

FBC POWELL, 12-31-17 AM
"Sticks, Stones, and Words"
Proverbs 13:3

Proverbs 13:3 (NASB) "The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin."

Proverbs 18:21a (NASB) "Death and life are in the power of the tongue..."

Proverbs 29:20 (NASB) "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."

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

Luke 6:45b (NASB) "...for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart."

Proverbs 10:19 (NASB) "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise."

James 3:2 (NASB) "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well."

I. Words That Tear Down

Proverbs 11:9a (NASB) "With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor..."

Ephesians 4:29-31 (NASB) "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. ³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander [typically poured out through our words] be put away from you, along with all malice."

A. Rash Words

Proverbs 29:20 (NASB) "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."

1. Rash Commitments

Proverbs 15:28a (CSB) "The mind of the righteous person thinks before answering..."

2. Rash Conclusions

Proverbs 18:13 (NASB) "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him."

3. Rash Responses

Proverbs 29:11 (NKJV) "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise *man* holds them back."

James 1:19b (NASB) "But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger."

B. Hurtful Words

James 3:6 (NASB) "And the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is set on fire by hell."

1. Lying Words

John 8:44b (NASB) "... he is a liar and the father of lies."

Proverbs 6:16 (NASB) "There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him."

Proverbs 12:22 (NASB) "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight."

Proverbs 19:5 (NASB) "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape."

Proverbs 30:6 (NASB) "Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar."

2. Gossiping Words

Proverbs 11:13 (CSB) “A gossip goes around revealing a secret, but the trustworthy keeps a confidence.”

Proverbs 17:9 (CSB) “Whoever conceals an offense promotes love, but whoever gossips about it separates friends.”

Proverbs 18:8 (CSB) “A gossip’s words are like choice food that goes down to one’s innermost being.”

Proverbs 26:20 (CSB) “Without wood, fire goes out; without a gossip, conflict dies down.”

2 Timothy 4:14-15 (NASB) “¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.”

3. Flattering Words

Proverbs 26:28 (NASB) “A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”

Proverbs 7:21 (NASB) “With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him.”

4. Harsh Words

Proverbs 15:1 (NASB) “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

II. Words That Build Up

Proverbs 15:23 (NASB) “A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word!”

A. Words That Restore the Fallen

Proverbs 25:12 (HCSB) “A wise correction to a receptive ear is like a gold ring or an ornament of gold.”

Proverbs 28:23 (CSB) “One who rebukes a person will later find more favor than one who flatters with his tongue.”

B. Words That Lift Up the Burdened

Proverbs 12:25 (NASB) “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad.”

Hebrews 10:25 (NASB) “Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

C. Words That Instruct With Kindness

Proverbs 15:7a (NASB) “The lips of the wise spread knowledge...”

Proverbs 31:26 (NASB) “She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.”

James 3:8 (NASB) “But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison.”

III. The Power to Build Up and Stop Tearing Down

Romans 6:6 (HCSB) “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin’s dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin.”

Romans 6:11 (NASB) “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” The cross and the work done there can free us from a lifetime of an out-of-control tongue and sinful patterns with our words.

Galatians 5:16 (NASB) “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

Proverbs 10:19 (NASB) “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.”

Sermon: Sticks, Stones, and Words

Proverbs 13:3

You have probably heard the old saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That may sound good, but it is simply not true. I believe that, in reality, words hurt us way more than “sticks and stones” ever could. As we move into a new year, I want to focus on the power of our words, both for good and for bad. In a world of harsh rhetoric, may there be a difference in our speech.

To prepare our hearts for a *topical message* on our words I want to read from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 13:3: “The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.”

Proverbs 18:21a: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue...”

Proverbs 29:20: “Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

All of us (whether we realize it or not) have been deeply impacted by the words of others – usually by someone who had a prominent role in our life. A parent or another close family member may have told you that you would never amount to anything. A teacher may have encouraged you to reach the potential she saw in you; some of us can remember a hurtful thing said to us twenty, thirty, even fifty years ago. Words can lift people up, motivate, encourage, or put people down, discourage, and motivationally handicap them.

It is amazing how many references are made to our words in the Bible. The power of our words is emphasized in the Gospels. Here are three verses of many. 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.” Luke 6:45b: “...for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.” The source of our words is our heart. It is interesting that very chapter in the book of James speaks of the tongue, referring to our words. Our negative, hurtful words are compared to a destroying fire, a dangerous beast, and a deadly poison. In the Old Testament book of Proverbs, there are about 150 uses of the words tongue, mouth, lips, speech, or their equivalent. When the Bible speaks of the *potential evil* of the words we say (our tongue), it uses adjectives to describe our tongue such as wicked, deceitful, lying, perverse, filthy, corrupt, bitter, flattering, slanderous, gossiping, blasphemous, backbiting, foolish, boasting, murmuring, vile, and others.

There is danger in talking too much. The longest inaugural address delivered by a president of the United States was William H. Harrison. It was 9,000 words and took two hours to deliver. By contrast, George Washington’s inaugural address was 135 words. On Inaugural Day for President Harrison, the wind out of the Northwest was extremely cold. The next day, the President came down with a cold that then turned to pneumonia and he died a month later. Talking too much can be dangerous.

The Bible says in James 3:2: “For we all stumble in many *ways*. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.” In this topical message, I want us to examine some of what the Bible says about the tongue and then make some practical

applications about how to guard our mouth and our words in the coming year. When we survey what the book of Proverbs says about our speech, it can be divided into two categories: Words that tear down and words that build up. My prayer is that God will use this message to make us a people who build up and not tear down.

I. Words That Tear Down

The Bible says in Proverbs 11:9a: “With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor...” When the Bible gives examples of sins that grieve the Holy Spirit, they are predominantly sins involving our words. Ephesians 4:29-31: “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. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander [typically poured out through our words] be put away from you, along with all malice.”

From the book of Proverbs, let me break down into two categories the words that tear down – rash words and hurtful words.

A. Rash Words

By *rash*, I am speaking of thoughtless, impetuous behavior. Proverbs 29:20: “Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” Words, like bullets going out from a barrel of a gun once they are sent out, you cannot get them back. Oh, the harm done by rash words. How many times do we hear, “I just didn’t think before I said that.”? Let me give you some examples.

1. Rash Commitments

Oh, how many times I have gotten myself in trouble by making rash commitments. Proverbs 15:28a (CSB): “The mind of the righteous person thinks before answering...” Often, the result of rash commitments is that either we lie and don’t fulfill the commitment we made, or we let things of a higher priority go undone in order to fulfill our thoughtless commitments that we did not seek the Lord about. I have deeply repented for the sin of rashly agreeing to a good thing that robbed me of time that should have been given to the best things. Often the enemy of the best is not bad things, but good things that are not best things. I have tried to instill a practice of saying to any request for a commitment to do something that will take significant time, “I’ll need to think and pray about that and get back to you.”

Sometimes the rash commitments are simply because we do not take seriously the cost involved in making a God led commitment. Let me give you an illustration. I think that many make a rash decision to join a church. Before you make a commitment to join a church, you need to ponder what it means. The reputation of Christ and His church in the community rests partially on your shoulders. If your life does not reflect Christ and in fact brings reproach on Him, you don’t need to be associated with His church. You need to repent! If you are physically able, but just not willing to be faithful in “...investing in and equipping the next generation to live Christ transformed lives in a rapidly changing culture” (our mission statement), you need to repent. When we make rash commitments without counting the cost or without a willingness to be serious about making disciples, we do great harm to the reputation of Christ.

2. Rash Conclusions

I heard about one person in an office who said to a coworker, “We don’t need an exercise program in this office; we get plenty of exercise jumping to conclusions and running down others.” Proverbs 18:13: “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.” Sometimes we hear something about someone and get angry and tell three others and they get all angry and tell ten others. Then we find out later that it was all taken out of context and our conclusions that we have with our mouth spread to others was not accurate. You cannot undo the damage that has been caused. I cannot count the number of times that someone has come to me with a complaint about a staff member that sounds horrible. Then, when I go to that staff member I find that it was nothing like the person with anger toward them had spoken it. Don’t make rash conclusions and then run your mouth to others. Spend some time investigating and going to the party who is accused.

3. Rash Responses

Proverbs 29:11 (NKJV): “A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise *man* holds them back.” The way the feelings are vented is through rash words. Did you ever hear someone say, “I just say what I feel”? The Bible says that person is a fool. Have you ever noticed that the first words that come to your mind when you are upset are usually not the best ones? A mouth opened in haste to make a commitment, jump to a conclusion without all the facts, or respond based on feelings does great harm. That’s why we are told in James 1:19b: “But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger.” Rash words do such great harm.

B. Hurtful Words

James 3:6: “And the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is set on fire by hell.” Our words may seem like a small thing, but James says they can do great harm like the spark that starts a great fire. In 1871, Mrs. O’Leary was milking her cow in Chicago. The cow kicked over the lantern and that small blaze set some hay on fire. Mrs. O’Leary couldn’t get the fire out and it began to spread. Thus began the great Chicago fire. The fire raged for over twenty-four hours pushed on by strong winds. It wiped out Chicago’s downtown and most of the North side homes. It killed at least 300 people. About 17,500 buildings were destroyed and over 100,000 people were left homeless. It cost the city (in 1800’s dollars) over \$400,000,000. James said, “That is the way the tongue operates.” Many more people have been hurt by harmful words than by literal fires. There are several kinds of hurtful words.

1. Lying Words

We are never more like the Devil than when we lie because he is called in John 8:44b: “... he is a liar and the father of lies.” When we lie we are never more unlike Jesus who according to John 14:6 is the truth incarnate. Proverbs 6:16: “There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him.” In the next three verses we see that two of those things he hates are “A lying tongue,” and “a false witness who utters lies.”

There is verse after verse in Proverbs about lying words and their consequences. Proverbs 12:22: “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight.” Proverbs 19:5: “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.” Lying words usually take one of two paths: either they add to the truth or contradict the truth. Proverbs 30:6: “Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.” Sometimes we call adding to the truth “exaggeration.” Exaggeration is just a fancy word for a lie. It doesn’t matter if it

is from a human perspective a “small lie” or a “big lie.” Proverbs 12:22 says that lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.

2. Gossiping Words

Proverbs 11:13 (CSB): “A gossip goes around revealing a secret, but the trustworthy keeps a confidence.” Proverbs 17:9 (CSB): “Whoever conceals an offense promotes love, but whoever gossips about it separates friends.” Proverbs 18:8 (CSB): “A gossip’s words are like choice food that goes down to one’s innermost being.” People who gossip always crave more. Most conflict has gossip at its root. Proverbs 26:20 (CSB): “Without wood, fire goes out; without a gossip, conflict dies down.” If you have ever been the object of gossip, you know the harm it can do. Gossip is translated “talebearer,” “whisperer,” and “slanderer” in other translations. There are two who are guilty when it comes to gossip: Those who speak it and those who *consistently* listen to it. Don’t let some long-tongued gossip use your ear for their garbage can. Let me tell you how to stop them. When they start with, “I’ve heard” or words to that effect, interrupt them and say, “Before you tell me this, I want you to know that I am going to this person and ask if it is true.” I guarantee that this will stop them from using your ear as their garbage can. Someone may say, “I only pass on what I know to be true.” That may not qualify as gossip, but it is its first cousin. Even if it’s true, you only pass it to those who need to know. Sometimes there is a need to pass on some true things to people who need to know. Paul wrote to Timothy a warning about a trouble maker. 2 Timothy 4:14-15: “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.” I have numerous times called other pastors and warned about someone who attended here and caused trouble and now is attending the church where they are the shepherd. It’s not that we never speak negative of another; it is that we only speak truth and only negative truth to those who have a need to know.

3. Flattering Words

“Flattery” is from a French word that means to stroke or caress with the flat of the hand. It is an insincere compliment given with a wrong motive. Someone said that a flatterer strokes you on the back to find a soft spot to stick his knife into! Proverbs 26:28: “A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.” An immoral person often uses flattery to seduce someone. Proverbs 7:21: “With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him.” Most extra-marital affairs begin with flattery.

4. Harsh Words

Proverbs 15:1: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Researchers at Kenyon College in Ohio discovered that people addressed by telephone or intercom respond in the same tone of voice they hear. That’s one reason that sinful out of control anger tends to be passed from one generation to another. Angry parents with harsh words to their children stir up wrath and those angry children develop a flesh pattern that results in their harsh speaking to their children and, so it continues generation after generation. A gentle answer can diffuse a potentially explosive situation. These are a few examples of words that tear down.

II. Words That Build Up

Proverbs 15:23: “A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word!” Proverbs gives us so many examples of timely words that are delightful, encourage us, and build us up!

A. Words That Restore the Fallen

Proverbs 25:12 (HCSB): “A wise correction to a receptive ear is like a gold ring or an ornament of gold.” One of the least understood and least practiced manifestations of genuine God type love is confronting those who have fallen into sin. It involves speaking the truth in love. It isn’t always taken well, but many times it is appreciated later. Proverbs 28:23 (CSB): “One who rebukes a person will later find more favor than one who flatters with his tongue.” I think if that one passage were consistently obeyed in the church, it would revolutionize our fellowship and totally change the bad reputation of the American church in the world. Oh, how unloving to allow one who has fallen into sin to go on in their sin without a confrontation in words given with love.

B. Words That Lift Up the Burdened

Proverbs 12:25: “Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad.” One of the main reasons that we assemble together is to lift up the burdened. Hebrews 10:25: “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

C. Words That Instruct with Kindness

Proverbs 15:7a: “The lips of the wise spread knowledge...” Proverbs 31 describes the ideal wife and mother and it says in Proverbs 31:26: “She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” Oh, the opportunity we have in the home, in the small groups, and one on one, to instruct others with God’s Word through our words offered in kindness.

Oh, the power of words! There is power to harm and power to help. However, I need to give you a hard truth. James 3:8: “But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison.” You cannot (in your own power) overcome a lifetime of programming (flesh includes our old programming) in the use of your tongue (words). What is impossible with man is possible with God! That brings us to some practical application.

III. The Power to Build Up and Stop Tearing Down

As James 3:8 tells us, no one (in their own power) can tame the tongue and change what is often decades of programming their own flesh. Here is the only way we can walk in consistent victory over our own flesh.

A. Take God at His Word

When a person receives Christ, not only is their sin forgiven, the power of sin has lost its authority in their life. Satan, through the power of sin in our members (Romans 7:23) could enslave the old you in Adam. When you received Christ, that old man in Adam was crucified with Christ and the power of sin lost its authority in our life. Romans 6:6 (HCSB): “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin’s dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin.” All that remains for us to do is to take God at His word and reckon by faith that the one whom sin had dominion and authority over is dead. Romans 6:11: “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” The cross and the work done there can free us from a lifetime of an out of control tongue and sinful patterns with our words.

B. Walk in the Fullness of the Holy Spirit

When the Bible describes the results of the filling of the Holy Spirit, it emphasizes our speaking. We speak to one another in a new way (Ephesians 5:19) and we speak the Word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31). As we walk day by day, moment by moment in total dependence on the Holy Spirit, we overcome lifelong flesh patterns of the tongue. Galatians 5:16: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

C. Talk Less

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

Conclusion

As we go into a new year, may we look to God to do what we could never do ourselves and that is to control our words. When we fail, we must confess it immediately to God and ask forgiveness of those wronged with our words. These truths can revolutionize our marriage, our relationships with your children, our workplace, our school, and our church.

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

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