

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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(Proverbs, No. 12)

SUBJECT: WISDOM IN SPEECH (6 of 6)

TITLE: A WORD FITLY SPOKEN (2 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.”*

INTRODUCTION. I have spent a lot of time searching the Book of Proverbs, marking subjects as I felt the Holy Spirit was leading me. I have written codes in the margin of a study Bible, denoting passages dealing with subjects I would include in this series of messages: W for wisdom, I for instruction, D for Discipline, FOL for fear of the Lord; M for morality, T for the tongue. Last night I spent some time reviewing all the passages that deal with the tongue, the mouth, lips, or speech. Believe me, they are all covered in Proverbs. I cannot help but wonder how it is that with all the sound advice we have in proverbs, civilization did not completely overcome the sins of speech and embrace godly speech some nineteen hundred years ago! Of course, I say that tongue in cheek, for human nature has not changed and each generation needs the same lessons.

Listen to the words of Isaiah: “Then I said, *“Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts”* (Is. 6:5). In a world filled with unclean lips, a “word fitly spoken” is like an oasis in a vast desert, like a breath of fresh air in a garbage dump. Hollywood stars become environmental activists, crusading for clean water and air - all while they fill the air-waves with filth. Profanity and obscenities are scattered across our nation through movies, television, music, and the Internet. Wherever you go today you hear vulgar language, crude language, rude language, vile language, perverse language. In such a world, a word fitly spoken really is like apples of gold in baskets of silver.

Now, I have a confession. I have not always chosen the right word for the occasion. As a matter of fact, I have often been guilty of saying the wrong thing. You do not have to use profanity or obscene language to be guilty of using words that hurt or offend. Old George was the community drunk. It was almost as though people had stopped trying to witness to him or to reform him, they just made jokes about him. So, when I decided to call some one “George Smith” one Sunday evening in front of our church, I was certainly not saying anything that was any worse than what most of them had said about George on other occasions. There was a fairly large group of men and teenaged boys standing in the poorly lighted parking lot, the men trying to finish their cigarettes before going inside and the boys carrying on the friendly banter of teenaged boys. Someone made some crack and I said, “You are just like old George Smith!”

That night when we got home from church, my mother asked me about it. I tried to tell her that everyone joked about Old George. She then informed me that she had been told that Old George was standing their on the back side of the group of men when I said what I did. I don't know who had told her, but I was aware of the fact that Old George was not in the service that night. I was also aware of the fact that a number of our church members had been trying for years to get him to attend a service. In my effort to try to be funny I had hurt someone deeply. I wish I could say that that was the only time I have ever done anything like that, but would not be true.

A word fitly spoken truly is like apples of gold in baskets of silver, something of great value. By the same token, an inappropriate word dishonors god and pleases Satan. I wish I could sat that I learned my lesson as a teenager, but that would not be true. Only a few days ago, a lady told me her mother had asked her to ask me if I wold like to read a copy of a magazine she had with her. I said, "No." I was going to say more, but when I paused I could from the reaction in the lady's eyes that I had blown it. Again! Realizing that I had spoken shortly, I then made an effort to explain that the man who had written the article had made the statement that he was born again in a Shinto temple in Japan. However, I could see that my explanation was falling short of the mark. Later, I told my wife that I had spoken too quickly. She said, "Yes, you did." Well, I confess. I need to hear and apply these words of wisdom on the tongue.

I. A WORD FITLY SPOKEN WILL ALWAYS HONOR GOD.

A. Godly Wisdom Rebukes Evil (27:5).

"Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed."

ILLUSTRATION (Bible Illustrator):

Traveling on a plane next to a salesman, Billy Graham asked him, "Are you paid anything for all the swearing you do?"

"No," was the startled reply, "I do it for nothing."

"Nothing?" cried the famous preacher. "You work cheap! You throw aside your character as a gentleman, inflict pain on your friends, break the Lord's commandments, and endanger your own soul -- and all for nothing! You certainly work cheap -- TOO CHEAP!" Yes, swearing is not only a "cheap" practice in many ways, but it is also a terrible sin which grieves the heart of God!

B. Godly Wisdom Praises God.

"Praise is becoming to the upright" (Ps. 33:1b).

C. Godly Wisdom Honors Others.

1. Godly wisdom honors your parents (Ex. 20:12).
2. Godly wisdom honors God (Pro. 3:9; 1 Sam. 2:30).
3. Godly wisdom does not honor a fool (Pro. 26:1, 8).
4. Godly Wisdom honors others above self (Rom. 12:10).

A word “fitly spoken” can brighten the day for most anyone you know. On the other hand, all it takes is the wrong word to inflict pain and anxiety. Ronald Hawthorn was flying from Alexandria, Louisiana to Memphis years ago. His friend and companion was from deep in Cajun country. Mike grew up speaking French and when he began working with the USDA he was still thinking in French, then translating it into English. At one point Mr. Hawthorn made a comment and his Cajun friend said, “Don’t say that again!” Mr. Hawthorn was really disturbed for several minutes. He could not understand how his simple statement could have offended his friend, but it seemed so obvious that he had. Then it hit him: what his Cajun friend meant to say was, “You can say that again.”

There are many ways in which you can honor others with your speech. A compliment usually works, as long as it is sincere. Who cannot use a word of encouragement? Sometimes we simply need to affirm a friendship. Our spirits are lifted by a positive word. Sometimes our spirit is broken by a negative word. Try this some time. You speak to fifty people in a day. Thirty of them simply speak. Nineteen say something positive or encouraging. But some time during the day one person says something negative or critical. When you go home at night, which one do you remember? I will tell you what you will recall over and over. You will recall the one negative thing. You would like to forget it, but it is not easy. You may consciously recall some of the positive things people have said during the day, if only to try to forget the negative comments - the ones you keep playing back in your mind. Well, you cannot control what others say to you, but you can be sure you are not the one who hurts others.

II. GODLY WISDOM WILL NEVER BE DENIED EXPRESSION.

A. Godly Wisdom Is Expressed with a Righteous Tongue (10:20-21).

“The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver, The heart of the wicked is worth little.”

B. Godly Wisdom Honors Righteousness (15:1-2).

1. A word fitly spoken can turn away wrath.
2. Harsh words stir up anger.

3. "The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly" (15:2a, NKJV).
4. "The mouth of fools spouts folly" (15:2b).

C. Godly Wisdom Expresses Courage (Ps. 27:14).

American history will continue to record the exploits of cavalry officers like Custer and Sheridan, but to those who have not been denied the privilege of reading, (in Paul Harvey's words) "the rest of the story", there were two cavalry commanders whose exploits eclipsed all others in modern history. Those two men were Jeb Stuart and Nathan Bedford Forrest. A British military historian insisted that Nathan Bedford Forrest was the single greatest soldier of the Civil War. Forrest, who had twenty-six (or was it twenty-nine) horses shot out from under him during that bloody war, never became a Christian until after the war. Jeb Stuart was better known because of his theater of operation - he was guarding the flanks of General Robert E. Lee and invading northern territory. Both fought against incredible odds.

On one occasion, toward the end of the war, Jeb Stuart was preparing for a charge by forces several times greater than his. A captain looked to General Stuart for any indication of what he was thinking, and was surprised to see a smile on his face and an expression of peace on his face. Jeb Stuart answered the question he saw in the captain's eyes: "When you fear God you don't have to fear anything else."

Wouldn't you like to face the trials and challenges of your life with that kind of courage? Well, so would I! And now, I am going to tell you something, and when I do, someone may think I am boasting of my courage, but if you will bear with me, I think I can dispel that thought.

Following my heart attack, I spent several days in ICU before undergoing by-pass surgery. I committed myself to the care of the Lord and the medical team. I had had the kind of heart attack you hear about when someone does not live to get to the hospital - so a nurse told me. I had no fear. I was not worried about dying, debts, rehab, or anything else. I distinctly remember thinking that after what I had been through I should never worry about lesser things again. Guess what? I am not boasting of my courage, I am confessing fear, anxiety, and worry about numerous things, both small and great since that time.

This is not matter of attaining a certain level at which you will never fear again. When you keep your eyes on Jesus you can walk with Him with assurance, but when you take your eyes off Him you are going to sink in a sea of fear and despair, just as surely as Simon Peter sank in the Sea of Galilee.

D. Godly Wisdom Expresses the Truth (12:17, 22b).

Our Lord loves the truth - and He hates a lie. We had better count our blessing in that while God hates lies and He hates lying, he loves liars, and Jesus died for liars, just as He did for all other

sinners. The psalmist declared, "I said in my alarm, 'All men are liars'" (Ps. 116:11). I don't want to think of myself as a liar, do you? I have heard quite a few "personal testimonies" in revivals and evangelistic crusades, people confessing all sorts of things - "I did it all before God saved me." However, there are a couple of things that I do not remember people giving their "personal testimony" about. One is hypocrisy - would you really want to confess the hypocrisy in your life? No, we had rather have someone in mind we can identify at "the" hypocrite in our church. The hypocrite is someone else, and so is the liar. But, let's face one thing - as long as you are in this world, you are going to be tempted to compromise the truth, and if you do you are lying.

Now, before you protest that you would never lie, let me concede one point. If I ask you a question about something you did or did not do, I believe most of you would tell me the truth if you say anything at all. But when was the last time someone asked you, "Isn't that the most beautiful baby you have ever seen?" And what did you say while you were thinking, "You ought to see my grandchild"?

My brother James told me he had asked our younger brother about a lawyer who were running for the position of district judge in another area. James told me that Mike said, "If Joe B. (our father) was one hundred on the truth chart, this man would come in at about sixty-five" - which, by the way, placed him close to his opponent. A young man who lived on our farm described something another young man, a friend and neighbor, had done to try to intimate girls on dates. He would drive around, seemingly without purpose, until he found a secluded place way back out in the hills. There he would threaten to put her out and make her walk home if she was not cooperative. The young man who was telling my father the story, was more than a little impressed with his friend's "approach." When he finished he waited for a response. My father looked up from the tractor he was trying to get back in the field and said, "That's sorry as the devil!"

To which our young friend asked, "Do you mean you think I am as sorry as the devil?" Without missing a step or a breath, Daddy looked him in the eye and answered, Yes." I will have to admit that he used a mild expletive naming the eternal abode of said "devil," but the discussion ended there. My father was scrupulously honest with money, property, or his opinion. He might not offer an opinion, but if he did you never had to wonder if he was telling you what he really thought. You may be thinking that this should true of all Christians, and it should. But I wouldn't be surprised if my father had been that honest before he became a Christian at age twenty-one. He came from that period in our history when "a man's word was his bond," and a handshake settled most any agreement other than a contract on land.

That kind of honesty is good, but there is something better. A Christian should always be honest - but there is a major difference. The Christian knows a truth the lost person cannot comprehend. He "tells the truth in love" for the glory of God. Furthermore, he is used of the Lord to help pull back the veil and reveal divine truth which no lost person can grasp.

My good friend, Bob Moore, decided one summer to move his family an hour away from their home

in Nederland, Texas to some property he had bought for his retirement. He explained that both he and his wife wanted to know if they would want to commute to their jobs and they decided on a trial run while their teenaged son and daughter were out of school. He told me that they decided to move their church membership to a local church because it would not be a fair test if they did not have a local church home.

By the end of the summer, they had decided to stay in Nederland, and shared this with people at the small church where they had worshiped all summer. The pastor visited and tried to talk Bob out of moving back. Then, when he saw that they were committed to moving back, the pastor said, “Well, since you are going to be moving back, I would like to ask you a question. I would like to know what you think of my preaching?”

Bob said, “Now, I want you to understand this: if you had not asked me, I would not have said anything. But since you asked, I feel that I should tell you the truth. Frankly, your preaching doesn’t appeal to me. I know it does to some people, but it doesn’t to me. For the first ten to fifteen minutes you do all right, but then when you have said everything you have prepared to say, you begin to repeat yourself and then you resort to pounding the pulpit and hollering, and that doesn’t appeal to me.” I made up my mind that Bob was ever going to tell me what he thought about my preaching he was going to have to volunteer it!

Bob felt that this man asked a fair question, and he must have had a reason. He also sought to help him, not to hurt him. It is not always comfortable to tell the truth, even when you tell it in love, but the more you do it the more you will find the Holy Spirit guiding you.

We must also tell the truth when it comes to sound doctrine and ethical issues. We must not go around looking for arguments about security of believers, Halloween, or whether it is a sin to decorate a Christmas tree. But there are issues we must address. Peter wrote, “...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

E. Godly Wisdom Seeks Peace (12:20b; 15:1).

“...Counselors of peace have joy” (Pro 12:20b).

Jesus taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers...” Peacemakers usually make, or promote peace between other individuals with words “fitly spoken.” My mother was one of the most frustrating people some people ever met. As a matter of fact, she frustrated me many times with this thing she did. When someone began criticizing another person she knew, Mother waited for an opportunity and then she would say something like, “I understand what you are saying, but are you aware of how much this lady does for her neighbors?” Or maybe, she would begin sharing some of the person’s good qualities that you would feel guilty for criticizing him.

Christians must learn to cultivate the capacity for using the right words to promote peace and harmony. They must also avoid those words and phrases that are designed to intimidate or provoke others. I listened to someone quote a lady who seemed to always have a cutting remark about others. She was often quoted because she employed humor in character assassination. I once observed to someone that when that lady turned that tongue on the person who had been so impressed with her, it would no longer be funny. Within a few weeks she turned on the one who considered her a friend.

F. Integrity Is Expressed by A Word Fitly Spoken (Pro. 12:22).

“Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.”

G. A Wholesome Tongue Is Wholesome (15:4).

1. A godly tongue expresses godly morality.
2. A perverse tongue dishonors God and other people.

H. A Word Fitly Spoken is Pleasant, 16:24.

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

When I was in high school I was walking down a hall one day when I met some younger students. I could not believe it when I heard one of the girls say, “I just can’t stand him.” I was shocked, but not too shocked to try to figure out what I had done to cause her to feel that way about me. I could not remember ever having a conversation with her. As a matter of fact, I could not remember ever having spoken to her personally, only as a part of a group. She was not one who attracted attention to herself, either through her appearance or her personality. I had hardly noticed her. Then it hit me: that may have been the problem. From that day on, I make it a point to speak to her - by name - when I saw her. At first, I simply greeted her, and later I may have had a conversation or two with her. I don’t remember a conversation with this girl, but what I do remember is that after a month of two when I saw her in the hall or on the campus she looked directly into my eyes, smiled, and spoke. Simple courtesy can help make the day for friends and acquaintances. It is worth the effort.

CONCLUSION. *“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.”*

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit” (Pro. 18:21).

Please let me make a personal appeal. Children do not learn the proper use of grammar in the cradle. They do not master communication skills in kindergarten. They begin learning the basics in kindergarten and they begin forming a foundation in the first grade, but they must continue to build on that foundation if they are going to be able to communicate effectively with others who have

developed communication skills. Sadly, there are many people whose communication skills are retarded for no other reason than laziness and a lack of discipline. Those people often use perverse language to cover up the fact that their communication skills are not what they should be. Others use profanity when they are with their own peer group, not because they are bold and courageous, but because they lack the courage not to use the language expected of them.

Many young people today can hardly carry on a conversation without constant references to body parts of body functions. They have heard the language at home, at school, in movies and television programs, and in their music. It just seems natural to use that kind of language.

I would like to appeal to parents to teach their children the value of wholesome language. I would like to appeal to children and young people to go to the word of God and see what kind of language He wants His children to use. And I would like to appeal to adults to consecrate their tongue to the Lord, looking to the Holy Spirit for strength and wisdom.

Let me stress this one point: godly speech is a vital part of your sanctification. Paul appeals, "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus." When you begin to think like Jesus you will begin speaking as He spoke and acting as He acted. I can think of no better definition of Sanctifying than that expressed by Paul in the Epistle to the church at Rome: "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...*" (Romans 8:29). That is sanctification in a nutshell! If you would be conformed to the image of Christ you are going to have to conform to the language of Christ.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver" (Pro. 25:11, KJV).

INVITATION.