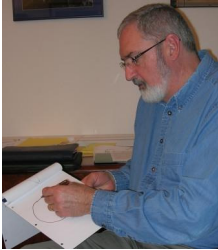


## Empowering Healthy Leaders for Missional Impact

[www.royking.org](http://www.royking.org)

### Christians and free speech

By Dr. Roy King



On May 22, 1976, my bride, Pandora, looked into my eyes and vowed to be my wife as long as I lived. Saying “Yes” to me meant she was saying “No” to over three billion other men in the world. *Wasn’t I the lucky guy!* Because of her commitment to me, she was limiting her relationship with other men.

A few years earlier, I had made a different vow. I received God’s gift of salvation in Christ and became a member of the bride of Christ. In doing so, I gave up my rights to be just Roy King. I would forever be Roy Child-of-the-living-God King.

When Pandora married me, her name changed to King. Just as she bears my name and shares responsibility and access to my credits, and my debts, the same is true of my relationship with Christ.

**A commitment to a relationship always involves *limiting and surrendering our personal rights*.** Forming a connection with another person or group should make us more conscious of how our choices will impact the others.

I work at Columbia International University and when I travel, I often wear CIU-imprinted clothing. Because that’s who I represent, I give up my right to react to poor service in a restaurant or missing luggage with the first words that come to mind. To taste the joy of a committed relationship, I must also forgo my “rights” to free speech. But controlling what I say makes me a better person.

I create and collect proverbs, daily reminders of ‘distilled wisdom’. One of my guiding proverbs is, *“Anything powerful can probably also be dangerous.”* Think of many of God’s powerful gifts – music, sex, food – and don’t leave out WORDS.

Whether spoken or written, words are extremely powerful. I received a recent e-mail from a friend whose words so encouraged my heart that I printed them for my wife to read and saved them in a file for such special gifts.

But words are also dangerous. I am weary of Christians using e-mail, blogs and other electronic communication to vent whatever emotion they’re experiencing. Their speech is public and it pollutes God’s name they bear. When we become a member of the family of Christ, we give up our right to issue words that represent our God poorly.

The Bible provides safe places for us to process our pain through words. The Psalms offer several examples of venting prayers. With other people, we can have that private, honest conversation. But just because we feel disappointed, betrayed or rejected, we have no excuse for using words as daggers to wound even our enemies.

As He hung on the cross, Christ had the perfect opportunity to use His powerful words to judge, punish or even destroy His opposition. But instead, His words were a pleading prayer for mercy and forgiveness. Our words *about* or *to* people of other ethnic groups, political parties, gender, or socioeconomic levels are to measure up to the standard of a God who loves the world.

Several years ago, predating e-mail, a church member sent a form letter to everyone in the membership directory. The letter was filled with venomous and inaccurate attacks on the church

leadership. Two elders were sent by the board to privately warn the member that if he continued this behavior, he would be publicly disciplined. A public meeting of the church was then called, not to embarrass or wound the sender, but to present the leader's perspective on the issues "shouted" in the letter. It was a time of growth for the whole church, leading the congregation to make a fresh surrender to God's limit on our words.

Words are God's gift, but he has a plan for their use. His children surrender their right to use his gifts in any manner they choose. Verbal or written communication in our culture operates from an assumption that we have the right to say *whatever*, about *whomever*, to all who will listen. But the ones who bear Christ's name should shine like bright stars in the darkness of unrestrained speech. For God's standard on our words, read Colossians 3:1-12, Romans 13:8-10, and Ephesians 4:25-32.

I cannot find one exception where my right to use words should not be limited by God's benchmark of loving others. There is no biblical support for wounding, malicious words under the umbrella of "free speech."

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Roy M. King". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "R" and "K".

***Dr. Roy King is director of alumni and professor of leadership at Columbia International University, [www.ciu.edu](http://www.ciu.edu). This series can be downloaded at [www.royking.org](http://www.royking.org). You may distribute, translate or use this material in your ministry. I ask that it not be sold without my permission. If you use this, please send me a brief description of how it was used. If you translate it, please send me a copy. Send e-mail to [roy@royking.org](mailto:roy@royking.org).***