

A supernatural source brings supernatural effect. Christians should speak supernatural words that carry supernatural effect.

- Does anybody see why spending focused time with God is so important (on Sundays, in daily prayer, in daily reading of the Bible, in Groups throughout the week)? It's how we gain the mind of Christ and fill our hearts until they overflow with him!
- [[Galatians 5:22-23 - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, patience, wisdom, care, concern, respect, etc - all come from the Spirit in us producing the life of Christ through us. That's why that Luke 11:13 is an ever-relevant teaching we have to cling to!]]

For some of you, you might be coming to the conclusion, I've never really gone all in with Jesus, so my heart can't be full of him. If Jesus were standing here, he'd say, "Let me give you a new heart." He gives us new hearts by faith.

T: Our words reveal who we are. Civility flows from our the character of our hearts, but let's move to something more constructive and we find it in verses 36-37.

II. Civility cares for others through constructive words. (12:36-37)

Read 36-37 - **Whoa**. Two truths here:

1) Every word we speak matters to God (and should matter to us).

- Think about how many words we speak in one day... Sprint Bill Reveal... :) We are on a family plan. Some were under 1k. Some were over 2k.
- Jesus says it's not just our calculated words that matter to God, he cares about every word, even the words we speak without considering their effect. Worthless words. Reckless words.
- Listen, our words matter to God, because God is a talking God.
 - He spoke the world into existence. He is the creator of communication. He made us for relationship.
 - He sent his Son into the world, and his Son was known as "the Word of God."
 - The words of God are words of life. Jesus said: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63)
- Paul said "**Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for *building others up* according to their needs, that it may *benefit* those who listen.**" **Ephesians 4:29, NIV**
- Our words have power. You may not think you have power. Yes you do! Your words have power. With our words we build up or tear down, encourage or discourage, give life or suck the life out of people. Our words can either lead someone to Christ or away from Christ. Think about that. Words have power.

Matthew 12.33-37. Jesus & Civility

- Let's rid ourselves of speech that is demeaning, insulting, cynical, mean, hateful, judgmental, inconsiderate, rude, and evil.
- Let's rid ourselves of careless words and replace them with caring and constructive words.

2) Every word will justify us or condemn us on the Day of Judgment.

- Whoa. Can you imagine your words being played back? All of us would cringe. All of us would cover our heads in shame.
- We will give an account for every word we speak.
- Legal terms of judgment...
 - Justified = declared righteous
 - Condemned = declared guilty
- **Romans 5:1** "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."
- **Romans 8:1** "Therefore, there is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
- It's not that our words are all that matter. Of course, our actions, even our desires and motives, matter to God, and we will give an account for them as well. But here, our words reveal what we are.

Proposal for Elevating Civility in our Culture. Some of these I borrowed from a talk Bill Hybels shared before 400,000 at last month's Global Leadership Conference that I attended.

1. **Christians must slow down, examine our motives, and respond (not react) with grace.**
 - "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19)
 - Look beneath the surface. Is pride driving your next statement or love? Do I want to elevate myself in this moment, even at cost to this person God loves, or do I want to humble myself, even at cost to myself. Love is humble, not "self-seeking, not easily angered."
 - And there is a HUGE difference between reacting and responding. When we react, we don't think, we don't consider, we don't weigh the wisdom of our words or actions. When we react, we are careless. BUT when we respond we consider others, we weigh out and calculate the value and merit of our words and actions.
2. **Christians differ with others passionately without demonizing them.**
 - Here's what I mean: we can have spirited conversations. In fact, I believe, we should have spirited conversations about the most important matters in life (as well as some of the more tertiary matters in life), while not attacking people in the process.
 - Disagree with positions, challenge presuppositions, example logic, represent a different set of values, but see people like God sees them (you remember last week, that whole bit about an all people posture and our thoughts on racism - they apply right here, right now). That person is an image bearer of God. That person is someone God loves. That person is someone God was willing to send his Son to die to the cross for. Wow. And we want to destroy them? How foolish and pathetic?
 - We have to love those with whom we disagree. Disagreement is inevitable. It is okay. In fact, it is healthy!
 - "The whole idea of democracy is based on the acceptance that different viewpoints abound, and within reason, those perspectives should be respected—even vigorously protected." - Brian Jones (Article, Harvard Law and Public Policy Review)
 - As D.A. Carson points out in his excellent book, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (and I'll come back to this in two weeks): we have seen the culture shift definitions of tolerance from "accepting the right for people to hold different beliefs with respect" to "accepting (not

Matthew 12.33-37. Jesus & Civility

simply the existence of different beliefs, but actually accepting) the actual views as equally valid as your own.”

3. **Christians must not interrupt others and dominate the conversation.**

- Interrupting someone is rude. We even teach 3-year olds to say “Excuse me.” And not interrupt.
- And did you know that word count does not determine who wins an argument? Nor does it determine a good sermon - ha! Can I get an amen?
- “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.” (Proverbs 10:19)
- One of the astounding things about Jesus was how he could turn a conversation or end an argument in about 10 words.
- You don’t have to comment on every social media post you disagree with. Our poor Mayor gets attacked for helping implement changes that will save people’s lives. “Stephanie, didn’t you already work on that rotary a few months ago?” Ridiculous stuff.
- And let me give you another principle for social media: If you wouldn’t say it to a person’s face, don’t say it on social media.

4. **Christians must watch their tone and display kindness at all times.**

- “A soft (or gentle) answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1
- “Love is patient *and* kind.” (1 Corinthians 13:4)

5. **Christians must build friendships with people of different ideologies.**

- Orrin Hatch is a Republican Senator from Utah. He wrote a piece for Time magazine titled: “I Am Recommitting Myself to Civility.”
- In it he reflects of days gone by when Democrats and Republicans vigorously debated ideas and then sat for dinner together. He encourages all politicians to “Venture beyond the comfortable confines of our social circles.” And then he went on to describe his vibrant friendship with the late Ted Kennedy.
 - I’m grateful for the late Senator [Ted Kennedy](#), who taught me that the bonds of friendship are stronger than any partisan pull. When I first joined the Senate, I thought Teddy would be an adversary. Instead, we became the best of friends.
 - Teddy and I were a case study in contradictions. He was born into privilege; I was brought up in poverty. He was an East Coast liberal; I was a Reagan conservative. He was a Catholic; I was a Mormon. Yet time and again, we were able to look past our differences to find areas of agreement and forge consensus. Had Teddy and I chosen party loyalty over friendship, we would not have passed some of the most significant bipartisan achievements of modern times — from the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) and the [Religious Freedom Restoration Act](#) to the [Ryan White bill](#) and the [State Children’s Health Insurance Program](#).

6. **Christians must form opinions carefully and stay open minded if better information comes along.**

- “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.” (Proverbs 18:2)

7. **Christians must apologize immediately when wrong, instead of denying it or doubling down.**

- We all have put our foot in our mouths.
- We all said things we regret. When that happens, let’s own it and ask for forgiveness of those we offend.

Matthew 12.33-37. Jesus & Civility

Conclusion:

When we live with the civility of Christ, when we choose words and actions that are caring and constructive, we will experience better relationships, possess better understanding, become better people, and we will promote a better society.

Let's pray that God will make us a people who choose civility and walk in the ways of Jesus.

Prayer again - for our tongues, for our enemies, (here if not elsewhere)