

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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(Proverbs, No. 10)

SUBJECT: WISDOM IN SPEECH (4 of 6)

TITLE: A WORD FITLY SPOKEN (1 of 2)

TEXT: PROVERBS 25:11-15.

“Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprover to a listening ear. Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters. Like clouds and wind without rain Is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely. By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.”

INTRODUCTION. We have seen in this series of messages on speech, that the tongue is “an unruly evil.” It is filled with the poison of profanity, vulgarity, gossip, slander, lying, and deception. While the world finds that kind of language “cool”, it expresses the ugliness of fallen man, even when we are trying to suppress it. As a matter of fact, the best way to hide the depth of sinfulness in your heart is to keep your mouth shut. There is a lot to be said for keeping your mouth shut: “the reason you were given two eyes and two ears is so you can see and hear twice as much as you say.” Or, “a shut mouth catches no flies.” One of my all time favorite professors wrote that in my year book! Can you believe that?

The world rewards the language of the world. Who does not remember the accolades in the media when, in his debate with Dan Quayle, Senator Benson interrupted, “Senator, you’re no John Kennedy!”? Dan Quayle had no comeback, because almost anything he might have said might have made things worse. Then came the debate between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale, when everyone wondered just how Mondale would echo the media claims about Reagan’s age. Well, once again President Reagan cut their feet out from under them when he announced, “Well, I am not going to hold the senator’s age against him.” Simple words, but they turned the tide of the debate. Which so often happened when the media held their breath waiting for Ronald Reagan to say something that would derail the Reagan express.

Kids and young people today proclaim everything the like, “cool”, or “awesome”. Well, to be perfectly honest, a lot that passes for “cool” is far from “awesome”! But today, we are going to look at just how awesome one’s speech can be.

When President Reagan stood before that oppressive wall separating East and West Berlin, and said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall!”, now that was awesome. When President George Washington delivered his farewell address, that was defined awesome. When General Robert E. Lee

delivered a command in war, his troops were in awe, often declaring that they would die for General Lee - slavery was not the issue until later in the war, and most of those soldiers had never owned a slave. In fact, many lived under conditions worse than the slaves on some plantations - but of course, that means more security and better food and shelter, not more dignity or freedom. Yes, General Lee's presence and his words were awesome, but it was in reconciliation that Robert E. Lee was most "awesome."

I. IN THE BIBLE THE TONGUE EXPRESSES ONE'S TRUE NATURE.

A. The Tongue May Express Evil (Ps. 64:2-5).

*"Hide me from the **secret counsel of evildoers**, From the tumult of those who do iniquity, Who have **sharpened their tongue** like a sword. They aimed **bitter speech** as their arrow, To shoot from concealment at the blameless; Suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear. They hold fast to themselves an evil purpose; They talk of laying snares secretly; They say, 'Who can see them?'"*

B. The Tongue May "Be Used for Praise (Ps. 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."

C. The Tongue May Be Used for Confession.

1. With the tongue we confess our transgressions, (Ps. 32:5; 1 John 1:9).
2. With the tongue we confess our faith (Matt. 10:32; Romans 10:9-10).
3. With the tongue we confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:10-11).

D. The Tongue May Be Used to Express the Wisdom of God (Pro. 4:5 ff).

E. The Tongue May Be Used to Witness for Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).

II. GODLY WISDOM IS A WORD FITLY SPOKEN (Pro. 25:11, NKJV).

A. Godly Wisdom Is Seen In a Word to Fit the Circumstances (Pro. 25:11, NAS).

The Bible is filled with prohibitions and warnings when it comes to the tongue. It is filled with deadly poison, it is like a rudderless ship, it is an unruly evil. James wrote:

"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” (James 3:6).

The psalmist associates the tongue with “curses and deceit and oppression...mischief and wickedness” (Ps. 10:7).

May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, The tongue that speaks great things; Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?" (Ps 12:3-4).

We could go on and on, citing scriptural warnings about the evils of the tongue. However, there are many admonitions to use one’s tongue for the glory of the Lord. Hear the words of David:

“Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit” (Ps. 34:13).

“And my tongue shall declare Thy righteousness And Thy praise all day long” (Ps. 35:28).

“The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, And his tongue speaks justice” (Ps. 37:30).

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer” (Ps. 19:14).

The tongue reveals our true nature. The lost person is walking in darkness and cannot speak as one who knows the Light of the World. His speech will betray him. The Christian should use his tongue to glorify Jesus Christ, and many do so and do so in a powerful and remarkable way. However, many Christians are not walking in the spirit, but in the flesh. I call them Wilderness Saints - they have been delivered from Egyptian bondage and death, but but through doubt and rebellion against the Lord, insist on wandering in the wilderness rather than enter Canaan where their possessions lie.

Your speech will reveal your true nature. You are either in Egypt (spiritually dead), in the Wilderness (a backslider who is walking in the flesh), or you are living in the Land of Promise (a spirit filled life).

The mouth of the person who is in bondage to sin and to Satan if filled with bitterness, cursing, and all manner of evil. Sadly, the Wilderness believer often talks like someone who is still in Egypt (spiritually dead). He may even look like those on the other side - some even smell like them.

The spirit filled Christian is one who has been justified, and is being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29-30). Paul also instructs believers to: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). By the way, in these few words from Paul we find the key to Sanctification. First, it is being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Second, when you begin

to think like Jesus, you will begin to behave like Jesus - and you will begin to speak like Jesus. Paul wrote:

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things”
(Phil. 4:8)

Let me remind you of what the Psalmist had to say about those who use their speech to glorify the Lord: A word “fitly spoke (NKJV) is *“Like apples of gold in settings of silver”* - they are very precious.

B. Godly Wisdom Speaks for Reconciliation.

Reasons abound to proclaim the late Confederate General Robert E. Lee one of the greatest men in the history of America. He was great in war and great in peace, but above all, he was a great man of faith. He was overheard speaking to an old soldier: “Yes, I prefer the Bible to all other books. There are many things in the old Book that I may never be able to explain, but I accept it as the infallible Word of God and receive its teachings as inspired by the Holy Ghost.”

As the man left folding money General Lee had given him, a pastor asked what unit the man had fought with. General Lee said, “Oh, he was one of those who fought against us. But we are all one now and must make no difference in our treatment of them.” This at a time when southerners were being maligned persecuted! There were many powerful leaders in congress who hated Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson and sought to undermine their efforts to bring about a reconciliation with southern states. These forces often boasted of efforts to starve southerners. They wanted to take their land and divided among freed slaves - not out of compassion for the freed slaves, but to keep those slaves from coming north!

To many people, north and south, Robert E. Lee was the south. If he had manifested a spirit of hate and resentment it would have spread like wildfire, inciting acts of violence that would have further divided this country. However, with awesome words of wisdom - sanctified wisdom - this most godly of men moved the nation toward peace and unity - even when he was being maligned and misrepresented in northern newspapers.

C. Godly Wisdom Encourages Others (Pro. 16:24).

“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”

1. We must encourage the discouraged.

There has never been a time when people did not need encouragement, and this day is certainly on exception. We, however, have a major advantage over all the millions of people who lived out their lives over the centuries without having the advantage of having experts from the social sciences to

tell them how miserable they were. Every time you turn around you hear of another syndrome that is making someone's life miserable. Seriously, there really are times when we all need to hear "pleasant words." Pleasant words are words of love, affirmation, assurance, and encouragement. They really are "Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."

2. We must encourage the weak, (Isaiah 35:3).

"Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble."

3. We must encourage one another in the faith.

Paul exhorted the Thessalonians, "Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing" (1 Thes. 5:11). And in verse 14 of the same chapter, reiterated that plea, "*And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.*"

4. We must encourage one another daily.

"But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

Children need a word of encouragement on a daily basis. Sadly, too many children rarely ever hear a word of encouragement, and far sadder is the fact that they do not receive any word of encouragement at home where it is needed most and where it will do the most good. In fact, many children in our society are starved for affection today. They live in a hostile environment, some because their parents are always fighting, others because they live in a broken home in which their mother seems more in her latest boyfriend than her children. In fact, many children are abused in the very place they should be most secure.

If these children are to receive a word of encouragement it is going to have to come from someone at church or at school. I was fortunate in that I grew up in a Christian home and in a church where people encouraged me. But I will never forget a teacher who offered encouragement when I really needed it.

During WW II, my parents moved to Mobile, Alabama, when I was in the first grade. They both found good jobs and planned to save money to invest in the small farm they had recently bought. The only problem was that the school system was different from Mississippi. When my parents were told that I would be put in a "primer" class they decided to let me stay with an aunt and finish the first grade in Mississippi. I attended my second year in what they called the first grade in Alabama, and then, before the next year began, my father was drafted when they started drafting older men. I think he was twenty-eight years old at the time. Mother, James, and I had to move back to north Mississippi, but since the farm had been rented out, we could not move back to the farm. Mother and James stayed with her sister near Calhoun City and I lived with my father's aunt and began the

second grade at Pitsboro, MS.

My second grade teacher was very encouraging, and she was also very astute. After about two weeks she went to the principal and told him that I had already had everything they were studying and that I should be put in the third grade. She was right, but it took half a year for her to convince the principal, and when they finally put me in the third grade in the middle of the year I went from being ahead of my class to wondering what had happened. The war ended and we were back in our home on the farm in time for me to start the fourth grade at Sledge. I soon made two or three discoveries. They were a little more advanced, for one things. For another, the teacher was using different terminology. Unfortunately, my teacher had about twice as many students as she needed in the class and she persisted in calling me by the wrong name, and refused to listen when I tried to correct her.

But there was another problem. There were a few children in the class whose parents were friends of the teacher. They had grown up together and she had know their children all their lives. This teacher was very kind to the children from town, but her behavior toward a lot of the other students would get her fired - and sued - today. I kept my mouth shut and tried to pick up what I could without asking questions.

My fifth grade teacher had enlisted someone to come to her classroom and cut off the front of one of the old type school desks on the front row. Now, there reason behind the madness. She wanted a desk where she could bend students over the desk without interference from that board that stuck up a couple of inches in front of the top of the desk. She had a heavy paddle which she used - frequently for sure, and seemingly with great enthusiasm. She began by applying the board of education to the seat of learning, but she did not stop there. She worked her way down to the hamstrings, and then the calves, and then back up to the seat of understanding. We were scared to death of that woman!

Then came the sixth grade, and Miss Reba Jackson. One day there was an announcement that they were having a revival at the Baptist Church and all students whose parents sent a note could walk down to the church for the morning service. I was thrilled, and so was my mother. Daddy approved, he was just not programed to exhibit "thrill," whether he felt it or not.

When we returned to the classroom after the first service, Miss Jackson asked who could tell her about the message. Immediately, my hand went up - and that was the only hand to go up. I had been very careful to avoid that kind of situation for over two years. Miss Jackson called on me and I told her the story of the Good Samaritan - which I could have done if I had not gone to the service. I knew it from home and from our little mission church. I was just surprised that I was the only one who knew it well enough to raise his hand.

Miss Jackson discovered me that day - and I discovered something. Her words of encouragement motivated me. From that day on, I approached my work with a confidence I had left back there in that second grade classroom. And I was ready for the seventh grade.

Parents, teachers, Sunday School teachers, pastors, and neighbors are often in a position to encourage a child. You may be the one person who can offer a word of encouragement when it is needed most, and in doing so you may really make a difference in a child's life - for the rest of his life.

D. Godly Wisdom Instructs Others (Pro. 4:1-5; 7:1-2).

1. Godly parents instruct their children, (1-2).

"Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding, For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction."

2. Godly children receive instruction from their parent (3-5).

When I was a son to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, Then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live; Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth" (Pro. 4:3-5).

3. Godly leaders instruct people in righteousness (1 Sam. 12:23).

"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way."

4. Godly leaders instruct younger people in ministry (1Tim. 6:17-19).

CONCLUSION. A word fitly spoken really is "Like apples of gold in settings of silver ." With the tongue we confess Jesus Christ as Lord. With the tongue we instruct people in righteousness. With the tongue, we witness to lost people that they might be saved. With the tongue praise and honor the Lord God of eternity. Pray now to the Lord of wisdom: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).

INVITATION.