

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

II Timothy – Sermon #3
II Timothy 2:14-17
The Importance of Words

Editorial Note: What follows is a sermon that was part of a series that Sidney Cox delivered on the book of II Timothy.

In 1962, Sidney and Violet Cox retired to the Salvation Army retirement home in Detroit, Michigan known as, “The Eventide.” Violet was in failing health and ultimately died in 1967. Sidney continued residency there until a late in life move to Birmingham in 1972.

Certain clues contained throughout this series reveal that it was delivered in 1968, in the aftermath of the death of Sidney’s beloved wife, Violet. It was delivered to the Grace Bible Church of Detroit.

During this period of his life, Sidney was in great demand as a preacher and Bible teacher both within The Salvation Army and churches of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (“CMA”). He had a close relationship with The Salvation Army early in life and developed a close relationship with The Christian and Missionary Alliance late in life. CMA was a wide network of churches throughout the world that shared a common theology and emphasis and was similar in that regard to The Salvation Army. Grace Bible Church was a CMA church

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

We have been looking at a number of pictures that would remind us of one central truth; that is, the Christian life is serious business. And we looked at a son at the beginning of it, we looked at a soldier, we looked at an athlete, we looked at a farmer. And now we are looking at a workman, and we are looking particularly at the material with which he works. Here is a workman who works with words, not with wood, with words. Wood is dead, words are alive. That’s one of the things that makes this so significant. Let us remember also, that in this, more instruction is given, more startling statements are made, things appear that we have not seen before, names are mentioned. The danger of words is brought before us in a most startling way. And I’m just praying that God will help us to have listening hearts and understanding minds. Surely my dear, he must have something to say to us through this rather strange section of the scripture.

Words, they lie before us. They’re in our ears. Words. Words. A workman working with words, and immediately this book of ours, unique in so many ways, unique in the way in which truth naturally or supernaturally unfolds before us, presents words to us in two ways – profitable and unprofitable. And here are these two sections there. Words that produce blessing. Words that produce catastrophe. Words, the handling of which can bring approval, the mishandling of which causes us to be ashamed. Words. And here they are before us. And one of the startling things is that God holds us responsible for it. Now I want to say that again, because some of you didn’t hear it. God holds us responsible for words, words in three ways.

Words that we say, words that we do not say and words that are entrusted to us from God himself. Put them in mind, you charge them before the Lord, that I am holding my children responsible for the words that flow out of them, that we are not only responsible for the sound we make, we are equally responsible for the silence that comes from us. And more startling still, we are responsible for words that are entrusted to us. Words said, words that should have been said, because our silence can be sometimes more eloquent than our words. We can say more sometimes by refusing to say anything, than when we say something. But the most important thing about it is that God has entrusted his words to us, and expects us to handle them, and to handle them correctly. And if we do, we shall be approved, and if not, we shall be ashamed.

Now, here are several of the startling things that come before us. The main emphasis in the passage before us is on the unprofitable word. But we need to keep in mind that whatever is said about the unprofitable word can be said on the other side about the profitable word. Whatever the unprofitable word does on the one side, the profitable word can accomplish on the other. Now here are these unprofitable words and they are actually described. It's not just stated there are some words that are unprofitable, we are told what these unprofitable words are. They are described in a sentence that is amongst the most terrible and startling to be found anywhere in the scripture. And remember, this is being said to folks who are in the church, not out of it. This is not a word that is being said to sinners. This is being said to folks who are in the church. Now here is the word, the sentence to describe the unprofitable word that flows so easily out of the average life, "profane and vain babblings."

Now my dear, if we didn't find that in the book, we wouldn't dare to say anything like that. But that's the way the Bible describes the unprofitable word that sometimes flows in a current from us. Profane and vain babblings. What does profane mean? It means the opposite of "holy." What does vain mean? It is the Bible word for "emptiness." When the preacher, speaking in the long ago said, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity," what did he mean? He was simply saying of the world, "emptiness of emptiness, all is emptiness." And words can flow even out of hearts that are supposed to belong to God that have within them these two characteristics – they can lead to unholiness and be marked by the echo of their emptiness. Lord, help us to understand. I can't do it. Help us to understand that this kind of thing can happen to any one of us - that out from our hearts and our lips may come words that have a destructive quality. On the other hand, isn't it a good thing to remember that the profitable word can lead into the blessed realms of godliness, can lead to the place of fullness and not emptiness, and we've got the thing before us.

Now remember if you please, that here is another very unusual thing about this passage of scripture – names are given, and you won't find them anywhere else. Here are names mentioned. Now remember, the soldier is not named, the athlete is not named, the farmer is not named, the workman isn't named. But the people who mishandle God's word and from whom flows profane and vain babblings, they're named. Now you won't find names like that anywhere else. I don't know whether Hymenaeus and Philetus are mentioned anywhere else. I have a feeling that maybe we can find them somewhere or other, but I know this – they are not mentioned again. Whether they ever appeared before or not, they do not appear again. They go out into the darkness with this thought of the guilt that lies upon them for the mishandling of God's word. And not only that, but we are told again in what way they mishandled God's word.

Where was the error? What was it that was wrong with the words that flowed out of the heart of these people, that produced catastrophe, and it should have produced blessing, where were they wrong? Where? Were they wrong about church government? Oh no. Were they wrong about the fact that they ought to give a little money once in a while? Oh no. No no. Were they wrong about this or that or the other? No no. Not at all. They were wrong about one thing. And I'm quite sure that the Holy Spirit wants us to keep our eye on this point – where these folks were wrong, for this is the point where we go wrong if we go wrong at all, it was at the point of the resurrection of our Lord. They were wrong about the resurrection. And whatever they may have said about other things, it was profane and vain babbling if they were wrong about the resurrection. They probably knew a good deal about the crucifixion. They probably knew a good deal about the burial of our Lord. But there was something where they went wrong, and they went wrong at the point of the resurrection. Now they didn't deny it, they denatured it. They turned it into something that was different to what God intends faith and the resurrection to be. They turned it into a past happening instead of the power of a future hope. It was gone. We don't need to bother with this.

And whenever you find the attack upon the resurrection of our Lord, you can be quite sure that Satan is somewhere in the background leading the thought that leads to the conclusion that the resurrection is something other than what the Bible says it is. This is the basic fact of our faith. In that 2nd chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, a man speaks and we are quite wrong when we say Peter preached that sermon. He didn't preach that sermon at all. The Holy Ghost preached that sermon and in the midst of it a man inspired by the Holy Ghost said, "A man approved of God was among you. You slew him but God raised him from the dead."

And again, in the 15th chapter of I Corinthians another man speaks, or should we say, the Holy Spirit speaks again through another man in which he says, "This is the gospel that I preach unto you, that Christ died. According to the scripture, he was buried but the third day he arose again." And whenever you find any attack upon the resurrection, you can be quite sure that Satan is speaking in his loudest, most subtle, most disguised tones. That's the reason that makes it so difficult for association with folks who deny that kind of thing. How can there be any union of hearts between professed Christians when one denies the virgin birth and the resurrection, for they were both supernatural acts. They do not deny death, not at all. They deny the birth and the resurrection of our Lord. How can there be any fellowship with those who deny the basic facts of our faith. We either have a risen saviour or we do not have a saviour at all. This is the basic fact of it, and there were those around who were denaturing the fact of the resurrection. That's the way that Satan always does when he attacks truth. He never denies it. He agrees with it, and then proceeds to mix something in it that takes away its power. And it's always the same, no matter where. He will provide a religious substitute for it. And he has done it and is doing it constantly.

And there are words that sound so plausible that will destroy the fact of the resurrection – reincarnation is no substitute for resurrection. And we'd better keep our ears open because if there ever was a day when subtle words are being bandied around it's the day in which we live. Anything but the resurrection, sure. You can have a Christ who did this and a Christ who did that. You can even have a Christ who died. You can even have a Christ who was buried. But when it comes to the Christ who rose again, that's the point where the division comes. And if there is anything that should bring to our hearts great joy and constant joy, it's the fact that we have been entrusted by

God with a word that declares the power of the resurrection. Here was the problem here – men were denying it. Men were denaturing it. Men were substituting something else for it. We either have a risen saviour or we do not have a saviour at all. This is the hope that is there. This is the basic fact of it all. This is the rock that holds the anchor - the fact of the resurrection.

Now we're told other things here as well. We are told that words are like seeds, there are thoughts that are given to us in this section that you will scarcely ever find anywhere else. Thoughts are like seeds, we plant them, they produce and then they reproduce. Now, we are held responsible, so this word tells us for the way in which we not only receive God's word but do with it what God intends. We understand it sufficiently so that we know when to plant it and where. You don't plant seeds indiscriminately at anytime, anywhere. We are supposed to know enough about a natural seed to plant it in an appropriate place, at an appropriate time. And "rightly dividing the word of truth" whatever it may mean in other ways, certainly involves that – that we ought to know God's truth so that we have it on hand to plant it when it should be planted and where it should be planted so that it will bring forth and reproduce for the glory of God.

Now that thought is there before us and it's given to us in a very interesting word, it's an agricultural word. It's the word "increase." Dark and terrible words increase "unto more ungodliness." But on the other hand, the light and beautiful and powerful words, they too increase unto godliness. "Increase" my dear is an agricultural word. The farmer would be quite at home with that. You'll remember how frequently it is used – one plants, another waters and fertilizers, but God gives the increase and we are held responsible for handling something into which God has placed this magnificent thing of life that reproduces itself, and we are held responsible for it. And we say to ourselves, but that's a terribly serious job, and so it is. How can ordinary folks become so aware of the word of God and its truth and how to handle it, that it can be planted where and when it ought to be planted? And the answer is given to us in this miraculous passage of scripture that we are studying. And there's the word, we "study to show ourselves approved unto God." Now generally speaking, we'll do anything under the sun with the word of God, except study it. By the way my dear, how much studying of the word of God have you done during this last week? I don't mean did you read a little bit of it. Sure we did. I don't mean did you go somewhere and hear somebody talk about it, cause that's the thing that we usually do. And we think when we've heard somebody talk about the word of God that that's all it is, that's our obligation. We've then done what we're supposed to do. Oh no my dear, we haven't begun to do what we're supposed to do.

Studying of the word of God involves the effort that so few folks are willing to put into it. The absolute dependence upon the Holy Spirit with so few folks are prepared to recognize, and the studying of the word of God. What God is looking for in these days are folks who will so devote themselves to the word of God that when God entrusts to them a word to be planted, they know how to plant it and where to plant it, and when to plant it.

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,"¹ because if something other than the word of God is planted in the midst of great truth, it brings forth a harvest that is terrible to contemplate, and the harvest is told us, right here. There are words used here that you will seldom find anything like them anywhere else. These words dropped by these people who denatured the resurrection. These folks produced a harvest that is described as a

¹ II Timothy 2:15.

“canker.” Now that’s the Bible word for it, not my word for it. A canker. And remember canker is the word translated into our modern terminology that means, gangrene. Did you hear it? Words used incorrectly, guided by Satan can produce a condition within the heart of the individual, and sometimes within the church that is described by one of the most terrible words that you will find either in the Bible or out of it, for gangrene my dear is the ultimate expression of the death like faculties if you like that are wrapped up in what we call cancer.

And here is a word and we look at it and we say, “Oh God, why would you say that to us on this Sunday morning? Are you saying it, because if you’re not, I am? I’m wondering frankly, “Lord, why did you want us to bring this this morning? Why. Why did you want us to hear words like this this morning? It would have been so much easier to have talked about the Balm of Gilead, wouldn’t it? This is the way the Lord leads us sometimes, and when he does there is only one thing for us to do and that’s to do what he tells us to do. And it seems to me somehow in the mystery of things that God wanted to remind us about this serious, serious aspect of the Christian life, the Christian life that can be so beautiful on the one side and can be used of Satan to turn something into destruction on the other. I wonder how many Christians have destroyed the faith of other Christians by releasing to them an unprofitable word. I wonder. I wonder. I wonder how many churches have been smashed to pieces by the releasing of an unprofitable word.

I don’t know what to say right now, but there’s one thing you can always do when you don’t know what to say, you can turn your hearts to God in prayer. So let’s pray, shall we.

Our Father whatever purpose Thou didst have in using this reluctant preacher this morning to bring a word that is so serious that we feign would have avoided it. We pray our Father that whatever Thy purpose was in bringing this before us, that somehow or other it may be accomplished. That in these minds and hearts of ours we may face once more the seriousness of the words that can produce life on the...

(audio ends).