

Intro:

Well, we're talking about a seemingly random subject today: words. I don't know how much you think about the words you use, but I think if you start thinking about it you would discover that words are pretty important and significant in our everyday lives, and in fact, in the life of our larger society world.

I mean, how many of you have been impacted by SNL, for example, and the words and jokes there, especially during this election season? How much of our economy is affected, or was affected, by the words of people like Alan Greenspan, and Ben Bernacke?

On a maybe more personal level- how many of you have been seriously encouraged, or seriously hurt, by someone's words? Some of us grew up with the saying- "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," but we knew it was false, because we would get hurt, we continue to get hurt, by words from a friend, parent, teacher, spouse, child.

(My story in jr. high)

The Bible actually has a lot to say about our words, and it's pretty important. We're going to try to touch on a few things in our conversation here, from the wisdom of Proverbs and teachings of Jesus. There's a lot to absorb, but I think we can divide our time up to two parts: 1) Looking at how and why the Bible describes words as being important, and then 2) looking how how we can begin to get take care of our words. So the importance, and the way we can care, for our words.

Words are very important.

They impact others.

The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense. 10:21

Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed. 11:11

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. 12:18, ESV

Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up. 12:25

They have personal consequences, good and bad.

From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward, 12:14

Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin. 13:3

By the mouth of a fool comes a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them. 14:3, ESV

In fact, they show our true selves and spirituality.

33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in them, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in them. 36 But I tell you that people will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Jesus, Matthew 12:33-37

Now this comes in the context of Jesus' contact with a group of people called the Pharisees, the religious people of power back then. These people didn't like Jesus, and were accusing Jesus' miracles, and Jesus himself, as being from Satan. And so Jesus has a pretty harsh comment to warn them about what they're saying- their empty words.

And what he says is this: Who we are in our soul- and the choices we make at that level- determine our words. We can thus be rightly judged by our words.

To clarify, this phrase "empty words" isn't meaning to meaningless words per say- like jokes or words we may say while we're having fun. Remember the context- these people are saying some harsh things about what they believe Jesus to be- they're accusing him of being from Satan. The word "empty" is used elsewhere, as in James 2:20, to speak of what empty faith looks like. In both instances, we're talking about words and beliefs that are based on false motives and promises, words that are like broken promises, words that aren't really backed by action. And so we will be judged by our words toward God- are they backed by action, or not? One more verse:

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. James 1:26

Words are very important, as it relates to others, ourselves, and God. And so we need to be careful with our words. The rest of the message is going to reflect on how we can take care of our words. My hope is that, through this, we can make some good choices about spirituality, and our lives.

But before we get there: one question to address. If words reflect what's in us, does trying to control them really do anything? Shouldn't we change our hearts first?

The question is a definite yes, especially if you're at that place where you really haven't committed to following Jesus. If you're here today and checking Christianity and Jesus out, please note that Jesus isn't here primarily to get you to stop lying or gossiping or whatever else we're going to be talking about. He will definitely transform your speech, but He's not primarily about that. His first priority is this: letting you know you are loved by him, you can be forgiven by him, and then transforming your life- giving you a new heart, making you a new person from the inside out. Only he can give you a new heart- you can't give yourself one. (Playing ball and cussing.)

But there's a second part to this, once you have given your life to Jesus and he has give you a new heart, the process of change from inside out begins. Inevitably things like our speech will be affect. But the way things begin to change- the way God has designed it- is through us changing our behavior in conjunction with God's power at work in us. There's a partnership going on.

More could be said about this- it's not easy or even simple at times. (Romans 6:1-14, James 2:22 has some more) But I think it's enough to help us embrace what Proverbs will ask us to do with the right mentality. We're not here to somehow make God happy with our

behavior, and then when he's not looking we can let loose and be ourselves. God is here to change us inside out, and our behavior is part of that process of real change.

How should be careful with, take care of, our words?

As with proverbs, it's written in a very unique way, where it talks about one subject in a numerous variety of ways, all through the book. Our task as interpreters is to try and bring these verse together, and ponder. So let's do a little bit of that.

Included here are some of the verses on our words, arranged by topic. Take a look with your neighbor, and see what you can come up with in terms of what proverbs says about how to be careful with our words.

Be truthful

There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood... Prov. 6:16-17

Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. 12:19

Think before you speak

It is a trap to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider one's vows. 20:25

The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.15:2

To answer before listening— that is folly and shame. 18:13

Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them. 29:20

Don't gossip, don't slander

Gossips betray a confidence, but the trustworthy keep a secret. 11:13

A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much. 20:19

Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down. 26:20

**The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts 26:22*

*The picture here is pretty telling. Gossip is like fine food- we kind of like it. Worse yet, it goes down to our inmost part- it's stuff that can really get in us, affect us and how we look at others. In other words, it's pretty dangerous!

Don't Flatter

A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin. 26:28

**Those who flatter their neighbors are spreading nets for their feet. 29:5*

* What this proverb is using is the imagery of hunting, catching animals. When you use flattery you are really out to hurt them. You are bending the truth about someone. Long

term, that's not helpful- for them, or for you (some interpreters think the net is for not their feet, but those who are doing the flattery)

Silence

Those who have no sense deride their neighbors, but those who have understanding hold their tongues. 11:12

Those who have knowledge use words with restraint, and those who have understanding are even-tempered. Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues. 17:27-28

When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. 10:19, ESV

*Note how Jesus did this: see 1 Peter 2:22-23

Gentleness

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

The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit. 15:4

Know Your Context

If anyone loudly blesses a neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse. 27:14

**Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes. 25:4-5*

* There are times when people are acting stupid, and you should try and talk with them- you're not going to get through, and you may end up like them. But there are times when you need to use their own medicine to really shock them into thinking.

Challenge:

- Have you been taking care of your words lately? Do you need to change some things, "repent," in your words? If someone was to hang around you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in your private and public moments, what would they say about who are you are, what your spirituality is like, based on your words?

- For those of you who are here checking things out with Jesus- Do you need to start getting your life right with Jesus?

As we worship, bring yourself before God. If you need to repent, do it. If you need to embrace Jesus, and let Him in to have control, let him.