

# THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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(Proverbs, No. 8)

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SUBJECT: WISDOM IN SPEECH

TITLE: BAD LANGUAGE AIN'T COOL (3 OF 3)

TEXT: PROVERBS 15:1

When I was a student at Mississippi College majoring in Bible and Sociology, we made some field trips and invited certain experts in to speak in classes. On such guest was Dr. Jake Jaquith, Director of the Mississippi State Mental Institution at Whitfield. We also visited with the chaplain, whose name was Dr. Pepper. No joke - Dr. Pepper. There is a lady in our church, Dr. Irene Steward, who trained under Dr. Jaquith before going on to pursue other degrees in medicine, and she remembers "Jake" and Dr. Pepper well. I recall asking Dr. Jaquith on one occasion, "Why do people drink alcoholic beverages?"

"For the same reason they use profanity - an inferiority complex," he replied.

I have no authority for this, and may receive little support from the social sciences, but I have maintained that there is a difference between an inferiority complex and low self-esteem. I checked with my friend, who interned under Dr. Jaquith before going on to a degree in surgery. She agrees.

The whole esteem issue has fallen on hard times in recent years, as educators and criminologists have discovered that many offenders, rather than suffering from low self-esteem, have extremely high self-esteem. One may have high-self esteem, or sense of self-worth and self-importance, and at the same time manifest an inferiority complex when thrust into a situation in which he is not in control, or with people who are obviously more capable or more sophisticated than he.

An inferiority complex may seek to disguise the insufficiency through sins of speech, especially slander, gossip, vulgarity, or profanity. I am convinced that regardless of how "cool" the user may think his speech is, you will never see the wisdom of God in profane, obscene, or hurtful language.

## I. WISDOM IS NEVER EXPRESSED IN SINS OF SPEECH.

### A. The Art of the "Put Down" Is Considered "Cool" By Some People.

Most of us know someone who has become a master of the "put down", a person who has refined the practice of dropping comments about another person which are designed to point out some fault or weakness in the other person - whether real or imaginary, or even an image the speaker seeks to create in the mind and heart of others. I have often heard Christians quote these put-down artists as though they admired them. At times, I have been impressed with the wit and worldly wisdom of the person who seems to know exactly how to wrap up in a phrase the sentiments of a number or people,

or a people group about another person or group. We knew exactly what the person had in mind, we knew it was a put down”, and yet we laughed at it. Then, I have held that statement up to the Golden Rule and had to confess the sinfulness of this attitude, I have sinned by violating the Scriptural admonition to “speak the truth in love.”

Does a name come to mind? What about Senator Trent Lott? Senator Lott made an ill advised statement - a statement made, according to the senator without a thought as to the ramification - and ever since that statement there has been a frenzied attack on the senator. I have met and talked with Senator Lott. As a matter of fact, His aunt married my wife’s uncle. Through the family, I know Trent Lott to be a godly man, and a sensitive man. No one should approve of the thought conveyed to many by Lott’s statement, but let me ask you this. Who has done the most damage to America, Senator Lott or those who have used his statement to drive a wedge between the races?

Can you fathom the arrogance and hypocrisy of a Ted Kennedy, a Bill Clinton, or a Robert Bird attacking Trent Lott? However, there is no way the liberal media will deal with Robert Bird, a former grand what-ever-they-call- them in the Klan the way they have gone after Trent Lott.

But, let’s get beyond the Lott issue. I have had people on many occasions to tell me something someone else has said about a mutual acquaintance when it was so obvious that the person repeating the comment not only approved the comment, but encouraged the “put down” artist. This person seems to know exactly how to nail the victim to the wall with verbal barbs. The “put down” is never designed to help the subject, never to correct, never to cause others to think more highly of him/her, but always to “put him down”, to highlight some flaw in his appearance, personality, or attitude.

The “put down” artist has found a subtle way of slandering another person without calling attention to the fact that it really is slander. When you see it for what it is it ceases to be funny or entertaining. W. O. Shivers, my high school superintendent, was a brilliant man, a good teacher, and a strong disciplinarian. He often made statements to students that stuck with me. For example, he once said, “I am convinced that I can do a little bit of anything anyone else can do a lot of.” I remembered that when I began taking foreign languages in college and seminary - Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Botany, courses like that. Mr. Shivers quoted someone one day that I have repeated from time to time: “Little people talk about people, average people talk about things, big people talk about ideas.”

Mrs. Thelma Street was no little person. I paid for my education, in part, by working for the Quitman County (MS) ASCS, which is a part of the USDA. I spent five summers “measuring cotton” - in reality, plotting fields on an ariel photograph for someone to planimeter in the office. My close friend, Luther Street had told me about the job, and my being a resident of Tunica County was not a problem. About once a week, I would stop by Luther’s home and visit with his parents - usually around noon time. That way I could enjoy a nice visit as well as a great meal, and in part to deep from answering Mrs. Street’s questions when I failed to stop by for lunch for a few days.

On one such visit, Mrs. Street made a statement I have never forgotten. Explaining why she did not

make negative statements about other people, she said, “Before I say anything against another person I remind myself that God loves that person as much as he loves me, and Jesus died for that person just as He died for me. When I remember that God loves that person I don’t want to say anything against him.” I still remember very clearly what Mrs. Street said - I just wish my applicator had always been as good as my rememberer!

#### B. Verbal Misdirections Are Pronounced “Cool” By the World.

A good salesman should be positive, and there is nothing wrong with developing a good sales technique. There is, however, something wrong with lying to the customer. When the automobile salesman tells the customer he selling him the car “at cost” and the business manager shows him his “invoice” and points to the “pure” cost at the bottom of the page, he does not tell him that the “pure” cost is not what he actually paid for the car. That is a misdirection - it is also a lie.

I have listened to a lot of salesmen who were anxious to tell you why their appliance was the best on the market. One day, I stopped by *Donnie’s* in Monroe, LA, to look at a VCR. After Donnie Mann showed me a couple of the models, I asked, “Donnie, everyone advertises their VCRs as the best on the market. Is the Zenith any better than the others?” Without a second’s hesitation, Donnie said, “No. All the VCRs in America are made by three manufacturers. Zenith requires the manufacturer to use the Zenith timer in the ones they make for us. The difference will be in the warranty and service.” Today, there are many cheaper models made in all sorts of places, but if I want to know about a product, I can ask Donnie and know he will not mislead me.

#### C. Sexually Suggestive Language Is the Epitome of “Cool” to the World.

Little commentary is need here, though illustrations abound. Movies, TV, the Internet, and the music industry will always find an audience as long as they entertain fallen man with sexual innuendoes. Of course, today many people are seeking something far more graphic than suggestions and innuendoes.

Sexually suggestive language both feeds lust and feeds on lust. A lot that passes for love today is nothing more than lust. One does not lust after a “friend” any more than one can he can run off with his wife’s “best friend.” That does not happen! He is no friend who does anything like that. We need to get this message across to young people today. However, within the last few weeks there have been reports that speakers who advocate abstinence before marriage have had speaking engagements canceled by schools because some NEA representatives claimed that such a position is not realistic. One speaker had numerous “non-religious” speeches canceled in schools because he was a Christian and had appeared on programs with Dawson McAllister.

According to a recent poll, only a small percentage of teenagers in the area know who the vice-president is, and a much smaller number can name our two US senators. But I can guarantee you they will pick up on any sexually suggestive statement. You may be asking if it has not always been like that. I remember sitting in a classroom in highschool when a girl in the class asked to borrow something from one of the male students. He began a series of questions and answers, none of which

were subtle to his friends. The girl engaged in the conversation with straight-faced boy for several minutes, never suspecting that he was entertaining his friends at her expense. I was glad she did not understand the nature of some of his comments. You see, she thought he was her friend.

Increasing numbers of children and young people are obsessed with sex today and some experts in the youth problems are convinced that the entertainment industry is a major factor in that obsession. Where has it led us? One of those experts stated on AFR radio that we have tens of millions of people today with a sexually transmitted disease that is incurable. But abstinence is impractical????!!

## II. PROFANITY AND OBSCENITY ARE OPPOSED TO THE WISDOM OF GOD.”

*“When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver, The heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding” (Pro. 110:19-21).*

### A. Profanity Appeals to the Fallen Nature of Man.

1. Profanity is common among lost people.
2. Small children pick up profanity very quickly.
3. Our society has become more profane.
4. The entertainment industry has “pushed the envelop” with profanity.
5. Profanity is one reason for movie and televisions rating.

From the moment Clarke Gable used the “four letter word” in *Gone With the Wind*, Hollywood has been injecting profane words incrementally. Television used popular sit-coms like *MASH* and *All in the Family* to push profane and obscene language, with each season bringing new words or combinations of profane words. Today, God’s name is used in vain, even in what used to be known as the family viewing time. We have reached the point today that anyone who refuses to support programs or attend movies because of the profanity is seen as a fanatic - or worse, a right-wing fundamentalist. I don’t know about you but I am sick and tired of hearing kids and young people talk about body parts and body functions. This is not new, just more common and more accepted.

I remember that when we were picking cotton on our Mississippi delta farm, there were times when my father “segregated” us - not by race, but according to language. In particular, I remember learning that the reason he sent a group of women to a separate field was that he did not want his children to hear their language.

6. Profanity violates the commandment of God, Exodus 20:12.

*“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”*

I was dressing following my workout at a health club in Port Arthur, Texas, when suddenly I heard someone shouting profanity from a shower in a different area. He was literally shouting God’s name in vain. Why? The water was cold. A few minutes later the man with whom I had enjoyed numerous brief conversations came into the dressing area of the gym. My new friend was a serious body builder, and from his language I knew that he might lose control if provoked. However, I had tried to witness to him and I was concerned about his tirade.

There was noone else in dressing area, so I decided to say something to him. I said, “Bill (not his name), I think I heard you mention the name of someone I know a few minutes ago.” He said, “Really? Who?”

I said, “I believe I heard you mention God, and He is Someone very important to me.” A look of shock and surprise spread across his face but before he could say anything, I continued, “I think you know me well enough to know that I am not trying to get smart with you. But if I had heard someone use my mother’s name like that it would have hurt me. And when someone uses God’s name like that it also hurts me.”

I was surprised when all pride disappeared and he humbly said, “I am so sorry. I am sorry. I didn’t think anything about it.” I never saw this man pray to receive Christ as his Savior, but it opened the door for a witness opportunity.

Admittedly, as we move deeper and deeper into the post-Christian era in America, if you rebuked some people today, you might provoke acts of violence. However, when we have an opportunity, Christians should take a stand against profanity, especially the use of God’s name in vain. Above all, the Christian should not use profanity himself. James wrote:

*“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment”* (James 5:12).

Any use of an oath to support or strengthen your “yes” or “no” calls into question your integrity as a Christian. To resort to the use of profanity stands in sharp contrast to the believe’s commitment to walk in the truth.

7. Profanity is not just a habit.

Someone tries to explain a friend or relative by saying, “He uses a lot of bad language, but he doesn’t mean anything by it. He has just done it so long that he doesn’t even think about it.” That may

satisfy the friend of relative, but it does not justify the language. The person who curses all the time is revealing a lot more than he thinks. He is revealing a heart that has set itself against the commandments of God and his rebellion has become a hard and fast condition of his soul. Saying that profanity or foul language is second nature to a person is to deny the serious condition of his soul. His heart is set in rebellion against God.

#### 8. Profanity violates the wisdom of God.

Cussin' ain't "cool" - but people keep on doing it because they think it is. Have you ever noticed that there are people who turn their profanity on and off as circumstances change - and as their associates change? Why do you suppose they do that? An inferiority complex? With some boys and young men, it is the fear of ridicule. They feel that they have to use profanity to keep from appearing different. But even those who think cussin' is "cool", are going to be hard-pressed to show the wisdom in it.

Most people can think of situations in which the use of profanity was really foolish. I can hardly think of any kind of confrontation that is not made worse when profanity is introduced. In fact, acts of violence are often a response to profanity. Profanity and anger go hand in hand. James wrote, *"From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way"* (James 3:10). A profane tongue is often an out of control tongue. Of course, many people use profanity when they are not angry, but anger often spawns profanity, and profanity intensifies the anger, which often ends in violence.

*"A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows. A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul"* (Proverbs 18:6-7).

#### B. Vulgar Language Rejects the Wisdom of God.

*"A worthless person, a wicked man, Is the one who walks with a false mouth, Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers; Who with perversity in his heart devises evil continually, Who spreads strife"* (Pro. 6:12-14).

Obscene or vulgar language has been increasing for decades, and there is no indication that it is going to get better any time soon. The proliferation of the vulgar is obvious, the solution is obscure.

While on this subject, and at the risk of being accused of repetition, I would like to know who ever told a whole generation of young people that constant references to body parts and body functions is somehow "cool." Their grandparents would have washed their mouth out with soap. But their parents abandoned them to the influences of the entertainment industry, with children coming in from school to a steady TV diet of rebellion against authority, gutter language, profanity, and sexually explicit material. Fallen humanity beings picks up language that dishonors God very quickly, and this is especially so with children and young people who are constantly in search of that which is "cool".

C. Paul Offers a Lesson on the Sins of Speech, (Romans 3:13-15).

*“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS; WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS; THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD.”*

The following commentary on Romans 3:13-15 is taken from a verse-by-verse commentary on Romans, written a few years ago by this pastor. The direct quotes were taken from *A Practical and Exegetical Commentary on Romans*, by the late Dr. J. P. McBeth .

**ROMANS 3:13 - THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN SEPULCHRE.** See Psalm 5:9. The Hebrew word used for throat here implies destruction. The word first meant to gape or yawn, and then the term was applied to a yawning abyss or gaping chasm. In time it took on moral significance. The throat is an organ of speech, but the emphasis here is upon the primary function of swallowing. The picture is of an open grave with a putrefying corpse at the bottom of it. The open grave is a description of their nature rather than of their practice, denoting depravity rather than occasional eruption.

**WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY HAVE USED DECEIT.** Their tongues were "smooth , slick or oily," thus a smooth talker, slick tongued. Flattery, deceit and hypocrisy are stressed.

Here, their speech is contrary to their nature. Their nature is as corrupt as a dead body and ought to have been covered long ago. Their speech appears to be sound, seems to have life in, seems to be the only way to avoid destruction, professes to be the way of life, and a haven instead of a chasm [17: 106].

In a word, they sought to produce fruit that would conceal the nature of the tree. Consider that:

A hypocrite is the vilest when he tries to be the sweetest. They are the most hypocritical when they use flattery. They are the most satanic when they ill garb themselves in the spirit of Christ [17: 107].

**THE POISON OF ASPS.** An asp is a venomous serpent, the bite of which may be fatal. Without antivenom serum a neurotoxic serpent's bite would be fatal unless the bitten part is immediately cut away. The venom of slander is the thought here. The "poison of asps" points to the most poisonous form of speech, used for the injection of deadly corruption into others. A slanderous tongue identifies one as a child of Satan. It should be remembered that the venom belongs to the one doing the slandering. The one doing the biting is the serpent. We should crush the head of the serpent and treat the victim. Too often in the church we applaud the serpent and crush the head of the victim. Unfortunately, the most popular person in some churches is the one who knows and

shares everybody's business. Many people have been hurt by gossip and slander. They are hurt more when the church takes the side of the slanderer without giving them the benefit of a doubt.

A number of years ago someone suggested to me, "when a pastor is accused of being immoral or becoming involved with some woman and it is proved, he ought to be run out of town on a rail. And you preachers ought to contact the state convention and try to keep them from getting another church." I said, "I might go along with you under this one condition: if the man bringing the charges cannot show grounds for the charges, or accusations, then he ought to lose his job and we ought to follow him around to keep him from getting another job in his field. He ought to be forced to leave his home in disgrace and never be able to return. And he ought to be labeled, 'Slanderer.'"

**3:14 - MOUTH FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS.** See Psalm 10:7. Cursing means profanity. Bitterness points to the anger, hate and strife that to often accompany profanity. Fits of anger is the rule among many people who curse. The heart of the profane person is boiling with bitterness. There are many people who curse when they are not angry. The problem is that when the person who habitually uses profanity becomes angry, or is injured or threatened, the first thing he is likely to do is use profanity. And once he begins to use profanity, the potential for heated arguments and violence is significantly increased.

Any person's troubles may increase may increase with profanity. When individuals are having difficulties there is always the potential for violence, but often times this can be controlled if no profanity is used. When profanity is used feelings that are already running high may be intensified. Even if violence does not follow, the emotional scars may result that will show for a long time.

Another thought might be added here. Why would a mature person want to use profanity? What does profanity tell you about the person using it? It has been observed that vulgarity (3:13a) is the most obnoxious form of speech. Flattery (3:13b) is the hypocritical form of speech. Slander (3:13c) is the most deadly form of speech. And profanity (3:14) is the most inexcusable form of speech. Furthermore:

There may be temptations for the first three; but there is never a temptation for a person to profane God's holy name. It is characteristic of man to sin by temptation; and it is characteristic of Satan to sin without temptation; therefore, to use profanity is to sin in similitude to the devil [17: 109].

**CONCLUSION.** If you know Jesus Christ as Savior, our Lord is actively, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, trying to mold you into the image of His Dear Son (Romans 8:28ff). If you would honor your Lord who died for you, you will let your speech reveal the character and nature of Jesus Christ.

*"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