



Free Speech Either Exalts Self or Honors God

There seems to be an increasing demand for “free speech” world-wide. Proponents of self-centered free speech often clamor for unrestricted and unhindered verbal and printed communication as well as unrestrained and uncensored physical expressions in which ideas and beliefs can be presented.

God’s Word, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of Christ-honoring communication in all aspects of life. This type of communication has many characteristics such as being thankful, kind, forgiving, compassionate, thoughtful, loving, truthful, gracious, joyful, and peaceful. In addition, Christ-honoring communication brings glory to the Lord and builds up others whenever it is appropriate and possible. *Of course, all aspects of Christ-honoring communication are included, by definition, in free speech.*

There is, however, another side of free speech that is sinful, self-oriented, and condemned in Scripture. The basic problem with this type of communication is its denial or omission of “truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

See [Telling the Truth is Naturally Impossible](#)

From a biblical perspective, self-oriented free speech is corrupt, obscene, slanderous, malicious, bitter, crude, foolish, blasphemous, and deceptive. This list of descriptive terms is not exhaustive, but all of these characteristics indicate the harm that the dark side of free speech can cause. Obviously, those who embrace this type of sinful free speech are not oriented toward honoring the Lord Jesus Christ but, instead, are oriented toward gratifying and exalting themselves.

While we have many opportunities in daily conversation to indicate whether our focus is honoring Christ or exalting self, we are particularly vulnerable to focusing on self when talking about sin in our own lives or the lives of others. Believers committed to the Lord Jesus Christ are to have their communication guided by God’s Word at all times. The following presents various kinds of verbal communication mentioned in Scripture which are especially significant when addressing someone’s sin.

FREE SPEECH THAT IS BIBLICALLY ENCOURAGED

Romans 3:23 states, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Since all of us have sinned in the past and none of us is now perfect, believers in Christ should confess failures to God and others.

God’s Word says that we receive God’s forgiveness and spiritual cleansing when we confess our personal sin(s) to the Lord.

1 John 1:9, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As believers, we are told to confess our sins to fellow believers and pray for one another.

James 5:16, Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Believers are to live at peace with others, and confessing wrongdoings to those sinned against enhances that prospect.

Romans 12:18, If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

See [Confession – The Ultimate Test of Truthfulness](#)

FREE SPEECH THAT IS BIBLICALLY PROHIBITED

Out of a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and in obedience to God’s Word, believers in Christ cannot participate in free speech that is prohibited by Scripture. For example, a believer cannot communicate another person’s sin to others simply for the purpose of relaying information. Speaking about the sin(s) of others could be factually true but, nonetheless, is specifically forbidden in Scripture because it is gossip.

Proverbs 11:12-13, Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent. ¹³ Whoever goes about slandering [*talebearing, scandal mongering*] reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. [*Explanation added*]

Proverbs 20:19, Whoever goes about slandering [*talebearing, scandal mongering*] reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babblers. [*Explanation added*]

Titus 3:2, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

Review [*Communicating the Sins of Others \(Why, When, and How\)*](#)

There is more to God-honoring communication than stating truthful facts. For example, a key element of godly speech is graciousness, and one way to show grace is to edify (build up) others.

Ephesians 4:29, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Colossians 4:6, Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person

Your speech indicates your spiritual condition. For further insight into this self-evaluation tool, see [Words – The Thermometer of Your Heart](#)

FREE SPEECH THAT IS BIBLICALLY COMMANDED AND SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED

Believers in Christ who are spiritual (*Christ-honoring as a result of living in obedience to God's Word*) are directed to restore fellow believers who are overtaken in a fault.

Galatians 6:1, Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

James 5:19-20, My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Communication with a fallen believer for the purpose of spiritual restoration is free speech par excellence. This communication, however, is to follow the steps of church discipline and restoration outlined in Matthew 18:15-17.

Matthew 18:15-17, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

The process of restoration to the Lord, to the Body of Christ, and to those specifically sinned against begins when a follower of Christ communicates with a fellow Christian who has sinned but has not repented. Hopefully the sinning believer will respond with a renewed commitment to follow the Lord Jesus Christ wholeheartedly due to the prayerful encouragement of a fellow believer. If the believer confronted about personal sin will not repent, then the concerned believer who initiated the restoration process is to bring one or two other believers to a subsequent meeting with the unrepentant believer. Obviously, this restorative group can encourage the unrepentant believer to confess personal sin(s) according to biblical guidelines and begin, once again, to live according to Scripture. If the unrepentant believer rejects the group's message, the group can confirm a persistent refusal to repent. If repentance does not occur at this stage, then those in the local body of Christ (the church) are to join in encouraging their fellow believer to repent.

Review [*Church – Do You Know What It Means*](#)

If the believer remains unrepentant, then those in the church are to limit their communication and fellowship with the unrepentant believer until repentance occurs.

To review the process of spiritual restoration, see [*Church Discipline and Restoration Process*](#)

FREE SPEECH THAT IS BIBLICALLY COMMANDED

In some cases, a believer may become aware of a sin that is so significant that the governing authorities of the state must step in. The Bible emphasizes that believers should submit themselves to those governing authorities.

Romans 13:1, Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Titus 3:1, Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,

1 Peter 2:13-16, Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

The only exception to this practice would be if the governing authority required a believer to disobey specifics of Scripture.

Acts 4:19, But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge"

Acts 5:29, But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men."

An Example—

United States citizens are urged to report suspected child abuse to the proper authorities. Each state also has laws requiring certain people to report concerns of child abuse and neglect. While some states require all people to report their concerns, many states only mandate that specific professionals report. These people are typically teachers, social workers, medical and mental health professionals, clergy, and child care providers. This type of communication is a direct application for believers in Christ to submit to governing authorities with regard to a specific subject of communication.

FREE SPEECH THAT IS BIBLICALLY PROHIBITED ALL THE TIME

Total freedom that is foundational to the world's idea of "free speech" is forbidden by God's Word in very specific terms. For example, the Lord mandates that no one should ever take His name in vain.

Exodus 20:7, You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

A study on "taking the Lord's Name in vain" is in [Biblical Insights that are "Out of Sight" \(Part 2\)](#)

Out of a commitment to Christ and obedience to God's Word, followers of Christ are also *not* to communicate in ways that are indicated in the list below. The list is not exhaustive, but it does indicate many of the ways someone can sin in verbal communication.

Some of the following terms are used in more than one verse, but for purposes of simplicity, words in the list below are mentioned only once:

quarrelsome (strife), jealous (rivalry), angry, hostile, slanderous (evil speaking, backbiting, defaming), gossip, conceited (puffed up), disorderly

2 Corinthians 12:20, For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

corrupt (worthless), bitter, wrathful (fierce indignation), clamorous, slanderous (blasphemous)

Ephesians 4:29 & 31, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear ... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

filthy (obscene), foolish, crude

Ephesians 5:4, Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

grumbling, questioning (arguing, disputing)

Philippians 2:14, Do all things without grumbling or questioning.

malicious, obscene (depraved, malignant, wicked), untruthful (deceptive)

Colossians 3:8-9, But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

deceitful, hypocritical, envious (spiteful)

1 Peter 2:1, So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

FREE SPEECH THAT IS BIBLICALLY ENCOURAGED ALL THE TIME

Believers have an opportunity to demonstrate the difference Jesus has made in their lives by what they say and how they say it. The following descriptions of Christ-honoring communication are not exhaustive, but the list indicates many of the ways our words and associated attitudes can honor Christ and edify others.

As in the previous section, some of the following terms are used in more than one verse, but for purposes of simplicity, words in the list below are mentioned only once:

blessing to others (praise, speak well of), joyful, harmonious (of same mind, interest oneself), honorable (virtuous), peaceful

Romans 12:14-18, Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

building up others (edify), gracious (favor, pleasure), tenderhearted

Ephesians 4:29 & 32, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. . . . Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

compassionate (pity, mercy), kind (useful), humble (modesty, lowliness), meek, patient, forbearing (putting up with), forgiving, loving

Colossians 3:12-14, Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

God's Word gives great latitude with regard to free speech that is Christ-honoring but prohibits free speech that dishonors the Lord and others.

FREE SPEECH THAT REQUIRES WISDOM AND PRAYER

A believer growing in Christ easily understands the examples of biblical communication thus far in this study. Such a believer realizes that "free speech" that is promoted in the world is an abomination to the Lord.

Even with clear biblical insight in Christ-honoring communication that is coupled with a desire to obey God's Word, a believer can sometimes not know how or when to communicate in certain situations. When that happens, it is not wise to speak freely.

The following questions are personalized to you for illustrative purposes.

- Would you hasten to confess your sins to someone whom you have offended but who has also indicated no interest in hearing from you? How should you respond to this rejection?
- Would you ask for forgiveness from an unbeliever you have sinned against, knowing that an unbeliever does not understand biblical forgiveness? (*1 Corinthians 2:14 says that the natural person cannot understand the things of God.*)
- Would you confess your sin(s) to a believer who consistently indicates that he has no interest in granting forgiveness to you because he doesn't trust the motivation behind your confession? How can you biblically react to this rejection?
- Would you promptly begin the first step of the church discipline and restoration of a fellow believer who is hiding his provable, known sin by purposeful lying?
- Would you begin the process of church discipline and restoration of a fellow believer who is not convinced that a sin has even occurred? What would you do to address his viewpoint?

- Would you confess some of your sins to another believer but not confess all of them because some sins are too embarrassing to you to communicate?
- Would you confess some of your sins to someone you sinned against but omit other associated sins because you don't believe the other person is ready to hear them?
- Would you immediately correct a fellow believer who sinned publicly before others?
- Would you return to confess later sins to someone who experienced great sorrow over your earlier sinfulness and had great difficulty in granting forgiveness to you originally?

All of the previously listed scenarios deal with sin, confession, and forgiveness. Of course, there are many other situations of life outside of these related subjects. The purpose of listing these questions is to illustrate that not all situations have immediately discernible wrong or right responses with regard to communication that honors the Lord.

Actually, there is not enough information given in any of the above questions for a clearly discernible and accurate biblical answer to surface readily. For example, what is the relationship and gender of those mentioned in each question? How about the timing and appropriate setting for each response? What about your own motivation behind each of your answers? Should other believers be involved in some of the answers? Most importantly, what are the scriptural directives and insights that are applicable to each question? Unless you could determine a clearly understood biblical basis for every answer, you would be wise not to respond immediately.

2 Timothy 2:15, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

James 1:19, Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger

In addition to your study and appropriate application of Scripture to specific situations of life, you should dedicate some time to hear from the Lord in prayer before responding to difficult issues.

James 1:5, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

See [*Wisdom: A Prerequisite to Determine God's Will*](#)

See [*Prayer: A Viable Option or an Absolute Necessity?*](#)

COMMUNICATION ... FROM GOD TO US

By His grace, God has chosen to communicate specifically through the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the written Word (the Bible) to help us deal with every situation of life. May we each hear, understand, and apply the Truth that God has so freely spoken to us for our eternal benefit.