

# We have a right — an *obligation* — to speak the truth!

BY DAVID POSEY

The first amendment to the Constitution says,  
*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

We live in the greatest country in the world. This amendment is one reason we can say that. Yet, recent history may suggest that many of our citizens have either forgotten or chosen to ignore this law — or they apply the provisions of this amendment selectively. For example, just recently, we have seen an appalling outbreak of violence because students at a state-supported university decided to deny freedom of speech to someone they disagreed with. Some universities have made this school policy, under the guise that allowing certain speech will hurt a student's feelings.

Freedom of religion and freedom of speech are rights granted to all citizens. No law can be passed that removes or minimizes those rights. But what congress cannot do, the courts have done, to some degree. People have been sued for asserting the free exercise of religion. In a high-profile case, a young couple who owned a bakery were forced out of business because they refused to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding, on religious grounds.

In the last few years, we have heard rumors that “hate speech” might extend to sermons preached from the Bible in church buildings against same-sex marriage or homosexuality. It doesn't matter how carefully the preacher treats the topic; preaching on the topic itself is considered “hateful.”

“Hate speech,” in other words, does not necessarily mean that hatred is involved in the speech; it just means that if certain groups feel excluded, then, ergo, it is “hate speech.” Yet, could Christians, who are often subjected to truly hateful speech, seek relief on the basis of a “hate speech” law? Don't be naive.

Regardless of where the moral wind is blowing at any given time, we have a right to speak out against unrighteousness and ungodliness. In fact, we have an *obligation* to do so. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:11, Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. The word “expose” (*elencho*) is the same word used by Jesus in John 3:20, For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. Christians are not only to avoid (“take no part”) works of darkness, they are to shed light on them as evil.

What are these works of darkness? Just look at our culture and then read Ephesians 5:3-5: But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral

or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Sexual immorality (*porneia*) heads the list. This is that word “fornication,” which has fallen out of favor, perhaps because it is too blunt. *Porneia* covers all instances of illicit sexual intercourse and all instances of sexual intercourse outside a lawful marriage is *porneia*. A lawful marriage is not defined by the Supreme Court of the United States or by any state or local government. Marriage is defined by God and God alone as a lawful union of a man and a woman. You can read God’s “ruling” on marriage in Genesis 2:18-25. Therefore, even before citing specific passages from the Bible on homosexuality, the practice is ruled out. It is *porneia*. It is *sin*.

But homosexuality is not the only thing Paul mentions. He also cites covetousness (*pleonexia*) — a desire to have more, always used in a bad sense; it is a lust for more, often wanting what belongs to someone else. This, like sexual immorality and impurity are things that “must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”

Paul then moves on to filthiness (*aischrotes*, “obscenity, all that is contrary to purity”), foolish talk and crude joking. People who make a practice of these “unfruitful works of darkness” have no inheritance in the kingdom of God (Eph. 5:5) and make themselves subject to wrath (Eph. 5:6).

We have a right and an obligation to speak out against these things as well. But do we? Why might we be reticent to mention these things, to “declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:20)?

There’s a clue in 5:6 where Paul says, “let no one deceive you with empty words...” There is a slew of empty, deceptive words in the world today. How do you identify these “empty-word deceivers”? It’s not that hard, really. There are people telling you that homosexuality and same sex “marriage” are the “new normal,” so deal with it. Others will hurl crass insults — vulgar, hateful speech — at people they disagree with and ridicule those who have the nerve to suggest that *their* speech is “hateful.” Many protester/rioters we’ve seen in the news lately wear masks — and they should; they are hypocrites.

Paul says, “it is shameful even to speak of the things they do in secret” (Eph. 5:12). Their evil acts are done in broad daylight, in front TV cameras. What on earth do they do in *secret*!! But we don’t speak out because we don’t want to be seen as too pure. No one wants to be called a prude; in the old days, you might be called a “goody 2 shoes...” I don’t even know what that means. I suppose it means that we’ll be viewed as not cool, not “with it.”

In other words, if you want to be liked by most everyone in our culture today, just keep quiet in the face of abject evil. If you want to be popular, by all means aim for the lowest common denominator. If your main goal is to be accepted, pander to the deceptive, empty-talkers in the world.

But I tell you, if you go down that path, you put your soul at risk. God is looking for courageous Christians who will speak up for what is right and true. It's not easy. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him, so that he would be bold.

...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. *Ephesians 6:18-20*

If you speak up, you'll need that armor that Paul speaks of earlier in chapter 6 — especially the shield (6:16) because the darts will come flying toward you; you can count on that.

But, that shouldn't be surprising. We are at war. The battle is against rulers, authorities and global powers who rule this present darkness; spiritual forces of evil (Eph. 6:12). This world is a battleground, not a playground (II Cor. 10:4ff.). We can have some measure of peace here, but complete peace will not come until we are in heaven. In the meantime, as C.S. Lewis said, every inch of ground in the spiritual universe is being claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan (I John 5:19).

But make no mistake. The war has already been won. Christ is the Victory and we, as his people, share in that victory. Our task is to persuade people in the world, caught up in its darkness, to come to the light, to join the winning team, to put on the armor of God and wage war against that spirit in the world that seeks to steal the souls of our neighbors.