

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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SUBJECT: WISDOM IN SPEECH (1 of 6)

TITLE: WISDOM IS NOT COOL (2 of 3)

TEXT: PROVERBS

This is another message in a series on wisdom from the Book of proverbs. As a matter of fact, this is a series within a series, for in this part of the series on Wisdom there will be a number of messages on the subject, *WISDOM AIN'T COOL*. Today, the subject is *WISDOM IN SPEECH*. Though we will not expand this to include the written word, we might well do so because we use words to communicate, and those words “speak” volumes about us. Several years ago Mike, one of my brothers, made a profound statement: “You let someone write me a letter and I will tell you if he has an education.” When he receives a letter or reads a brief written by another attorney he cannot help but note the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. For centuries great emphasis was placed upon communication by means of letters, journals, and books. But that was before e-mail.

Rather than pursue that, may we move on from the written word to the spoken word? W. O. Shivers, my high school superintendent, was a man of intelligence and wisdom. It was from him that I first heard the old adage, “It is better to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.” That is a wise saying, but true wisdom is in the application.

If you want to know something about a person, listen to them when they speak. I love to listen to a person who is well informed on any subject - well, any subject in which I am interested, from sports to theology, from wood working or carpentry to bricklaying, from guns and hunting to fishing, from agriculture to horticulture. If you want to know if a person knows anything about a subject, listen to him when he speaks.

Furthermore, if you want to know what kind of person it is to whom you are listening, just listen to him for a little while. If you want to know if one knows the wisdom of God, observe what he does and listen to what he says. James states it clearly and succinctly:

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic” (James 3:13-15).

Our primary concern today is with our speech. Again, James writes:

*“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. **If anyone does not***

stumble in what he says, he is a perfect (complete, mature) man, able to bridle the whole body as well.” (James 3:1-2).

The tongue is used to communicate, and in that communication one may seek to glorify God, or he will seek to glorify himself, and in so doing he glorifies the devil. The tongue may be used to communicate truth, offer instruction, or provide encouragement. It may also be used for deceit, flattery, lying, intimidation, hypocrisy, or for immorality. The world recognizes, and often rewards language that it interprets as “cool” even when it is ungodly. It does not take much time in reading either James or Proverbs to discover that the world does not always find the wisdom of God to be “cool.” What the world sees as “cool” may be far from the wisdom of God.

I. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS NOT ALWAYS SEEN IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE WORLD.

A. For Many, the Key to “Cool” Is the Language.

1. The “perverse mouth” is not “cool”.

I am well aware of the fact that many people think preachers are naive and ignorant of the things of the world. Let me set the record straight; I am naive and ignorant and I can offer the proof on most any subject. But I am not totally ignorant in the things of the world. When the Lord called me to preach the Gospel, there were people who took special delight in trying to shock me with their speech. I worked part-time for several years for the US Department of Agriculture to pay for my education. I also visited the Hinds County Jail in Jackson, MS and the state penitentiary at Parchman weekly for some time. I also stayed in touch with the people who are of the world for many years through contacts in a large health club.

I have often walked into a dressing room or a steam room and found a person who professed to me to be a Christian, entertaining a group with a “perverse mouth.” His reward was the raucous response of his audience. While most show respect for me, there are always those who, when they are in a group, like to try an off color joke on me just to see how I will react. Of course, the best thing we can do under those circumstances is to act, not react.

Now, let us see what the Scripture has to say about a “perverse mouth.”

“A worthless person, a wicked man, Walks with a perverse mouth; He winks with his eyes, He shuffles his feet, He points with his fingers; Perversity is in his heart, He devises evil continually, He sows discord. Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly; Suddenly he shall be broken without remedy” (Pro. 6:12-15).

- 1) A perverse mouth has its source in a perverse heart.
- 2) A perverse heart desires evil.

3) A perverse mouth sows discord.

4) A perverse (wicked) person shall be broken - we have God's word on it.

A perverse mouth does not bear up under the scrutiny of the Word of God. No matter what the world says, a perverse mouth is not "cool".

2. A deceitful tongue is not "cool".

David was addressing wicked people when he wrote: *"You let your mouth loose in evil, And **your tongue frames deceit**. You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son"* (Ps. 50:19-20).

"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy" (Pro. 12:20).

"Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put devious lips far from you" (Pro. 4:24).

Is it not great that Solomon did such a thorough job in warning people about the dangers of a deceitful tongue that we do not have to concern ourselves with this today?!! Well, it is going to take more than three thousand years to change human nature. There are salesmen who take delight in deceiving prospective buyers. Thousands of employees have lost their life's savings because they were deceived by company executives. Does the name Enron ring a bell? Or Martha Stewart?

Where is deceit seen more than in the political arena today? Liberals in the media march in lock-step with their comrades in politics and education. Liberal educators have sold two generations of Americans on moral relativism. Unethical politicians lie to voters, knowing that their friends in the media will amplify their views while muting the views of conservatives. They have used class envy, racial strife, and fear to scare people into voting for them. We have reached the point that millions of senior adults are absolutely convinced that conservatives are plotting to take away their Social Security checks.

Every time anyone mentions the Marxists roots of many liberal politicians and educators they go into orbit. But since the collapse of the Iron Curtain, former officials have told us some interesting stories about some American politicians. For example, during the past months former president Jimmy Carter has criticized America - from Cuba - and received the Nobel Peace Prize. And now it seems that he personally visited a Soviet diplomat to ask him to encourage the Soviet Union to do everything possible to help defeat Ronald Reagan. Then, while President Reagan was running for a second term, Carter sent Armand Hammer to try to enlist his Communist friends to help defeat Reagan.

With the tongue people practice deceit in the office, in the home, at school, and at the ball park. There are people who have practiced deceit so long it is second nature to them - no, it is their old sin nature asserting itself. Now let's face the truth. We had rather point our finger at someone we all

agree uses deceit. Former Louisiana Governor Edwin Edwards surrendered himself to federal authorities to begin serving a ten years sentence for practicing deceit - and, as Paul Harvey points out, the worst part of it is that he took his son down with him.

Are you ready now to face the truth? We may feel that it is a part of our righteousness to condemn the former governor. Admittedly, he did wrong, and we may have only seen the tip of the iceberg. But my point is that it is a lot easier to condemn Edwards that it is to confess deceit in our own heart.

All the world hates a hypocrite, right? Well, maybe. I will believe that when they refuse to go to the mall because hypocrites go there. I have no doubt hypocrites go to my doctor, my dentist, and my Optometrist. I have no problem admitting that. What I have trouble admitting is that I am one of them! Now, before you call for a vote, let me go on: so are you! Hypocrisy is a temptation that recognizes no exceptions. I have considered posting a message on our church sign: YES, WE HAVE HYPOCRITES. YOU'LL FIT RIGHT IN!

3. Loose lips are not “cool”.

“The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin,” (Pro. 13:3).

Without a doubt, you can think of someone who fits into this category. I know I have known people with loose lips. But this is not the first generation to suspect that there are people with loose lips - some one before my time came up with, “loose lips sink ships.”

Now, I have a special favor to ask of you. Will you please stop thinking of that first cousin, or your neighbor for just a few minutes? Because if you are doing that, you are going to miss my point. Forgive me - I just thought of some one! This lady arrived at church one Sunday morning and as soon as she saw the mother of a friend she exclaimed, “I am so sorry about Bill and Sue!” To which the shocked mother asked, “What’s wrong with them?” “Loose Lips” hesitated before responding, “I am so sorry. I am not supposed to say anything. I just assumed you already knew.” Needless to say, neither lady heard much I said that day.

But, forgive the digression, for my purpose is not to talk about that one particular lady whose loose lips caused such anguish and stress. The person I would like for you to think about is not someone who is not present today. The person I have in mind is not sitting beside you, or behind you. If you are going to get anything out of this service you must ask the Lord to guard you against the temptation to point to others.

4. A flattering tongue is not “cool”.

“A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps,” (Pro. 29:5).

A perverse individual uses flattery for evil purposes. Some use it to manipulate people, others simply

to persuade them to do something, and still others use flattery to try to make and keep friends. My granddaddy often used flattery for what he thought was a good reason, but at times it backfired on him. He was a simple, uneducated man, but like so many of his day his limited formal education did not prevent the development of a sharp mind. He could handle math better in his head than I could with a pencil.

Do you remember all those “*My Most Unforgettable Character*” articles in the READER’S DIGEST? Well, my maternal grandfather, Lee Cofer, was my most unforgettable character. I knew a number of other people who would have said the same thing. He was a man of compassion, concern and perception, and persuasion. He was also the most humorous person I have ever known, but he almost never told a joke. In his deep old-south drawl (with a trace of a stutter), he told stories, and answered questions for people who always tried to draw him out and get him to tell them a little more. His timing was impeccable and what was funny in him would have been embarrassing in another.

He was the most interesting conversationalists I have known, not because of his world-view - they didn’t do world-views in his day. This was in the days before psychology had made it to his part of the country, so he just made it up as he went along. For one thing, he was convinced that most people could do a lot better than they were doing, and many of them would if you “bragged on them a little bit.”

I visited my grandfather once along with my wife, Becky, and my mother. As we were preparing to leave, Granddaddy and I walked out to my car and stood waiting for the others to come out. I looked off to my right and discovered that a right-of-way had been cleared for a power-line, which allowed us to see his church, Turkey Creek Baptist Church, from his front yard. I asked, “Granddaddy, how do you like your new pastor?”

“Well, I’ll tell you, Son, it ain’t too much to him,” he said - then quickly added, “but don’t tell him I said so; I’ve been bragging on him to his face.” I know that sounds like he was lying, or being hypocritical, but for him it was simply a matter of “bragging on him” to get him to try a little harder.

This approach is not without some risk. For many years Granddaddy lived in a house we built for him on our Mississippi delta farm, seven miles west of Sledge, MS. My father often hired people to chop cotton in the Spring and Summer. Among those he hired for a few days one Summer were a man and his wife, who were also pretty unforgettable, not because of their humor, but because of their hygiene, or maybe I should say, lack of hygiene. Everyone made comments about their filth. They seemed to work in the same clothes all week and never change and never take a bath. People tried to help them but it just never got through to them.

For some unknown reason, Granddaddy decided to give it a try. He started the first of the week with a few simple words of encouragement to the wife - who was not much older than my mother. He usually made the comments in the presence of her husband, but always in the presence of some of our family or friends. His timing was such that neither the man nor his wife was offended. As a matter of fact, by the end of the week she was beaming. I am not sure any of us had ever seen her smile

before. Finally, with almost everyone in the field close by, Granddaddy stopped work, leaned on his hoe handle, looked up at woman and said, “You know, if you went home and took a good bath and put on some clean clothes you would be a fine looking woman.” Her husband never missed a lick with his hoe, and she never looked up, but she was beaming, with a smile running from ear to ear. And we grandchildren were so embarrassed we couldn’t say a word. We didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

Then, Granddaddy delivered the clincher: “Corina, I’ll tell you right now, if you ever get tired of old Billy there, I want you to let me know about it.” She continued to smile and her husband continued to work. I was wishing one of those cracks in the buckshot had been big enough to hide me.

The next week it rained one day, so Granddaddy stayed home where he read his Bible and listened to the St. Louis Cardinals on the radio. He was surprised to hear a knock at the door. But he was in for a lot bigger surprise when he opened the door and saw “Corina” standing there. She said, “Well, here I am.”

Hesitating briefly, he replied, “I see you are, but what are you doing here?” She said, “You told me if I ever got tired of Billy to let you know, and here I am.” He walked her straight across the field, not bothering to go around by the road, and turned her over to my mother. To this day, I have no idea what Mother did or said. We had waited too long for something like that to backfire on my grandfather and we were enjoying it. We never understand why Mother told us not to laugh at him.

5. An immoral tongue is not “cool”.

“The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; He who is cursed of the LORD will fall into it” (Pro. 22:14).

The ungodly world sees anything “off color” as “cool”. In movies, television programs, comedy routines, and songs, perverse people find sexual innuendoes humorous and entertaining. And let me stress here that it is no less perverse when Christians are doing it. That which would have shocked our grandparents this generation calls entertainment.

Flirtations obviously seem “cool” to a lot of people, or they would not go around bragging about what “I said,” and what “she said.” There have always been immoral people who took pride in developing “a line” they use on the opposite sex, but this generation has taken it to a new low.

Let me assure you, the Lord hears every word you say, and He does not find suggestive language amusing. Since it is not amusing to God when people use language that feeds lust, it should not be amusing to the Christian.

Bob Moore will always be one of my favorite deacons. He loved and supported his Lord, his church, and his pastor as few people I have known. Bob supervised draftsmen for Texico, which kept him in contact with a lot of people. When he began his job it was not unusual for someone to stop by and

ask if he had heard the latest joke. The ex-marine would stop and look directly into the man's eyes and listen to him. When the man finished, he would return to his work without comment. The man would leave with a puzzled expression on his face, wondering if he had offended his supervisor - not a good move! Bob had decided on a course of action after observing how ineffective it was when some Christians over-reacted.

As time passed, Bob would hear some ask, "Did you tell Bob that joke?" Later, it was, "Don't bother to tell Bob." And finally, it was, "Don't tell that in here, Bob is here." What they did not understand was that Bob wanted to do more than silence them. If he began by lecturing them, they would have dismissed him as a religious fanatic. If he had written them up for their language, Texico would have told him that was no concern of theirs as long as they got the job done.

So, when Bob wrote his evaluation of some of the men for Texico, he might add that this employee should give some attention to communication skills, adding that at times he might make a better choice of words in expressing himself. Immediately, Texico would contact that person and tell him to go to his supervisor and talk with him about what he might do to improve his communication skills. Then Bob could sit down one-on-one and talk with him about his language.

Once Bob, wore a beautiful tie to work and a man walked by and looked at the pattern and observed that the design reminded him deer mating. Bob never wore that tie back to work. That might seem a little narrow to some, but Bob was very conscious of the way the tongue can be used for evil and he was determined not to give others an occasion to sin.

B. What Many See as "Cool," Stands in Sharp Contrast with the Wisdom of God.

1. The Wisdom Literature stresses the importance we should place on our speech.

The world may reward those who practice deceit, but only for limited time. The wisdom of God refutes deceit and hypocrisy and embraces integrity. Job declared:

"For as long as life is in me, And the breath of God is in my nostrils, My lips certainly will not speak unjustly, Nor will my tongue mutter deceit. Far be it from me that I should declare you right; Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me" (Job 27:3-5).

David was inspired to write: *"Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit"* (Ps. 34:13). *"You let your mouth loose in evil, And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son."* (Ps. 50:19-20) .

2. James calls the tongue a fire, James 3:5-12.

"So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 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” (vv. 5-6).

“No one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way” (vv. 8-10).

II. THE BELIEVER’S SPEECH SHOULD EXPRESS THE WISDOM OF GOD.

A. We Should Confess Jesus Christ.

1. We must confess Him for salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

“That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

2. We must confess Him as Lord of all, (Phil. 2:9-11).

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

B. We Should Call on the Lord, (Ps. 78:1).

“Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.”

C. We Should Praise Him, (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.”

D. We Should Proclaim Him, (Acts 1:9).

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

CONCLUSION. You and I either use our tongue for the glory of God or for the glory of the devil. The world might reward the person with a “slick” tongue, or even a crude tongue by announcing that he or she “cool,” but if it brings us under the judgment of God, we would hardly call it wisdom. I urge you to commit your speech to the Lord. I know you have already done that, but you and I know that we have failed at times in that commitment. So let’s do it afresh now, and tomorrow, and the day after that. The wisdom of God would control the tongue.

INVITATION