

## **WISDOM FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - Practical Studies From Proverbs - Part six**

Teaching #1837 - Sunday, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - 6:00 p.m.

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### **LEARNING THE WISE WAY WITH WORDS**

So far we've studied the following subjects from the book of Proverbs: wisdom and how to attain it, the path of the fool and how to avoid it, friendship and its power to shape our life for better or for worse, and the ruining effect of laziness on character and spiritual life.

Today we focus our attention on the importance and influence of the words we use. Our tendency is to think of our speech as merely something we **do** rather than something we are **becoming**. The writers of Proverbs had no such delusions. Just because our words are **invisible** doesn't mean they are **impotent**. Words are **things** in the eyes of God. They have eternal impact and consequence. Our words shape ourselves and those around us.

This was re-emphasized by Jesus. When He taught the people about the reality of the judgement He would exercise over the world at the end of the age, the first thing He said He would examine was our words:

**Matthew 12:36-37 - "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, [37] for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."**

Of course, the emphasis here is on our **unplanned** words. These are words **drawn out** by anger, circumstances, and other people. Because they are my **reflex** response they are the ultimate **revealers** of what's truly rooted deep in my hidden inner heart.

Clearly, words have eternal significance. Words shape eternal destiny. And the relationship between speech and godliness isn't missed in the Proverbs:

**Proverbs 6:16-19 - "There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: [17] haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, [18] a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, [19] a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers."**

It's significant that out of the **six** things the writer specifically says God hates, at least **three** have to do with the words we speak. Is the writer trying to tell us that if we were more careful with our words the battle for holiness would be 50% won?

Here are some basic truths from Proverbs about the words we speak:

#### 1) **WORDS HAVE THE POWER TO EFFECT THE ACTUAL DESTINY OF THE LIFE**

**Proverbs 18:20-21 - "From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied; he is satisfied by the yield of his lips. [21] Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."**

These verses call the power of words to mind in a vivid way. It's the power of **death** and **life** that are in the tongue. Words, in spite of their innocent appearance, take the life in the direction of these **extremes - death and life**. This is a reminder that there is nothing **neutral** about the power of speech. Words are never insignificant. There is no middle ground **between** life and death.

The reason we don't see our words as such drastic tools for the shaping of our destiny is also hinted at in these verses. The results of our words don't explode all at once with instantaneous force. The results of our words come as **fruit** comes. Fruit grows **gradually** and **silently**.

Such is the shaping power of our words. Habits of speech are formed - **angry** words - **dishonest** words - **proud** words. This is what makes their influence and shaping power so easily overlooked. But they do have the power of life and death in them. They simply take us down those two roads in ways we will not perceive if we are not attentive.

#### 2) **WORDS HAVE THE POWER TO PENETRATE THE INNER REALM OF THE SOUL, ALTERING EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS**

This is seen in both positive and negative ways in Proverbs:

**Proverbs 12:18a - "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts...."**

This is a picture of the power of words to **wound** another individual. You and I can handle words carelessly or cruelly. Words can do more damage than we think to others. They can cut and pierce like a viciously swung sword. Surely this picture is designed to douse the myth that words are harmless entities.

**"Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me."** Wherever such nursery rhymes come from, they are certainly miles from Scriptural truth. You and I are called to be as careful with our speech as this world needs to be with guns.

But the effect of words is not all evil and negative. On the positive side, Proverbs highlights the power of life in well chosen, timely words to others:

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

This is quite an eye opening verse. We've already seen the damage done by cruel or thoughtless speech - like the damage done by a viciously handled sword. Now, in contrast, we learn the marks of **wise** speech. Contrary to what we might think, wise words aren't measured by their ability to **make a point** or **win an argument**. Wise words aren't merely the display of human wit and intelligence. Wise words are marked by their ability to **heal**.

People get discouraged and lonely. They feel guilty and afraid. They get confused and battered by life. The need, in all of those situations, is a **wise word** from someone who knows how to bring healing and health to the bones:

**Proverbs 12:25 - "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad."**

3) **MY WORDS HAVE THE POWER TO SMUDGE THE REPUTATION AND SLANDER THE CHARACTER OF OTHERS**

**Proverbs 18:8 - "The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body."**

The bearer of these words is rightly called a **whisperer**. He will say things **privately** that he doesn't want to be identified with. He will not **sign** these words on paper. He will not **verify them** with witnesses. He fears they might not stand up as true, or, even if they **are** true, he knows he will not look kind, loving, and Christlike uttering them.

Because of our fallen nature, the whisperer knows his words will usually be gullibly received by some, unfortunately, even in the church. Hearing such juicy inside information is aptly described as devouring a **"dainty morsel."** We falsely elevate ourselves when we are involved in the tearing down of someone else.

The next time someone comes to you with their **whispering words about someone else** they will most quickly be disarmed by your asking if they mind you **quoting them** back to the one they whisper to you about. Whisperers, by nature, do their work only in the dark. Their sin makes them cowards at heart.

4) **WORDS HAVE THE POWER TO SHAPE THE BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS OF OTHERS**

**Proverbs 10:21 - "The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense."**

We've already studied the tragic life of the fool. One of the things guaranteeing his eventual destruction is his stubborn refusal to **listen** to words of wisdom. Remember the words of Proverb - **"A thousand blows on the back of the fool won't accomplish what one word of rebuke will on the ears of the wise."**

But there are also times when the writer of Proverbs puts the shoe on the other foot. Sometimes he writes, not of the **hearer** of words, but the **speaker** of words. Wise spoken words **feed** others. We've seen how wise words can **heal** those who are broken and in need. Now we see how wise words can **feed** the mind and soul of those who will listen.

This kind of mutual feeding is at the very core of healthy New Testament congregational life:

**Colossians 3:16** - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

A rich relationship with Christ and His Word is the store out of which wise words come. The life must be grounded in the Word of God. If God's Word isn't rooted deeply in the heart, true wisdom can never come forth to others:

**Matthew 12:34b** - "...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

The body of Christ is to be a place where the wisdom of God is shared by people devoted to the Word. It saturates their prayer times, their worship and praise, and of course, their advice and counsel to each other. Nothing else replaces this.

5) **THE EFFECTS OF OUR WORDS SPREAD AND MULTIPLY BEYOND THEIR MOMENT OF UTTERANCE AND CONTINUE TO HAVE RAMIFICATIONS FAR BEYOND OUR INITIAL EXPECTATIONS**

This is true of both the blessing of good words and the damage of evil words. We will always *underestimate* the potential harvest of the things we say:

**Proverbs 16:27** - "A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire."

The picture is one of a fire that sweeps over a dry field. Somehow it used to be a camp fire or cigarette butt. No one could have dreamed of the horrible damage that was coming.

This is why, as we will see in a minute, the Bible invites us to such prayerful watchfulness over the things we say. All our words and sentences look so small and insignificant when we utter them. We can easily say things and then quickly forget about them - like turning our back on a small spark in a dry field. But that doesn't bring their cycle of life to an end.

6) **THE WAY OF WISE SPEECH AND THE MARKS OF WORDS AT THEIR VERY BEST**

a) ***Words should always be honest*** - **Proverbs 16:13** - "Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves him who speaks what is right."

Kings would surround themselves with wise men - counselors - who would help direct the hand of the king in wisdom. Obviously, the first thing the king would need to know was that his counselors were telling him the truth. Everything hinged on the honesty of their words.

One of the great examples of this in the Scriptures is found in the well-known story of young Samuel and Eli. We all know the account of how Eli had to actually coach Samuel in the recognition of the word of the Lord.

But the really instructive part of that whole account comes at the end of the story. God gives a very stern message of judgement for Eli through Samuel. Samuel doesn't want to give it. But Eli is wise enough and *godly* enough to know that false words are worthless to everyone involved:

**1 Samuel 3:15-18** - "Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. [16] But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." [17] And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." [18] So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."

Eli was wise enough to apply the logic of **Proverbs 12:22** - "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight."

b) ***Words should always be regulated*** - **Proverbs 17:28** - "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent."

A strong point is rather mockingly made. Certainly the fool doesn't actually *become* wise just by limiting speech.

But at least he can help himself **appear** wise. The obvious point is the chances for damage and self-destruction increase as the words spout from our lips. Words should never just **flow**. They should be **considered**. And then they should be **selected**.

**Proverbs 13:3 - "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin."**

- c) ***Wise words will be calm - Proverbs 17:27 - "Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding."***

Anger is the greatest enemy to wisdom. Nowhere is this more true than in the area of our speech. The person who allows his mouth to run on when he is angry has virtually eliminated his chances of accomplishing anything even remotely like God's will in his life. Wisdom evaporates when anger rules.

**Proverbs 15:1 - "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."**

Here we see the problem of angry words laid bare. They generate more anger. Someone must break this cycle of insanity. The writer says only a **"soft word"** will do the trick. Harsh words will only spawn harsher words in response. The temperature rises and the spiritual tone declines.

A **gentle answer** takes great moral and spiritual strength, but, once summoned, will do the job. It's the Scriptural **principle of responding in the opposite spirit** that will win the day and cultivate a heart of wisdom.

- d) ***Wise words will be appropriate - Proverbs 15:23 - "To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!"***

Two people can offer counsel to the same individual. One can be successful where the other fails. The reason is usually found in the ability of the successful one to **fit his words to the need**. A **fitting** word will carry truth more forcefully than a **general** word.

Wise words are specifically suited to the needs of the hearer. They are given at the **right time** - that is, at a time when the listener is going to be willing to genuinely hear and weigh their content.

Here is a great example of this from the life of David:

**2 Samuel 12:1-7, 13 - "And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. [2] The rich man had very many flocks and herds, [3] but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. [4] Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." [5] Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, [6] and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." [7] Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul....[13] David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die."**

Had Nathan simply exposed David's sin without this parable he would have appeared arrogant and out of line in his words to the king. But once he showed David his sin **as it looked in someone else**, David was humbled and contrite in his repentance.

How you and I **present** the truth makes a great difference in the way others will **receive** it.

## 7) **HOW TO MAKE YOUR WORDS COUNT**

The writer of Proverbs holds out hope and help for all who are humble and teachable enough to maximize the wise

fruitfulness of their speech for the glory of God:

- a) ***Study before you speak - Proverbs 15:28*** - "The heart of the righteous ***ponders how to answer***, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things."

Two people are pictured and their words are compared. The difference is obvious. The ***righteous*** person "***ponders how to answer***." The ***wicked*** person simply "***pours out***" the content of his own heart.

Take the time to ponder your words, especially when you are under pressure to "***answer***" someone else. Usually pondering won't be your first natural instinct. You will have to train yourself in this way. Sometimes people can ***accuse*** you falsely. Sometimes they can ***mock*** something you take very seriously. The rule is, when you are most tempted to respond ***quickly*** you need to respond ***slowly***.

- b) ***Make your words a matter of daily prayer*** - Two things will naturally arise out of such prayer times:

- i) You will be made increasingly aware of how many times you sin carelessly with your speech and will develop the habit of confessing these sins immediately to God:

***Isaiah 6:5*** - "And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of ***unclean lips***, and I dwell in the midst of a people of ***unclean lips***; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

- ii) You will increasingly bring matters of daily conversation to the Lord for direction and guidance, thus increasing the growth in wise speech in the future:

***Psalms 141:3*** - "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!"

This kind of praying is bound to bear fruit because, we can rest assured, it is prayer truly offered according to the will of God.