

CONFRONTING SINFUL SPEECH

INTRODUCTION

- It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that sinful speech – like criticism, harsh words, impatient words, angry words – is acceptable
- After all, these words can be spoken without most people knowing about them...often our wives, husbands, children and those closest to us are the objects of our unkind words that tend to humiliate or hurt the person who is the object of our impatience or anger
- The old adage “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” simply is not true
- Sinful words hurt...they destroy...they tear down...they are destructive

- 1/5 of a person's life is spent talking...If all the words we spoke from single day were put in print, they would fill a 50 page book...In one year there would be 132 books of 200 pages each

Proverbs 10:19 ~ When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

I stood on the street of a busy town watching men tearing a building down. With a hoe heave hoe and a lusty yell they swung a beam and a side wall fell. I asked the foreman of the crew, “Are those men as skilled as those you’d hire if you wanted to build?” “Ah no,” he said, “No, indeed. Just common labor is all I need.” I can tear down as much in a day or two as it would take skilled men in a year to do.” And then I thought as I went my way just which of these two roles am I trying to play? Have I walked life’s road with care, measuring each deed with rule and square? Or am I one of those one of those who roam the town content with the labor of tearing down?

- While hurtful, unkind speech may seem acceptable to us, it is not acceptable to God...it is real sin!

THE TREMENDOUS POWER OF THE TONGUE

It is Small but Powerful

- The tongue is probably the most powerful and influential member of our bodies...it has the power to build up, encourage, praise, and edify those who hear it but also the power to destroy, to strike down, to attack, and to wage war against its enemies

Proverbs 16:27~ A worthless man digs up evil, While his words are as a scorching fire

Proverbs 18:21 ~ Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.

- Everything we say lands somewhere on the life-death continuum
- Each day we must choose whether we will speak life words or death words

Paul Tripp: “Your words have direction to them. If your words are moving in the *life* direction, they will be words of encouragement, hope, love, peace, unity, instruction, wisdom, and correction. But if your words are moving in a *death* direction, they will be words of anger, malice, slander, jealousy, gossip, division, contempt, racism, violence, judgment, and condemnation. Your words have direction to them.”

James 3:1-12

- James uses 3 illustrations to demonstrate the power of the tongue (bit – vs. 3; rudder – vs. 4; fire – vs. 5)
- He shows the difficulty in taming that little red rebel (vs. 7-8)...man cannot tame his own vicious tongue
- And he shows how perverse the tongue can be (vs. 9-12)...it is inconsistent

The tongue is indeed mightier than generals and their armies. It can fuel our lives so they become fiery furnaces, or it can cool our lives with the soothing wind of the Spirit. It can be forged by Hell, or it can be a tool of Heaven.

R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*

The Boxer Rebellion of 1899 in China was launched in response to a false story in Denver newspapers.

It Has Temporary and Eternal Consequences

- The tongue can bring both commendation and condemnation both in this life and the next

Proverbs 12:13 ~ An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, But the righteous will escape from trouble.

Proverbs 13:3 ~ The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

Matthew 12:36-37 ~ But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

It Reveals Your True Heart Condition

- The way we speak tells much of what's inside us...our words are an accurate gauge of our hearts

Matthew 12:33-35 ~ Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil.

Matthew 15:18 ~ But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

- Christ is teaching in these passages that we live out of our hearts
- Thus, word problems and communication problems are not vocabulary problems...they are not technique problems...they are heart problems!
- Our greatest, deepest communication problems don't exist outside of us...they exist inside of us
- Sin makes our hearts want our demands, our expectations, our desires to be fulfilled...our communication problems then stem from our unmet expectations and demands
- Thus, the starting point in dealing with the secret sin of sinful speech is to recognize that we ourselves are our greatest communication problem!...it's a war for the heart!

THE SINFUL PROBLEMS WITH THE TONGUE

Ephesians 4:29 ~ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need of *the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear

- The word “unwholesome” (*sapros*) is a very descriptive term which refers to that which is corrupt or foul, something that is harmful or worthless, unfit for use

- It was used of rotten fruit (Matt 12:33), useless trees (Mat 12:33), and fish unfit to eat (Matt 13:48)
- It was used literally to refer to food that was spoiled, rotten, putrid, foul
- Paul wants to paint a visual picture in our minds here of the repugnance of unwholesome speech...it should be as repulsive to us as a rotten piece of fruit or food that has spoiled
- Paul's point here is that foul language should never proceed from the mouth of a believer, because it is totally out of character with their newness of life

Lying Speech

Proverbs 12:22 ~ Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.

Ephesians 4:25 ~ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.

Colossians 3:9 ~ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices

- Normally, we associate lying as making a false statement which we know to be wrong
- But there are other ways we can fall into lying: by exaggeration...by a failure to tell the whole truth...by indulging in "little white lies"
- Whatever form it takes, a lie expresses an intent to deceive
- A good test to use of our speech is the question: "Is it true?"

Gossip Speech

- Gossip is the spreading of unfavorable information about someone else, even if that information is true
- [Gossip] is the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential tidbits of whispered information, which destroy the reputation and good name of those who are not there to defend themselves.
William Barclay

- Sometimes it is done under the cover, "I wanted you to know so you could pray" (sanctified gossip)

Proverbs 18:8 ~ The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

Proverbs 20:19 ~ He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.

- This secret sin is particularly destructive because indulging in gossip seems to feed our sinful ego by making us feel self-righteous by comparison

Slandorous Speech

- Slander is making a false statement or misrepresentation about another person that defames or damages the person's reputation
- The motive behind slander is often to gain an advantage in some over another person

Proverbs 16:28 ~ A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

Proverbs 10:18 ~ He who spreads slander is a fool.

Ephesians 4:31 ~ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you.

- We as believers can commit slander when: we ascribe wrong motives to people, even though we can't see their hearts...we misrepresent another person's position on a subject without first determining what that person's position is...we blow out of proportion another person's sin and make that person appear to be more sinful than he or she really is

Complaining Speech

- Complaining calls into question God's integrity, His sovereignty, His goodness
- It expresses dissatisfaction with God's sovereign will for our lives
- When we complain or gripe as Christians, we are challenging God's wisdom, His grace, His goodness, His love

Philippians 2:14 ~ Do all things without grumbling or disputing

Critical Speech

- Critical speech is negative comments about someone that may be actually true but doesn't need to be said

Proverbs 25:11 ~ Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

James 4:11-12 ~ Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of it*. There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

- When tempted to say something harsh or critical, we need to ask questions like: Is it kind?...Is it needful?... Does it really need to be said?

Angry Speech

- Words spoken in anger are simply an expression of an angry heart, a heart that is controlled by the flesh rather than the Spirit of God

Proverbs 15:1 ~ A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Ephesians 4:26 ~ BE ANGRY, AND *do not* SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger

James 1:19-20 ~ Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

Sarcastic Speech

- Godly people in the Bible occasionally used sarcasm, ridicule, and mockery
- Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:27)
- Jesus ridiculed the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and legalism (Matt. 23)
- But rarely is sarcasm used properly...it usually ends up hurting someone else because they are usually carefully disguised barbs that injure others
- Sarcasm may at times be attempts at humor, but it often falls flat and end up hurting the person

- The common denominator in all of these kinds of negative speech is that they tend to put down, humiliate, or hurt the other person
- Behind all of this destructive speech is our sinful heart...the tongue is only the instrument that reveals what's in our hearts

THE BIBLICAL PRESCRIPTIONS FOR THE TONGUE

- The Scriptures call us to have clean, pure, sanctified speech:

Psalm 19:14 ~ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 141:3 ~ Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

Proverbs 13:3~ He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

Proverbs 16:24~ Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 17:28~ Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.

Ephesians 4:29~ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Colossians 4:6 ~ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

1 Timothy 4:12 ~ Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

- Practicing sanctified speech begins by understanding that there are 2 overarching lifestyles which are always competing for ruling our hearts and shaping our speech: the kingdom of self and the kingdom of God

Galatians 5:13-15 ~ For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

- We are either indulging the desires of the flesh (vs. 13) or loving our neighbor as ourselves (vs. 14)
- Kingdom #1 – Kingdom of Self
 - This kingdom is driven by self-indulgent desire characterized by my wants, my needs, my feelings
 - This kingdom is operated by my deeply rooted expectations and when I don't get my way, my words go where my desires take me
 - So in this kingdom, what I really want is for people around me to make my self-focused desires happen

○ Paul Tripp: "My loved ones and friends are reduced either to vehicles to help me get what I want or to obstacles in the way of what I want. When they deliver what I want, I speak kindly to them, not actually because I love them but because I love myself and the fact that they have satisfied my desires. When they get in the way of what I want, I speak unkindly to them because I love myself, and they have made the mistake of getting in the way of what I crave."

<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/war-of-words-getting-to-the-heart-for-gods-sake>

James 4:1-2 ~ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

- Kingdom #2 – Kingdom of God
 - This kingdom is driven by a love for God and others because at the center of this kingdom is the shocking sacrifice of redeeming love through the person and work of Jesus Christ
 - It is a kingdom of love where our hearts are overwhelmed with the love which God has demonstrated towards us which then spills over with love toward others

○ Paul Tripp: It is important to get this truth, because it is only when I love God above all else that I will love my neighbor as myself. It's only when God is in the rightful place in my life that I will treat you with the love that I have received from him. Brothers and sisters, hear this: you don't first fix language problems, communication problems, and word problems horizontally; you first fix them vertically.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/war-of-words-getting-to-the-heart-for-gods-sake>

Ephesians 5:1-4 ~ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

- Which kingdom are you operating under?

Galatians 5:16-23 ~ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.