

Proverbs
They're Just Words

"They're just words!" Ever heard anybody say that? "They're just words, what are you getting so worked up about?"

There's a fellow named Croco who has a web blog he calls crocoPuffs. In it he includes his world views on a whole hodge podge of subjects.

One of his articles is called "They're just words, people. I curse. So what." In it he explains his view that words are just letters of the alphabet grouped together.

He writes, "I'm not going to censor myself because I think someone might be offended by my use of any particular word. "Faggot" is no more or less of a word than "mongoose".

Of course it's a word. That's the point. Words aren't neutral. The whole reason Croco can write his blog is because words have distinct meanings. They're not just letters of the alphabet grouped together with no rhyme or reason.

Words are expressions of the heart and mind.

If words aren't really important then why do we say the pen is mightier than the sword?

Why do advertisers spend \$80,000 per second for Super Bowl ads? What different does it make if the doctor says malignant or benign? Words are very significant.

Isn't it interesting that the Bible calls itself the Word of God? That the phrase 'the Word of the Lord' is used 260 times in the Bible?

That Jesus Christ Himself is called the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Our words are vitally important.

Last week we started a series in the Old Testament book of Proverbs. The book gets its name from the fact that it's made up of hundreds of short, profound, pointed sayings designed to give us wisdom for every day living.

The book of Proverbs is God's wisdom given through the pen of Solomon, the third king of Israel, the son of David.

Last week we began by looking at the subject of wisdom.

According to Proverbs, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* (Proverbs 9:10)

It's in God, our Creator, and the Bible, which is God's message to us, that we find true wisdom. But now how does God's wisdom impact our lives?

For one thing, the book of Proverbs has a lot to say about what we say and how we say it.

In fact, the words "tongue," "mouth," "lips," "say," "says," and "words" are terms that show up over 170 times in the Book of Proverbs. That means that on an average of about 5.5 times in all 31 chapters Solomon says something about what we say.

What I'd like us to examine this morning is the right way and the wrong way to use our words.

I'd like to use Proverbs 18:21 as a launching pad this morning.

Turn to pg 575 Read 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. You can either bring life or bring destruction. Your words can be medicine or missiles. Our words can bring healing or devastation.

Listen to these warnings from the New Testament book of James: 1:26 *If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.*

Jas 3:5-6 *Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*

Jas 3:9-10 *With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.*

The tongue may be small but it can do a lot of good or a lot of damage.

I. There Are Wrong Ways To Use The Tongue

a. Turn to Proverbs 26 Read 23-24

Have you ever met someone who always seemed to be buttering you up? The Bible says those words are like clay covered with silver dross.

The dross is what's left over after you heat up silver to remove the impurities. You heat it up, the impurities come to the top, and you skim off the worthless stuff.

If you took that silvery looking dross and coated a clay cooking pot and tried to pass it off as a valuable silver utensil, it would be worth about as much as insincere words of flattery.

Remember, just like that person who does it to you becomes obvious really quickly. Your insincerity becomes obvious when you do it to.

Don't use insincere words.

b. Proverbs 26 Read vs 20-22

Here's one none of us have ever been guilty of, right? Gossip. Talk about a quick way to use your words for destruction, this is it.

It's amazing all the excuses we can hide behind to justify this one. But I have to wonder, just how many churches, how many businesses, how many marriages, how many reputations have been destroyed by gossip.

This is so practical.

When you have a campfire and you stop throwing wood on it, what eventually happens? It goes out, right?

So how come we struggle with gossip? Why are we so willing to let someone throw more wood on a fire that we know down inside should be extinguished?

Because the words of a gossip are like tasty bites. They're like candy. They taste good, but they have no nutritional value. They're not good for us, but we enjoy them.

Giving a false, exaggerated description maliciously about someone else falls into this category.

But what about things that are true? If I talk about someone and what I'm saying is true, did it stop being gossip?

Let me share with you four things that we need consider before we say anything to anybody. These are four simple filters to clean up our speech.

We need to ask ourselves:

First, "Is It really true?" Before you repeat a statement, make sure it's accurate. Just because someone said it, doesn't make it true! And it's so easy to jump to a wrong conclusion!

Before you believe something, before you repeat something, make sure it is true. If you don't know it's true keep quiet.

Next: "Is it complete?" It's easy to get half of the story. Sometimes, what's said is true, but the information we get is not always complete! Proverbs 18:17 says, *The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him.*

In other words, if you only hear one side of the story you tend to form an opinion that may not be close to the truth.

Have you ever listened to someone's complaint about another person and you think, "You poor thing. That's terrible what that person is putting you through."

Then you hear from the other person and suddenly the one you felt sorry for doesn't sound so innocent any more. Make sure you have all the facts.

#3. "Is it Necessary?" What you say may be true, it may be complete, but is it beneficial? If I meet someone who's ears stick out and I say "Man, you look like Dumbo," what I say may be true, but did it help that person in some way? If I say it to someone else about that person do my words build up or tear down?

Ephesians 4: 15 command us to speak the truth in love. We're to, *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.* Ephesians 4:29

Here's what we need to grab onto. Obedience to these verses isn't an option. It isn't nice to do if I feel like it.

Any disobedience to the clear commands of scripture is sin. Jesus Christ died for our sins. He died for the sin of gossip, just like he died for the sins of murder, adulterers, and thievery.

So, is it true, is it complete, is it necessary, and fourthly we need to ask: "Is It Kind?" Romans 12 :10 says: *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.*

Gossip is deadly and we should avoid it at all costs.

**For a third wrong way we can use our tongue turn to Proverbs 14 Read vs 16-17
Now chapter 18 Read vs 6-7**

God says, the person who gets into fights and conflicts is a fool. One time I was talking with a couple who was not from our church but had asked for marriage counseling.

They sat in my office on the couch together describing how they had had a violent, physical confrontation. When I asked them what started it all they turned to each other and said, "We don't remember!"

They laughed but I thought that's not at all funny. One of them obviously said words that attacked the other person so they responded with harsh words and things just grew from there until they were physically violent.

God has an answer of how to respond if someone verbally attacks us. The Bible

says, in Ephesians 4:31-32 *Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

This is the stuff of real life. This is where we live and move.

It's always interesting to me how quick some people are to judge others for superficial things, when they constantly fail at stuff like this. But this is the real test of the genuineness of our commitment to be wholly devoted followers of Christ.

Number 4 in the “destructive speech” category is found in Proverbs 17 Read vs 27-28

Read 18:13

Proverbs 11:2 *When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.*
Proverbs 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Ps 5:5 *The boastful shall not stand in Your sight...*
Ps 10:3 *For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; He blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD.*

The more we talk, the more we have an opportunity to misspeak.
There's a right kind of boasting and a wrong kind. The wrong kind focuses the attention on us. The right kind focuses on God.

Ps 34:2 *My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad.*
Ps 44:8 *In God we boast all day long, And praise Your name forever.*

If we're boasting in God we're not going to draw attention to ourselves.

The number 5 is in Proverbs 30 Read vs 11-12

Isn't it interesting that our culture seems obsessed with using words that describe bodily functions and sexual themes. Crudeness and cursing are becoming substitutes for legitimate communication.

Croco is wrong on this point. Cursing isn't just another form of expression. It's duming down society and promoting vulgarness.

Frederica Mathewes-Green wrote an editorial 2 years ago about Dale Earnhardt , Jr.'s use of the "S" word that got him in a lot of trouble. She said this:

"English is unusually rich language, with over half a million words, about five times the size of French. If there's something you want to say, you can probably find a way to say it.

Naughty words become a blank token we can stick in any sentence as a substitute for really thinking through what we're trying to say. If Earnhardt hadn't been in the habit of using this word casually, he could have come up with something equally eloquent for the occasion. I'm not particularly offended that he used this word, though I regret that such words are becoming more common while so many thousands of other words get used rarely or not at all. Our vocabulary is becoming more and more narrow, until one day the English spoken in the streets will be reduced to a few grunts and hand gestures."

Those are just some of the ways we can use words in a wrong way.

What about the right ways to use our tongue? What does Proverbs have to say about right speech?

II. There Are Right Ways To Use The Tongue

Proverbs 27 Read vs 9

You'll find a theme running through Proverbs that just as wrong speech destroys, right speech heals and restores.

The NIV translates verse 9 *Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.*

What makes a friend a real friend?

It's their willingness to tell us what we need to hear, not just what they think we want to hear.

Back up a couple of verses to 27:5 & 6 Read

One of the old commentators, Charles Bridges, writes: "The mark of true godliness is an anxiety to have our faults pointed out."

You might say, “Hey, I must be godly because I’d sure feel anxiety if my faults were being pointed out.”

But that’s not what he’s saying. He’s saying if we’re really godly we will be eager to have our faults pointed out. If we’re really godly we’re going to want to know our weak points so we can work on them and not just ignore them.

If our words give wise counsel we’re using them in the right way. It means speaking the truth in love. It means taking a hard look at ourselves first, but we need each others counsel and wisdom.

Listen to Proverbs 25:11 *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver.*

Romans 14:19 *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*

How many of your words this last week were words of encouragement? How many sentences were devoted to helping lift someone else’s anxious heart?

If you were paid 10 cents for every kind word you said and had to give away 5 cents for every critical comment, would you be rich or poor today?

Did you know the average person spends one-fifth of his or her life talking. In fact, if all of our words were put into print, the result would be a 50-page book each day. In a year’s time the average person’s words would fill 132 books of 200 pages each!

Sometimes using our words well will mean using less words.

Proverbs 13:3 *He who guards his mouth preserves his life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.*

Most of our mouth mistakes are made because we simply don’t engage our minds first.

Brian Bill has written on taming the tongue and this is what he says:

Let me give you 7 situations in which you should hold your tongue.

- 1) When you're tempted to say, "I told you so."
- 2) When you have information that makes someone look bad.
- 3) When someone is upset about a problem and you've had a similar experience.
Be careful of shifting the focus of the conversation to yourself.
- 4) When you're tempted to judge or criticize someone.
- 5) When you want to correct someone on something unimportant
- 6) When someone has not asked for your opinion.
- 7) When you want to tell something about yourself in order to impress someone.

Most of us don't really have a problem talking. What we really need to develop is the skill of listening. Proverbs 19:20 *Listen to counsel and receive instruction, That you may be wise..*

Why does it seem so hard to say kind things with our tongues? Why do we find ourselves prone to harming instead of helping?

It's because our tongues are inextricably linked to our hearts. Jesus gives us some insight in Matthew 12 and 15: *"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks....for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, lies and slander."*

The truth is, our words are just the public pronouncement of the private thoughts of our hearts. What comes out of our mouths reveals what is in our hearts. Our words reflect our true character.

That's why the Bible says we need a Savior. Proverbs was given to Israel. God also gave Israel His laws and commandments.

All throughout the Old Testament God gave wisdom and direction, but He was doing something else too.

God was showing the perfection of His standards. And every Jewish person who was honest would have to admit that they had failed God. Some in a very open, dramatic way. Some in a more subtle way that wasn't as noticeable, but all failed.

It's the same for us. When we look at God's standards in Proverbs and the rest of Scripture we can see that we've failed too.

God never says anywhere in the Bible, "Do the best you can and you'll be OK with me."

He says, "The souls that sins shall die." He says, "The wages of sin is death."

That's why God set up the whole sacrificial system for Israel. The people brought in unblemished animals and those animals were offered up to God.

That showed them that the wages of sin is death. That an innocent substitute could die in the place of the guilty sinner. That God was holy and demanded the payment be made.

All that was preparation for the final and ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Jews looked forward to a Savior, we look back, but the Savior's still the same.

As John the Baptist said, Jesus is "the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world."

The people of Israel were sinners in need of a Savior and so are we.

Jesus Christ laid down His life as the sinless offering taking our sins upon Himself. Real wisdom is responding to God's love by faith.

John 3:16-18 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Proverbs 14:9 says that fools mock at sin.

A truly wise person is honest about their imperfections and calls on the perfect God of heaven to forgive them and be their Savior.

The Bible says when we receive Christ, God gives us a new heart and a new life. But we still need to grow. We're "born again" by faith but after birth has to come growth.

How do we grow in the wise use of our words? What do we do about past failures? How do we get started?

1. Make things right with others. When we're reading through a book of the Bible like Proverbs that's so full of practical instruction it's easy to see where we've failed. A great thing about most computer functions is a command called undo. If you make a mistake and you want to go back to where things originally were you hit the undo key.

Wouldn't it be great if life had a CTRL+Z function? But it doesn't.

But while God didn't create an undo function for the things we say, He did create something called repentance and restoration. And perhaps more than any other function, it is the ability to ask for and receive forgiveness from others that elevates and strengthens Christianity. Unfortunately, it's a function we don't use near enough.

Do you need to have a change of mind and go to someone today and ask forgiveness for something you've said? Or, do you need to grant forgiveness to someone for something that was said to you? Take care of this today and then keep short accounts with people on a daily basis. When you mess up with your mouth, make things right. When you've been wounded by a cutting comment, restore the person by granting them forgiveness.

In fact, we need to have a attitude of forgiveness long before they ever ask.

2. Yield your tongue to God. Have you ever said, "God, my tongue now belongs to you?" That's where Romans 6:13 comes in, which challenges us to "not offer the parts of our body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer ourselves to God..."

I believe that God would have us say something like this: "Lord, I've been using my tongue for myself but I now want to start using it for You. Here are my lips, let me speak for you. Here's my mouth, let my mouth speak the words that You want."

Proverbs 16:1 says, *The preparations of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.* Your comments can be put under the Lord's control. He can give you lips of life. He can give you a tender tongue. He can put words of

wisdom in your mouth. He can sanctify your speech. It starts when surrender your tongue to Him.

3. Ask for God to work in your heart. If we want to stop using destructive words, and begin speaking words of life, we not only need to make things right with others and yield our tongue to God, we may in fact, need a radically different heart.

The good news is that God comes to live inside every believer through His Spirit. The more we yield or hearts to the power of His Spirit, the more He'll work in our rebellious, self-centered hearts to make them like His.

4. Feast on the Word of God. Proverbs 18:21 says, *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.* One of the best ways to change your heart and to make sure your speech is edifying is to ingest the Word of God on a daily basis.

Psalm 119:11: *Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!*
When God's Words are in our heart, we'll know right from wrong.
We'll stop making excuses for ourselves. And God's Spirit will use that truth to change us.

They're just words, right? They're tools. Powerful tools that can wound and destroy, or heal and point others to God.

The choice is yours!