

1. Watch Your Mouth!

Most of us have said a bad word (or two) in our lifetime. Most of us have also gotten in trouble when we said the word that was off limits. Whether it was a parent, grandparent, teacher, or pastor, they heard the word and enforced the punishment. Truth be told, we probably deserved it.

Defining bad words can be difficult. What's bad in one culture might not be bad in another culture. That said, we know there are words we should and shouldn't use. The Bible has plenty of passages that warn us about how we use our words, and God has also given us a conscience that warns us when we're saying (or doing or thinking) something we probably shouldn't.

Well, holiness isn't a word you'd likely get in trouble for. I doubt if you screamed the word – *Sanctification!* – you'd get grounded (unless you screamed this at 1 in the morning in your

parents' bedroom). While you might not get in trouble for saying 'holy' or 'sanctification,' these can sound like bad words to some Christians. At the very least, these are words loaded with controversy and debate.

SOME FANCY WORDS

There are also some bad mottos about sanctification, not to mention some bad approaches to sanctification in the church or Christian circles (perhaps because of the discouragements associated with it). Sometimes there's preaching and teaching that attempts to avoid sounding careless about sanctification, so the sermon or lesson ends up sounding like a lecture. The speaker uses so many imperatives (maybe even yells a lot) and fails to root Christian effort in God's grace.

Perhaps the passionate preacher is telling Christians to fight sin, but is not clear about God's grace that is at work in us? Maybe the teacher has not been clear to tell us that, by faith, God sees us clothed in the righteousness of Christ? If that's the case, the preaching and teaching can end up sounding like: 'Be good, do better, try harder.'

Sometimes preaching that seeks to avoid sounding too harsh ends up never challenging

other Christians. In these sermons/lessons, the preacher/teacher seems to explain challenges away in a manner that makes them all sound like Christians don't have a responsibility to live a certain way.

If they come across any exhortation or imperative in the Bible, it may sound a bit like this, 'The Bible says for you to do x, but you can't do x because you are a sinner, but praise God Jesus did x for you, so stop trying to do what you can't do and rest in His grace.'

Both of these are incorrect approaches to the Bible. They are wrong and unbiblical. The person who teaches that the law doesn't matter is referred to as an '**antinomian**.' The person who teaches that you are saved by your work and effort is referred to as a '**legalist**.' Both the antinomian and the legalist are wrong.

Sinclair Ferguson explains that both the antinomian and the legalist are obsessed with the law. They both place too much emphasis on it. Even though one seems to dismiss it (antinomian) and one seems to live by it (legalist), they both look to the law in an unbiblical way. The Christian, however, is to look to Christ and see His finished work. The Christian is to work, but work in the grace God

gives. Now, I'm getting ahead of myself, so just know this will all be explained in the pages ahead.

PERFORM FROM ACCEPTANCE

In Rankin Wilbourne's book, *Union with Christ*, he shares an example from the television show, *American Idol*, that I'll paraphrase. He talks about the nervousness that every contestant on the show deals with. They all battle a form of nervousness when they are performing because they have not been accepted on the show or have not been accepted to advance on the show. However, when the next *American Idol* winner is chosen, they get to perform one last time. As Wilbourne points out, this final performance is a performance from acceptance and the nerves seem to fade away.

Sanctification has many parallels to this situation. In sanctification, it's neither 'try harder' nor 'stop trying' but 'by grace, grow.' Or, to put it another way 'by grace, become who God created and redeemed you to be.' In other words, you've already been *accepted* because of the finished work of Christ; now work by His grace.

You see, the grace exhortations and imperatives of sanctification are based on really

good news – you're accepted in Jesus! When you hear, 'You can't change, so stop trying' that's NOT good news. When you hear, 'You are on your own in sanctification, so just make a better effort', that's NOT good news.

Here's the good news – your justification and sanctification have the same root of God's grace. Your progress in sanctification, your growth in godliness, is just as much God's gracious work in you as is your justification. That is, His freely justifying, pardoning and accepting of you on the basis of Christ's work and the work He calls you to do is by His grace alone. And this is REALLY, REALLY good news!

Main Point

We do good works because we know that God has already accepted us through His Son.