Thesis Statement

True moral corruption in human speech and human stewardship can only be understood when we begin with what God has declared clean: the sacred, irreducible worth of every human individual—fearfully and wonderfully made—the God-designed neurobiology of emotional catharsis, and the created substances of the earth intended for healing and stabilization. Rooted in Jesus's teaching that defilement comes not from what enters the body or passes through the air, but from malice and lack of mercy in the heart, corruption lies not in raw primal expletives, honest cries against injustice, or the disciplined medicinal use of God's creation to treat pain, fatigue, or neurodivergence; rather, corruption lies in the deliberate use of degrading slurs, such as the biblical raka, that call "unclean" what God has made clean, in bearing God's name without mercy by withholding shelter or treatment behind rigid purity tests, and in the misuse or sorcerous manipulation (pharmakeia) that abandons wise stewardship.

Sermon: What God Has Made Clean

If we want to understand what makes human speech truly corrupt, we cannot start with a dictionary of forbidden syllables. We have to start at the beginning—with the goodness of what God has made, both in the sacred worth of the human soul and in the intricate wiring of the human brain.

In Acts, God speaks a thunderous correction to Peter that establishes our baseline for everything we see and say: "What God has made clean, do not call common." And in Psalm 139, David pulls back the curtain on how every single human life enters this world: "For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

Start right there. Every person standing in front of you—regardless of their family tree, their neurodivergence, their cognitive wiring, or the circumstances of their conception—was intentionally woven together by the Creator's own hands. Not one human being is an accident, a mistake, or damaged goods. Each individual carries an irrepressible, sacred dignity that no human label can erase. Nobody chooses the circumstances of their own conception. Nobody picks their parents, their genetics, or the conditions of their

birth. As Ezekiel lays down as a bedrock principle of divine justice: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.

Now, hold that truth about God's design alongside a second truth: the same Creator who knit together our souls also wired our nervous systems. If the individual is made clean, so too is the biological design God built into our bodies to survive pain and shock. Modern neuroscience and comparative physiology show us that reactive expletives—the word that flies out of your mouth when you stub your toe in the dark or walk away from a closed door—do not even come from the rational, premeditated part of your brain. They fire from the limbic system and basal ganglia, the ancient emotional and motor core God built into creation. When a dog barks at thunder, or an ape beats its chest in sudden distress, it isn't committing a moral sin; it is discharging a spike of adrenaline. Clinical studies in the neuropsychology of catharsis prove that letting out an expletive during sudden pain triggers a genuine physiological release—it numbs pain, lowers acute stress, and acts as a pressure valve for the nervous system.

And Scripture itself gives us precedent that raw, unvarnished vocalization is clean. Look at the Psalms, where David and the prophets cry out in visceral anguish, shock, and outrage without sanitizing their pain for polite company—calling on God to judge cruelty and vindicate the wronged. Look at Paul in Philippians, using the Greek word *skubalon*—literally "dung" or "shit"—to describe everything he gave up to know Christ, not to degrade a person, but to express raw, honest reality. Even Jesus Himself told the Pharisees that true defilement does not come from mere words or bodily reflexes passing through the air, but from malice rising out of the heart to harm a neighbor. When we brand a harmless, reflexive cry of pain as "filthy," we are doing the very thing God warned Peter against—calling unclean what God designed as a clean, healthy release valve.

Once we root ourselves in the cleanness of the individual and the cleanness of our neurobiology, the real warnings of Scripture come into razor-sharp focus.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus draws a line in the sand: whoever calls his brother raka is in danger of judgment. In Ephesians, Paul tells us to let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouths—using a Greek word, *sapros*, that means rotten, putrid, decaying. And James warns us that the tongue is a fire, a restless evil from which both blessings and curses flow.

For generations, religious culture inverted this foundation. It ignored the dignity of the person and the biology of catharsis, reducing those profound warnings to a list of forbidden syllables—words like *damn*, *hell*, *shit*, or *fuck*—and turning the Third Commandment into a rule against saying "God damn it" when life breaks your heart.

Yet look at the true modern equivalent of raka—the slurs we use to attack someone's bloodline, their parentage, or their mind, declaring a person to be the product of brokenness or diminished capacity. When we hurl a slur that mocks someone's lineage or cognitive capacity, we are treating a victim as a perpetrator. We are holding a child of God accountable for things entirely outside their control. Worse still, we are looking directly at a soul God calls "fearfully and wonderfully made" and slapping a label of "unclean" onto the masterpiece of God. To demean the creature is to insult the Creator. That is what corrupt communication looks like. That is a curse.

And look at what happens when we apply that same inverted logic to the Third Commandment. In Hebrew, "Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" literally means "Do not carry God's name for emptiness, falsehood, or harm." Taking God's name in vain isn't shouting "God damn it" when you are hurting or angry. Taking God's name in vain is putting "Christ" on the sign outside your church, inviting the hungry to come in for a meal, and then blocking the to-go box at the door because of a policy—turning away a neighbor in need while claiming to represent the God who fed the five thousand. Picture someone walking out of that door, hungry and betrayed, letting out a raw "God damn it!"—and a man standing on the sidewalk immediately rebuking them for "taking God's name in vain." In his view, calling down divine judgment with the generic title "God" instead of God's personal covenant name was itself the act of vanity—emptying the plea of the Almighty's true name. So when that person snapped back in pure sarcasm, "Fine—Jehovah damn it, then!" the man nodded in genuine satisfaction, accepting it as a reverent correction. Yet look at the double irony of that moment. First, neurologically, a reflexive bark fired from the limbic system and basal ganglia uses deeply entrenched motor scripts wired in youth; because adult neural plasticity declines in those ancient subcortical circuits, retraining a split-second reflex to swap out the syllable "God" for "Jehovah" in the heat of crisis is nearly impossible—meaning a God who wired the human brain would never design a moral law whose obedience depends on overriding an unchangeable subcortical reflex. Second, while that man was policing phonetic precision on the sidewalk, he was completely blind to the real vanity happening inside the building: an institution carrying Christ's name while locking the pantry door against the hungry.

Consider, too, how this same principle of cleanness illuminates the sacred gift of medicine. Just as religious legalism inverted speech by policing innocent syllables while ignoring malice, it has repeatedly inverted God's creation by declaring whole categories of healing substances "unclean."

In Mark 7 and Matthew 15, Jesus explicitly links consumption and speech under a single foundational truth: "There is nothing from outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." He declared all foods clean, reminding His listeners that what enters the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated—it cannot corrupt the spirit. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," He taught in Luke 6. Just as a physical reflex or a non-malicious expletive does not defile the soul, neither do the botanical and chemical elements God placed within creation to soothe a wounded body or quiet a firing nervous system. What enters the body to restore balance is clean; defilement rises only when malice, greed, or deceit flow out from the heart.

Throughout Holy Scripture, medicine applied with wisdom and mercy is consistently honored as divine providence. In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul does not command Timothy to endure stomach distress as a test of spiritual purity; he explicitly instructs him: "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments"—prescribing a natural, psychoactive substance in disciplined moderation to treat a chronic physical affliction. In Proverbs 31:6–7, the text gives a direct command of radical compassion for those in unbearable suffering: "Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more"—establishing a biblical mandate for palliative relief and therapeutic comfort rather than demanding that the suffering conquer their agony unassisted.

Look at how Jesus Himself frames the ministry of health. In Matthew 9:12, He affirms: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." When the Good Samaritan found the beaten traveler on the road to Jericho in Luke 10:34, he did not demand that the bleeding victim prove his moral purity or achieve absolute sobriety before receiving aid. The Samaritan went to him, poured oil and wine directly onto his wounds to cleanse and soothe his trauma, placed him on his own animal, and brought him to an inn to provide ongoing care and shelter. Medicine and shelter came first; moral lecturing was nowhere to be found.

From the Old Testament to the prophets, God works healing through applied earthly remedies. In 2 Kings 20:7 and Isaiah 38:21, when King Hezekiah lay mortally ill, the prophet Isaiah did not treat physical medicine as a rival to faith; he commanded: "Prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover." In Jeremiah 8:22,

the prophet cries out, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?"—framing the absence of medicine as a tragedy, not a virtue. Sirach 38:4 echoes this eternal wisdom: "The Lord created medicines out of the earth, and the sensible will not despise them." And when Scripture paints its final picture of absolute cosmic restoration in Ezekiel 47:12 and Revelation 22:2, it reveals trees growing along the river of life whose fruit is for food and whose leaves are explicitly "for healing"—for *therapeia*. Medicine is not a concession to human weakness; it is an ordinance of creation's restoration.

Because every human individual is fearfully and wonderfully made, our brains and nervous systems possess unique, complex variations. A person living with neurodivergence, severe attention deficits, chronic pain, or overwhelming fatigue may require specific medical compounds to achieve cognitive clarity, emotional regulation, or physical functioning—substances that someone without those neurobiological needs might misuse. A chemical molecule is not inherently "unclean" simply because another person might abuse it. Moral error lies not in the substance, but in stewardship: it is a failure of stewardship to abuse a substance in excess for destructive escape, but it is equally a failure of stewardship—and an act of cruelty—to deny essential medical stabilization to a body or mind in distress.

Yet how often do modern ministries and shelters repeat the sin of the sidewalk Pharisee? They demand total, unmedicated abstinence from unhoused or struggling neighbors *before* granting them a bed, a meal, or a roof—forcing individuals off the very therapeutic medications that stabilize their neurochemistry and allow them to heal. They demand that traumatized human beings achieve total physiological perfection while sleeping on concrete. By placing rigid purity tests ahead of basic shelter and medical care, such institutions bear God's name without His mercy, calling "unclean" the very tools of healing God provided to bring order out of chaos.

Some will object by pointing to Scripture's warnings against *pharmakeia* in Galatians 5:20 and Revelation 9:21. But we must understand what the biblical writers were condemning. In the Greco-Roman world, *pharmakeia* did not mean taking a doctor's prescription or applying a fig poultice to a boil. It referred to sorcery, occult potion-brewing, poisoning, manipulative spells, and deceptive drugging used to exploit, coerce, or enslave others—which is why the Septuagint uses *pharmakeia* in Exodus 7 to describe the manipulative enchantments of Pharaoh's magicians, and why Revelation links it to imperial deception and violence. Contrast *pharmakeia* with *therapeia* (healing and

compassionate care) and the honor given to the *iatros*—the physician—such as Luke, whom Paul warmly calls "the beloved physician" in Colossians 4:14. Good medicine restores human agency, cognitive clarity, and bodily wholeness; *pharmakeia* destroys agency through manipulation, poisoning, or reckless excess.

Everything comes down to this: the sin is never in the bark, and the sin is never in the molecule. The sin is in the aim and the stewardship.

Corrupt speech happens when our higher mind—the part of us made to reflect wisdom and grace—hijacks that primal energy and aims it like a weapon at another human being. It happens when we stop reacting to pain and start manufacturing shame. A four-letter word aimed at a dropped hammer—or an honest cry of "God damn it" at a closed church door—is a release valve and a cry against injustice; a slur aimed at a neighbor's birthright or mind is spiritual arson.

So guard your tongue, not with the shallow etiquette of the Pharisee who polices syllables while locking the pantry door, but with the fierce love of Christ. Do not take God's name in vain by representing Him without mercy. Do not call unclean what God has made clean—neither the human wiring that lets out a bark when life hits hard, nor the precious, fearfully and wonderfully made image of God standing right in front of you. Let the frustrated air out of your lungs, and give yourself grace for being human. But never—not in anger, not in jest, not under your breath—use your voice to curse what God has made, or to punish a neighbor for the circumstances of their birth. Speak what builds up. Bless, and do not curse.