

3-8-25 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene - *T'tsaveh* (You shall command)
Torah Portion: Exodus 27:20 – 30:10
Haftarah: Ezekiel 43:10-27
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Matthew 18:15-20

Biblical Dispute Resolution 3 – Evil Speech 1

Central question: What kind of speech is evil?

Today we are in parasha *T'tsaveh*, which means “you shall command.” It takes its name from the first four words of the passage in English, and the second word in the original Hebrew.

Ex 27:20-21

20 "And you shall charge the sons of Israel, that they bring you clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually. 21 In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the Lord; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel.

20

אֵלַיְךָ	וַיָּבִיאוּ	יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּנֵי	אֶת־	הַצִּוִּיתָהּ	וְאַתָּה
thee	that they bring	Israel,	the children of		shalt command	And thou
<u>413</u>	<u>3947</u>	<u>3478</u>	<u>1121</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>6680</u>	<u>859</u>

שֶׁמֶן	זֵית	נָךְ	כְּתִית	לְמָאֹר	לְהַעֲלֹת	נֵר	תָּמִיד:
oil	olive	pure	beaten	for the light,	to cause to burn	the lamp	always.
<u>8081</u>	<u>2132</u>	<u>2134</u>	<u>3795</u>	<u>3974</u>	<u>5927</u>	<u>5216</u>	<u>8548</u>

21

בְּאֹהֶל	מוֹעֵד	מִחוּץ	לְפָרֹכֶת	אֲשֶׁר	עַל־
In the tabernacle of	the congregation	without	the veil,	which	before is
<u>168</u>	<u>4150</u>	<u>2351</u>	<u>6532</u>	<u>834</u>	<u>5921</u> <u>9999</u>

הָעֵדוּת	יֵעָרֵךְ	אֹתוֹ	אַהֲרֹן	וּבְנָיו	מִמֶּרֶב	עַד־	בֹּקֶר
the testimony,	shall order	it	Aaron	and his sons	from evening	to	morning
<u>5715</u>	<u>6186</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>175</u>	<u>1121</u>	<u>6153</u>	<u>5704</u>	<u>1242</u>

לִפְנֵי	יְהוָה	חֻקַּת	עוֹלָם	לְדֹרֹתָם	מֵאֵת
before	the Lord:	a statute	for ever	unto their generations	on the behalf of
<u>6440</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>2708</u>	<u>5769</u>	<u>1755</u>	<u>854</u>

בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל: ׀
the children of	Israel.
<u>1121</u>	<u>3478</u>

In this parasha, G-d gives detailed instructions regarding the Mishkan and how Aaron and the succession of priests. These instructions helped our people govern their interaction with G-d in the specific ways that He ordained for us.

G-d also gave us some specific instructions regarding how we are to interact with one another. We are to be a set-apart people, who follow G-d's instructions so as to be a light to the nations. Our light cannot shine to other nations unless our lives reflect G-d's wise instructions, and His righteousness. He is holy. We are to be holy as well.

Lev 19:1-3

19 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

Deut 7:6-7

6 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Deut 28:9-10

The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and walk in His ways.

In the next segments of our series, we will begin to explore a very important aspect of how we are to be a holy people. And that is in governing our interaction with others through speech.

Why do people leave a congregation? Chuck Lawless wrote an article in 2018 outlining what he sees as the top 12 reasons why people leave a church.¹ I won't list them all, for not all of them are relevant to our discussion today, but of those 12, there were several which illustrate broken relationships as the central reason for initiating a break in fellowship. Here is a listing of those few reasons:

Relationship conflict. Someone gets mad at another, and one or both leave the congregation.

Authoritarian leadership. The leader will not permit any opposing view, and those with an opposing view leave.

Congregational strife. A congregation-wide battle or constant conflict in the congregation causes people to leave just to find peace.

If you reflect on these three, you will see a commonality in them – the lack of meaningful healing conversations and productive human interaction. In short, people once offended or disappointed in another member of the Body of faith, will have a tendency to build walls against one another and allow an offence to fester and grow. That is “the flesh” speaking loudly.

But we are to bring the flesh into subjection to the Word of G-d.

¹ <https://churchplants.com/articles/15586-12-reasons-people-leave-church-chuck-lawless.html>

1 Cor 9:24-27

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

I believe that members of the modern Body of faith are currently plagued by the failure to follow G-d's instructions on resolving disputes among them. And that failure regularly divides and alienates believers. G-d intends that His family be in unity – and that doesn't require us to be in perfect unison. Unity is one of the greatest expressions of love, which is to characterize us.

Ps 133:1

133 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!

John 17:22-24

22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. 24 "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

How do we connect with one another in order to have unity? How do we maintain that connection of unity so that there be no disunity? It all must begin with conversations.

I want to begin this new topic by having us think a bit more deeply about how we can best communicate through speech.

The discipline of holy speech is often neglected.

Sadly, some churches seem to have minimized the discipline of holy speech, in favor of other topics. In doing so, their members generally lack a deeper appreciation regarding how damaging words divide and weaken

the Body of faith. When disputes or offenses arise, their members seem to be far more likely to deal with them in ways contrary to Scripture, because they are not taught the Scriptural ways. So, the body of faith is then further fractured and weakened.

Words seem to be the vehicle by which many offenses are generated. But with disciplined use of healing words those offenses can be resolved in a Scriptural manner.

If people will exercise the discipline required to engage in biblical conversations (as opposed to arguments), righteous words will have the power to edify and heal.

Biblical communication has the power to produce restoration and unity, That gives G-d the victory, and strengthens the organization as a whole.

I wish to address some obvious, and some not so obvious, impediments to effective communication by speech. Let's begin by simply defining how speech transmits information from one person to another.

The Dynamics of Human Interaction Through Speech

Communication through speech can simply be described as one person sending a message in code, and the hearer decoding that message. The mind of the speaker constructs words in a series and speaks them as a series of sounds into the air. The hearer gathers those sounds from the air and assembles those sounds into words in his mind, and thus a concept is transferred from one person to another. This all happens in microseconds, and it can be a very effective way of transmitting concepts from one person to another.

Communication requires the combined effort of at least two participants who consciously and intentionally cooperate in the process of transferring information from the mind and heart of the speaker, and the assimilation of that information by the mind and heart of the hearer.

Thus, the two-step process involved in communication is: the successful linguistic formulation from the speaker; and the successful extraction of information from that formulation.

When communicating in an attempt to resolve a dispute or offense, the parties must remain aware of several problems that can present themselves in such a conversation. Some of those problems arise from language itself.

For people to communicate effectively, they must first have a common language. This seems quite pedantic, but occasionally two people who each speak English fluently can have difficulty communicating effectively.

English speakers have different levels of vocabulary, and within that vocabulary, some words have very different meanings to different people. Such differences in meaning can cause one party's statement to convey a totally different meaning to the hearer than what was intended.

This is commonly seen when adults encounter some familiar terms and idioms whose meanings have dramatically changed by youth in their popular conversations. The adult can mean one thing by saying that word, but the child means something entirely different (if not opposite) by using that same word.

Further, a failure in communication can arise if the speaker uses a word which the hearer does not fully understand, and the hearer does not ask for immediate clarification.

If the hearer defaults to silence trying to gather further context within which he might extract the most likely intended meaning of that word, he

may never truly understand what was said. This is not always a good practice.

The hearer shouldn't allow personal pride to interfere with effective communication. The best practice is to immediately ask for a clarification when hearing a word, about which the hearer is unsure. Failing that, effective communication has partially failed, and the speaker has no knowledge of that failure.

English speakers also have different levels of ability to construct a sentence, with proper word use, tense, and syntax. If the speaker uses the language imprecisely, but the listener is skilled in the language, then precise communication is quite unlikely without a number of clarifying questions.

Some speakers will build-into their statements intentional disconnects for purposes of emphasis. They may use linguistic techniques of simile, exaggeration, hyperbole, metaphor, irony, sarcasm, and the like in order to make a stronger point. If so, there will be a disconnect between the literal meaning and the intended meaning of what is said.

The only way such disconnects can be resolved in favor of effective communication is when the hearer "looks beyond" the actual words used

to discern the actual intentions of the speaker. If the hearer is successful in that exercise, effective communication has occurred.

There is a danger, though. When communication involves some of these techniques of emphasis, it brings with it a significant risk of faulty decoding by the hearer, or creating a further offense by the emphasis. Accordingly, people should consider avoiding these techniques in favor of better communication.

Use of “terms of art” or “jargon” in conversations can be problematic as well. If any person in a conversation is unfamiliar with certain phrases or terms used, communication suffers.

It is not uncommon that people in the same faith community can differ dramatically on the definitions of commonly-used terms, phrases and idioms.

In such case, it may be best to pause the conversation, and agree upon a definition of those terms if they are important to the process of communication.

Jewish scholars have seen that disciplined speech is essential to the community of faith. These have undertaken to write extensively on this

topic. The authors of the gospels as well as the letters recognized and also echoed that body of Jewish scholarship as they wrote. Unless the reader is able to interpret the writings considering the parties to the exchange, the issues at hand, the cultures involved, and the language usage of that day, there is an increased risk of gleaning a very different message than that intended by the writer.

Importance of a Common Language

For much of human history, the bulk of human interaction has been by face-to-face conversations. As we end today's teaching, I will discuss why this is the superior method of communication.

A common language is important to any society. It often determines the boundaries of that society. When in urban environments, groups of individuals speaking one language are thrust together with other groups speaking other languages, each group tends to self-segregate into somewhat homogeneous enclaves within that city. This natural self-segregation is based upon shared culture, values, and a common language.

In similar fashion regarding faith-based organizations, adoption of the basic tenets of the faith and actions consistent with those tenets, become important parts of assimilation into that "body of faith."

Successful integration into a faith community generally occurs when sufficient numbers within that community see that the new adherent believes, acts, and speaks consistently within the recognized boundaries of that communal faith.

A foundational truth is that when people in a community wish to speak with one another, especially regarding a matter of conflict or an offense, clarity is essential. Unless those in the conversation have equal footing in the common language, and hold the same definitions for the words being used, effective communication will be hampered.

The use of proper linguistic techniques and a common vocabulary are both important. But how one should govern speech so as to be holy is what should effectively separate those who are of the Body of faith from those who are not. That is why our speech should conform to the guidance of Scripture.

Unholy Words have Consequences

From the earliest months of life, a baby begins to speak. A tiny child's speech is little more than gibberish, or a mimicking of the language of adults around him. But soon the child can form simple sentences. From that time forward another challenge presents itself.

Children have an unquenchable urge to reveal the entirety of their desires and thoughts at times of their own choosing. They can hear, but it seems that the discipline of actually *listening* comes later. With the guidance of wise parents, a child learns that governing speech is good, and listening to gain understanding is important.

Some children quickly take to heart the concepts of listening and governing speech. They learn the techniques of listening to understand, speaking to transmit information in a dialog, and asking questions to get clarification. These combine to assure effective communication. These children move closer to the standard set by Scripture.

Proverbs 13:1–3

A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. 2 From the fruit of his mouth a man eats what is good, but the desire of the treacherous is for violence. 3 Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

These wise children are contrasted with some others who become entrenched in pride and a feeling of personal entitlement. The flood of words which proceeds from their mouths contains far more uses of the words, “I,” “me,” and “mine”.

The self-centered nature of some children is on full display. They listen only to fashion an argument, and then pontificate far too much. These do what Scripture condemns.

Proverbs 18:2

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

Unfortunately, as some grow to adulthood, they never mature beyond this stage. Their adult expressions have little governance. The number of those who make up this segment of society seems to be increasing, as more people are self-centered and not G-d-centered.

Some believe that hurtful words disappear once their echoes fade. That presumption is wrong on two levels.

First, hurtful words actually cause a physiological effect in the hearer. They trigger a release of certain hormones and chemicals in the body which can actually change the brain itself.

A study of college students showed that verbal abuse from peers caused significant effects on daily life, such as fear of being assertive, increased irritability, and trouble remembering appointments and obligations.²

Abuse arising from an intimate partner, rising to the level of psychological violence, was even found to lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.³

Words have great power to injure, and that psychological injury may have a more severe, and lasting, effect than if the hearer had received a physical injury.

² Yun, JY., Shim, G. & Jeong, B. Verbal Abuse Related to Self-Esteem Damage and Unjust Blame Harms Mental Health and Social Interaction in College Population. *Sci Rep* 9, 5655 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-42199-6>, 2019.

³ Dokkedahl, S.B., Kirubakaran, R., Bech-Hansen, D. et al. The psychological subtype of intimate partner violence and its effect on mental health: a systematic review with meta-analyses. *Syst Rev* 11, 163 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-022-02025-z>.

Secondly, our words are heard in heaven as well. The Jewish people understand that at the time of the Second Temple, the people were still occupied with doing good deeds, following Torah's precepts, and in giving to the poor. But the Temple was permitted by G-d to be destroyed because the people engaged in baseless hatred, which expresses itself in evil speech. This is confirmed by Scripture.

Psalm 19:14

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Mt 12:34–37

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Satan stands ready to accuse us before the throne. He is ready with the accusation, but according to G-d's law, he needs a second witness.⁴ Thus, sinful speech turns every speaker into a witness against himself before the heavenly throne. It literally puts words into Satan's mouth, and empowers him as the heavenly prosecutor.⁵

But heavenly accountability doesn't stop there. The one who listens to sinful speech is also standing rightly accused before the throne, for he has participated in the sinful speech by allowing it to find a resting place in his heart.⁶ Since he has agreed to listen to an accusation against another, G-d agrees to listen to the accusation against him.

Conversely, even when one inadvertently hears sinful speech, he should immediately apply a presumption of innocence, and determine that there must be an innocent explanation for it all.⁷

Both of these dynamics are consistent with the Hebraic concept of "measure for measure." It is illustrated also by the following passage of Scripture.

⁴ Deut 17:6, Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Hebrews 10:28

⁵ Titus 2:6-8

⁶ Satan introduced the practice of *loshan hara* (evil speech) as he spoke to Chava (Eve), questioning whether G-d actually meant what He said. See, Genesis 3:1-6

⁷ Joshua ben Peraiah or Joshua ben Perachya (Yehoshua' ben Peraḥyā) was nasi of the Sanhedrin in the latter half of the 2nd century BCE. He was an advocate of the presumption of innocence. Pirkei Avot 1:6

Matthew 7:1–2

Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.⁸

By exercising favorable judgment, applying the presumption of innocence, you deprive the sinful speech by another of its power to divide. Satan's plan is frustrated.

And there is an even better outcome for the one who applies this principle – he obtains a more favorable judgment from G-d. He changes status before the court. God no longer judges him as a defendant in the heavenly court, but rather as one of His children, who are entitled to more favorable treatment.

⁸ Some have interpreted the sentence, “Judge not, that you not be judged” as a prohibition against making a determination regarding righteousness and sin, good and evil. They insist we should not make judgments regarding whether another person's actions are on their face sinful. Under that interpretation, we would be compelled to tolerate all manner of sin among us, which is specifically prohibited by Scripture. See, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. The part of “judgment” which causes us to discern between good and evil, righteousness and sinfulness, must be maintained, and even strengthened, as part of a healthy walk. But for any of us to sit as an unofficial Beit Din (court) to render judgment only upon the report of one side of an issue, is a grievous sin, for we have nullified G-d's justice system by issuing a false judgment, from a seat we are not given authority to occupy.

The Superiority of Face-to-face Conversations

As the decades have passed in human history, people have developed many ways to communicate with one another. Certainly, the written word can be useful in resolving disputes. In a written document, the reader can attain a level of understanding.

But in a face-to-face conversation, the participants can more clearly “see the heart” of the speaker. The nonverbal aspects which are part of a face-to-face encounter provide arguably more information than the spoken words alone.

And since clarity is critical, a face-to-face conversation is the preferred method of communication when engaging in the resolution of disputes or offenses in a Scriptural manner.

In January 2025, John Neff wrote an article entitled *The Decline of Face-to-Face Communication: A Call to Reconnect*.⁹ In that article, which begins by detailing how we as a modern society have begun to replace face-to-face communication with various electronic substitutes, he discusses the upsides to going back to face-to-face conversations.

⁹ <https://therealistjuggernaut.com/2025/01/02/the-decline-of-face-to-face-communication-a-call-to-reconnect/>

Face-to-face interactions allow people to connect on an emotional level through tone, facial expressions, and body language. These elements add depth and meaning to conversations. Without them:

Misunderstandings Increase: Text messages and emails often lack context, leading to misinterpretations that strain relationships and create unnecessary conflict.

Empathy Diminishes: Nonverbal cues are essential for understanding emotions. The absence of these cues makes it harder to empathize with others, reducing the emotional depth of relationships.

Fulfillment Declines: Humans thrive on connection. The absence of face-to-face interactions leaves individuals feeling disconnected, emotionally unsatisfied, and unfulfilled in their relationships.

We will continue next week to explore in greater detail how speech can be improper, and actually sinful.