

Weaving Words With Works

2nd Samuel 28:8-18; Psalm 112; John 10:27-28



It is becoming harder to trust what people say these days. We hear about spin in the world of business, finance, politics, and our courts. Increasingly, the one thing that is certain is that we must expect the truth to be hidden beneath layers of “spin”. “Anything you say can and will be used against you,” seems to express the fear so prevalent in our society. We have responded by hiding behind masks of half-truths, cover-ups, and diversionary tactics.

Truth has become a hidden commodity. Beyond the “spin” factor, however, lies an even greater issue which should claim our attention—consistency. We don’t set out to live in a manner that is inconsistent. Inconsistency often intrudes unbidden. Do our actions live up to our words? In a world plagued by the presence of “spin”, our words will be measured increasingly by their relation with our deeds. Will we live the realities we claim? Are not the quality of our actions the most appropriate means to measure the truth and validity of our words?

Saul never set out to thwart God’s will and direction. He never planned to leave God out of the picture of his life. He didn’t determine to live in conflict with God’s purposes. He seems to have fallen into the wrong patterns through the carelessness of inconsistency. He was not clear on the direction he ought to take, nor on the direction his actions were taking. His words were those of one who had established *Yahweh* as Lord and God over Israel. His actions just did not live up to the faith and direction he proclaimed.

In this closing chapter of Saul’s life we see that he had indeed done part of what *Yahweh* had asked of him. He had proclaimed that *Yahweh* was to be the only Lord and God of Israel. He had sent out word that those who consulted the dead were to be killed or driven out of the land. It is to these very ones, however, that he turned for direction. For whatever reason, God intervened to answer him through Samuel. God answered that his inconsistency in following God was his undoing.

In the Gospel of John, we find Jesus speaking with some of the Jews. They were concerned with the content of Jesus’ teaching and the claims He was making to be equal to God. In their eyes, Jesus’ words were blasphemy. They were sure that no human being could come close to equality with God. They were just as sure that God would never stoop so low as to take on human form. As far as they were concerned, the verdict was obvious, for Jesus’ claims broke with their assumptions about God and the reality of life as they knew it. They picked up stones to execute the judgment called for in the Law.

Jesus called them to look at issues of consistency. He asked them to evaluate the truth of His words on the basis of the truth that he lived. He understood that they would have difficulty with the message He spoke regarding God’s identity, will, and plan. Jesus called them to assess His words and their consistency with the revelation in the Old Testament, but He went further. He understood the struggle that many of the Jews would have in breaking out of their traditional understanding of God to accept a new dimension to God’s care and provision for them. He called them to assess his deeds.

Jesus understood that words are empty by themselves. We do well to remember the narrative of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. God spoke and God’s will came to pass. “Let there be light,” is

a phrase without meaning until light comes into existence. God does not speak without following through in action. Words become “real” when they take on flesh and become action. That was John’s message in this Gospel that we read. It was when God’s Word took on flesh that we could see the reality of God’s will. God’s truth was granted consistency in action. God’s Word took shape and action. When God transformed word into action, its reality and consistency gained expression.

We too often fail to recognize the implications of our words. We don’t try to be inconsistent, but we allow our words to remain too compartmentalized for them to be of much value. We speak of God’s love and grace for all. Do we live it? We claim the Great Commission as the hallmark of Jesus’ task for us as disciples. Do our lives express the reality we profess?

The President of the United States claims that stem cell research is unjustifiable if it takes life in order to preserve life. On the other hand, is this not the essential philosophy of his so-called “war on terror”? The message is inconsistent and unbelievable. One corporation embroiled over issues employee oppression airs advertisements boasting of investments in community development and humanitarian programs. The message is inconsistent and unbelievable. We speak out against unfair trade and foreign sweatshops, yet turn blind eyes to local businesses who mistreat employees and deduct payroll taxes that are never paid to the government. The message is inconsistent and unbelievable.

How can we weave our words with the works and deeds of daily life to achieve a greater consistency and wholeness?

Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice. They hear His voice and follow Him. They accept that their security lies in following Christ alone. They take courage and strength following Jesus’ example of sacrificial love, grace, and acceptance. They entrust their lives to God, assured that no one can remove them from God’s care. They allow God’s will and word to take shape in their own lives, speaking and acting in consistency.

Many did not like the message Jesus preached. Many did not like the demands placed on them to set aside their pet ideas, traditions, comforts, and live consistently according to faith. Like Saul, they wanted to hang on to alternatives that God deemed inappropriate or unworthy. They wanted to proclaim all the right words without living up to them in consistency. They didn’t want to take the time and energy to assess their lives in the full light of God’s will.

It is easier to make some other claim and brush the gospel’s demands aside. It is easier to cast blame or doubt in some other direction than take a hard look at ourselves. It is easier to spin our own actions or use pretense to cover up our own inconsistencies.

In a world bombarded by spin, cover-up, conspiracy, and half-truths, a half-hearted faith shows up all too readily as a shallow response to the world around. Are we up to the challenge of living a faith that is truly consistent with our claims? Will we allow God’s Word to take on flesh in our own lives for all to see and assess for consistency? Will we weave our words and the words of the Gospel with the works of our hands? Jesus asked those of His day to measure His words with the consistency of His deeds. Will our own lives stand up to the same test?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*