

The Deception Of Empty Words by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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When I was a teenager I heard a seemingly "spiritual" lady in our church say, "The sins of the flesh do not matter because the flesh is going to be destroyed anyway."

Immediately something in me recoiled. I felt the jolt of it in my spirit, even though at the time I could not explain why.

About the same time I overheard a conversation between the same lady and my pastor. The pastor was calling her attention to the clear teachings of the Scriptures, but every time he cited a Bible passage her stock response was: "I see something deeper than that."

Since then I have learned how human pride can deceive people into concocting their own "spirituality" by substituting their subjective inner thoughts, impressions and feelings for true spirituality. Their lie becomes their personal "truth." How sad.

Jesus warned, "Take heed that no one deceives you" (Mark 13:5).

After stating categorically that "no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God," the inspired apostle warns sternly: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them" (Ephesians 5:6, 7).

The inference is clear: people who share in the sins of the sons of disobedience will also share in their punishment.

Later, when gnosticism had become an even greater threat, the apostle John reported, "Many deceivers are gone out into the world" (2 John 7).

Just before his martyrdom, the apostle Peter warned that there will be false teachers "who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words . . ." (2 Peter 2:1 - 3a).

Around the same time and just before his own martyrdom, the apostle Paul also warned that "evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13).

Today, while the truth is advancing, so also is error. The war is on. It is the conflict of the ages. Battles are being fought everywhere: in the media, in classrooms, in courtrooms, in public discourse and personal conversations.

The weapons?

Words.

Words are powerful weapons. They can conquer nations and change societies. They can enslave. They can also liberate.

Words are precision tools. They can shape thinking and behavior for either good or evil. They can obscure. They can also enlighten.

These weapons--these tools--are being skillfully employed both in the promotion of truth and in the spread of error.

From the beginning Satan has used words to deceive. Jesus said that Satan "is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). He lied to himself when he said in his heart that he would ascend into heaven and be like the Most High (Isaiah 14:13, 14). Thus he lied to the angels who followed him in his rebellion. He lied to Eve when he said that if she would eat the forbidden fruit her eyes would be opened and she would be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5).

Satan is the instigator of all error. He is the chief promoter of rationalizations, the master architect of every structure of falsehood--"arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Satan deceives in order to destroy. To carry out his purpose he has enlisted the skills of many of his gifted but deluded followers, who have been "taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26). He has an effective force of influential word-crafters. These mind molders have bought into his ideas because they appeal to their own pride and passions. They are committed to promoting his ideology because they want to build a society structured after their own desires.

It is a known fact that whoever controls the language controls the culture. Secularists (unbelievers) have co-opted the language and are using it vigorously to bend public opinion, to erase biblical principles from the minds of the young, and to demolish the Judeo-Christian foundations of society. They begin with a false premise and then follow it "logically" and consistently to its false and dehumanizing conclusions. They "trade reality for words, and then talk about the words." They engage in the "deconstruction of language, with disregard for facts and accurate definitions."

Empty words are "the skin of reason, stuffed with lies." Skilled wordcrafters seize positive words and misuse them to create empty euphemisms, thus prostituting the language for the purpose of deception. The assumption is that most people think only on the surface and prefer short slogans to serious thought.

"Marriage equality" is a term specifically created for the mass propaganda campaign aimed at manipulating the public mind into accepting so-called "same-sex 'marriage'."

"Marriage equality" is not marriage *reality*.

Confusion opens the door to *deception*, resulting in *delusion*. Many people are "deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13), and words are tools being used to promote the deception and establish the delusion. The delusion is complete when people are not even aware that their thinking has been corrupted.

"A deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?'" (Isaiah 44:20 NIV). This was spoken by God to Israel to expose the folly of worshiping idols, the very objects that they themselves crafted and carried in their hand. It speaks today to all who willingly believe a lie because they willfully refuse to believe the truth.

The saying is true: No eyes are as blind as those that refuse to see.

Usually the process is not high-pressure "brain-washing" but subtle mind-bending. Words and phrases are "massaged" and "spun," and then repeated persistently until the terminology is accepted as the proper embodiment and expression of the "correct" idea. Young people who commit fornication are said to be "sexually active" and "sexually experienced." These are not morally neutral terms. What teenager under peer pressure wants to be considered "inactive" and "inexperienced"? Such language is intended to obscure the immorality of such behavior in order to make it acceptable.

Notorious examples of word-twisting are found in the adamant defense of abortion. An pre-born human being is persistently termed a *fetus* to rob it of its personhood in the public mind. Positive words such as *choice* and *rights* are drained of any real content so their empty semantic shell can be used as a respectable container for brutal barbarism. "Choice" says nothing in itself. The question is: choice to do what? Instead of "pro-abortion," we hear "abortion *rights*," as though abortion existed as a natural right in itself apart from its mere legalization. People who oppose killing unborn babies are called "anti-choice," and "anti-women's rights." The words are carefully chosen for their propaganda effect. It is the language of violence.

How great must the tyranny be that declares a whole class of human beings as "non-persons" for the express purpose of taking their lives.

Just as empty words are being used to legitimize same-sex "marriage," they can and possibly will be used to defend bigamy, polygamy, incest and other perversions. The words are easily fabricated for mass dissemination. One can almost hear them: "Monogamy is only a religious dictum; why shouldn't a man who has a genetically oriented high sex drive be allowed to marry two wives? Why shouldn't Muslim men have the right to marry up to four wives? Marriage is about more than procreation; it is about love; so why shouldn't a forty-four year old man be allowed to marry his twenty-one year old daughter? how much more love will they have when they add the love of a husband and wife to the love of a father and daughter?"

If *that* begins to sound reasonable, the trouble we are in now will be compounded. Empty words could be used to defend even cannibalism. If enough people were to develop a taste for human flesh, we would hear it all over again: "Keep your laws off my body. If people decide to contribute their bodies to the food supply, that is their right. After all, whose body is it, anyway? I defend dietary rights. My diet is pro-choice. I prefer homo-food, and I have the right to eat it. I'm not going to let some religious fundamentalists tell me what I can and can't eat in the privacy of my own home." Bizarre?

Yes, in all the above cases.

The last case sounds like something the cannibals could have said to the missionaries. Why are these and other empty words and slogans wrong? Because they do not address the nature of the relationships and behaviors. *They have nothing to do with reality.*

"The unthinkable first becomes controversial; then it becomes unquestionable."

To paraphrase Richard John Neuhaus, our society is going from the unthinkable, to the debatable, to the justifiable, to the usual.

Everyone who has AIDS is a "victim" (and yes, there are many true AIDS victims). Yet we do not hear of AIDS *spreaders*. Such morally charged words imply personal

responsibility. For that reason they are censored out of public discourse. "Lifestyle" is the euphemism used to shelter and defend the popular evils.

Orientation is another word that has been given new, made-to-order definitions. An on-line search yields such a variety of dictionary definitions for "sexual orientation" that one can hardly avoid the impression that the term is still looking for a factual definition. By their use of such terms as: tendency, inclination, preference, and resulting self-identity, most current definitions imply that sexual orientation is essentially voluntary. Only a few, such as the The American Psychological Association, make the presumptuous assertion that sexual orientation is not a choice. This assertion is not based on incontrovertible scientific evidence but is ideologically and politically generated. For this reason "sexual orientation" has no legitimate place in jurisprudence and should not be accorded standing in law.

Discrimination is the universal word used to condemn any opposition to homosexual behavior, and "hate" is assumed to be the criminal motive in spite of the fact that Christian opposition to the behavior is motivated by a concern for the well-being of the persons involved.

Homophobia is a word that was fabricated in 1969 out of two unrelated Greek words: *homo* ("the same") and *phobos* (fear)--"fear of the same." Because it is an etymologically meaningless word, it is technically incorrect. The use of *homophobia* and *homophobe* as a basis for the egregious charge of animus (hate) toward good, godly people is as vicious as it is spurious. The charge is made without evidence and persists in despite of solid evidence to the contrary.

Without the words orientation, discrimination and homophobia the radical sexual revolution would be almost speechless. It would have no term with connotations and legal implications sufficient to foist into non-discrimination laws.

What is especially offensive is the use of these words without basis in fact to demean, criminalize and severely punish innocent people whose only "offense" is to disagree with the assumptions and oppose the behaviors the terms try to justify, and to ask only that their fundamental human right of conscience and First Amendment right of free exercise be respected and protected.

If a person is "offended" by someone's statement opposing homosexual behavior, that has become grounds for action against the "offending" person, particularly an evangelical Christian. The believer is judged to be an "offender." Along with that often comes the censure of the "offender's" biblical faith.

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

On it goes. Language continues to change, not only by usage but also by manipulation.

Literate and *literacy* used to mean simply the ability to read and write and have a knowledge of literature. Now in some cases it means to make sure that people, especially students, become "politically correct" in their thinking. The traditional term is *brainwashing*.

For the unconverted to be deceived by empty words is tragic enough. When deception invades the Church, it attacks the very "pillar and ground [stabilizer] of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

Peter warns us of false teachers "who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And

many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words . . ." (2 Peter 2:1 - 3). "For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error" (Verse 18).

Paul wrote earlier: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17, 18).

Simple means naive and unsuspecting.

The Church has suffered from those who teach that because believers are under grace, how a "believer" lives does not affect his or her eternal destiny. Remember, against this pernicious error Ephesians 5:6 and 7 sternly warns, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them."

At the opposite extreme is the equally deadly error that we can be saved by our own works. This widely assumed notion is destroying millions of people in spite of the clear statement, "For by grace you have been saved, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

On another subject Paul wrote to the Colossians, "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (Colossians 2:4).

One of the most destructive influences within Christianity has been the rise of liberal theology. This, too, has been advanced by the crafty use of words--connotation words. Connotation words have a solid biblical meaning in the minds of the listeners and readers but are deliberately used in a non-biblical sense by the speaker and writer. The speaker or writer deceptively insinuates something into the words that are not part of their true, biblical meaning. This is done to instill the ideas of the speaker or writer into the minds of the hearers and readers by expressing them in words that are familiar and acceptable to the people. Thus the speaker and writer dishonestly takes advantage of the people's trust and betrays it.

An example of this is professing to believe in the "literal" resurrection of Jesus Christ but denying that this has anything to do with His body coming out of the tomb.

What should we do when we encounter verbal mind-bending? For one thing, we must be careful that we ourselves do not unwittingly adopt the terminology of deception.

When we hear it, we should ask ourselves, "is that true?" Challenge it. If it is contrary to the clear teaching of The Scriptures, reject it and expose it. Use the terminology of reality. Use Bible words with Bible meanings. Call things what God calls them. It is adultery, not "an affair." It is a practice against nature, not "an alternate lifestyle."

When someone who is not evangelical uses biblical words such as "salvation" and "redemption," or says that Jesus is "the Christ," ask what the speaker means by those words. Insist that the person be specific. We must not allow anyone to deceive us and others by the mere mouthing of Bible words.

Truth is the only effective defense against deception--real truth, truth in the form of God's words. God uses real words to combat empty words.

In the life-and-death struggle for our minds and souls, it is absolutely essential that we be "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:6). We must

speak "not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:13). We must assent "to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Timothy 6:3).

Truth and godliness are inseparable. We must beware of any teaching that subverts godliness. Unsanctifying doctrines--teachings that do not promote and produce holiness--are false doctrines.

Jesus said that the truth will make us free (John 8:32). Truth liberates. Any teaching that leaves people in bondage to their sins is not the truth.

Paul wrote: "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13). True faith and true love are in Christ Jesus. That faith and that love will hold fast to the pattern of sound words, the words that are written in The Scriptures.

Study your Bible as though your very life depended on it.

It does.