

Sermon Notes, October 8, 2017

The Christian Lifestyle: The Power of Words, Ephesians 4:25-32, James 3:5, 9-10

This morning, we're going to be specifically focusing on our words and how to build one another up through verbal communication. Our focus will be especially on verse 29. The Bible gives your words tremendous centrality. In fact, Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." The book of James says the tongue is like the rudder of a ship. Jesus goes so far as to say we will be judged for every idle word. We'll be judged for our words. Why all this? There is nothing more fundamental than the need to be understood and to understand.

That happens through communication. Communication and words are a power and a wonder, and they are so immensely powerful that God will judge us for every idle word. What does that mean? He wants you to realize just what kind of power they have to make or to break people AND you. Every one of your words is a little bomb that can go into somebody's soul, penetrate all the way to their center, and explode there. That's why abusing speech and words or not using them is diametrically opposed to what we have been created for. It flies in the face of being in the image of God.

Why is it so powerful? Because when we do it, we're like God, because God is a God who speaks. It's what makes him God. God speaks man into being. "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image, in our likeness...'" To be created in God's image is to be called persons in communion: with God and with each other. We are created for relationship, in which communication is central.

Think with me for a moment about it. One of the things that's so scary about speech is since it's one of the most wonderful things and one of the best things about us, it's the place sin makes a beeline for. Sin goes after the best parts of us. That's why the most wonderful aspects of humanity, sexuality and speech, are in many ways the most corrupted.

1. One of the powers of the tongue is a power over you, the speaker

For example, words are powerful in the fact that they reveal who you are. They reveal you. Jesus says, the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ..." The tongue eventually gives you away. Jesus said, "By your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned." What does this mean that we'll be justified on the base of our words and condemned on the base of our words? It means your words reveal whether you are justified or whether you are condemned. It reveals what your heart really is.

This should be a big difference between Christians and non-Christians. It's not, but it should be. All of us who are believers have a pretty good idea what the Bible says when it talks about the flesh and the Spirit, that you have on the one hand a new person being created after the likeness of Christ, being transformed by the Holy Spirit, and you have the old person who is still wasting away. but you see, the words reveal the heart.

So, when there's nothing in there but foulness, the non-Christian (and unfortunately this also happens in the lives of Christians!) really has to spend most of his or her life covering up, making sure the words that go out there don't really show what's inside. Yet, the Christian has a new center. In a Christian, there is (there ought to be) a growing honesty and a growing integrity and a growing & deepening love for God, so instead of trying to hide what you have by your words, one of the great things about real Christianity is it makes you desire to express yourself, to express encouragement there, to give expressions of love, or to express the praises there and so on.

Words also have this kind of power.

2. Words mold our character

If you clothe an angry thought with words, the words then have a new power over you. One of the best ways for you to get yourself in the grips of bitterness is to just keep expressing it. They have a power, and they end up having a life of their own. They can drive you. Clothe an angry thought in words and your anger has a new power over you. Words give thoughts and motives reality. Your words have that kind of power to reveal to you who you are, so don't do it uncritically.

Another power of the tongue (and here's where we really have to be accountable) is over the hearers. If you misuse words, if you speak dishonesty, if you speak out anger, if you speak out corrupt words, if you speak out slander, it will corrupt you. Unfortunately, you're not going to go down alone. You're not going to go down in flames alone. You're going to bring a lot of other people with you, because of the power the tongue has over hearers.

Words have a tremendous power of penetration. Words have a tremendous power to wound. Untold numbers of marriages have been permanently destroyed by words, sometimes one sentence, sometimes a single word. Untold numbers of kids' lives have been completely ruined.

On the other hand, words can heal. Proverbs 16:24 says pleasing words are sweet to the soul and health to the bones. The main word, the main direction given here is, "Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only that which is edifying, that which builds up (or gives grace) to the hearer." If you get some sense of the power of words, some sense of the incredible thing that has been put into your hands, what you have to ask yourself is, "Am I using it properly?"

God has a measuring stick, and it's called Eph. 4:29. And it looks at the motive. Paul says here that the only words God realizes are a legitimate and fair use of this powerful nuclear weapon that you have is if you're constantly wondering, "What can I do to encourage this person? What word will please? What word will affirm?" Your words have to have a certain purpose. Jesus Christ says you'll be judged for every idle word. "Idle words" means words that are not thoughtful. They're words that are not weighed. Are you weighing your words?

Please listen to yourself. Will you? Listen, after all, since God is listening to everything you say after the service, since he has that standard, are you trying to build other's up according to their needs?

Ultimately, your words have power of their own. They have a life of their own. My question is ... When you open your mouth, do people cringe, or do they treasure what you say?