

CHOOSE WORDS OF LIFE

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Right brethren, we are continuing with a study that we began last week. We were talking about our words, about our language and about our ability to communicate through words. And we said last week that if you think about it, animals sort of communicate a little bit, they bark, cheep or chirp, or do similar things. But human beings are very much different. We have words with which we can convey ideas and thoughts. That is very much a characteristic of our God, of our Father and of Jesus Christ our Lord. And yet because it is something that we do day in and day out, we do not always necessarily think very much about our words. Our words can sometimes be very helpful, very uplifting and very inspiring — and sometimes our words can be downright negative, harmful, injurious and destructive. It is a good idea, perhaps, if we just take a little bit of time and ponder the words that we use. We should ask ourselves a question or two about what the words that we use say about us. What do they reveal about us as a person? Are they the words that you would expect from a believer or not? We might think that our words are relatively unimportant, and we can say that is just the way we are, is it not? I guess it is sometimes exactly as we are, and that is not always a good thing!

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

So it says here, that our words are a matter of *death and life*.

This gives a hint surely, that our words are quite important. Our words can tend to life, or our words can tend to death. “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those that love it will eat its fruit,*” implying that our words do produce fruit, and we will end up eating of that fruit. If the fruit is harmful, destructive and injurious that will not be very good fruit to be taking in our lives. On the other hand, if our words tend to life, our words will build up and encourage. They will be words of truth, and the fruit will be good fruit, and will be good for us. Apparently that is in the power of tongue, and in your case in the power of *your tongue*.

One translation is “Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and they that *rule it* shall eat the fruits thereof.” This is implying that you and I can control our tongue; whether it leads to life, or whether it leads to

death. But a tongue left to its own devices, where we are being rather careless and paying no regard, it would not be a surprise if that tongue tended toward death, and the words were negative and destructive. It is going to take a bit of work if you and I are going to have words which are words of life.

Matthew 12:36-37 "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Here Jesus is saying that *your words* will determine whether you are justified, made right with God, and enjoy life everlasting. But, on the other hand *your words* may well condemn you; which would ultimately be death. So, even Jesus' words here talk about life and death. The words that we use, and the words that people around us use, will justify or condemn; they lead to life or they lead to death.

Verse 36 says, "*But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account*". As we said last week, "idle" can be translated as inactive, non-working, useless, unproductive, empty, pointless — just filling up the air with nonsense. You and I need to be careful that we do not use idle words. If we take Jesus' advice that we are going to be held accountable for our empty, vain and useless words, and that we will be justified or condemned by our words, then it makes sense that you and I pay some attention to our words!

We said again last week that the society that we live in, our environment that surrounds us, is full of empty, useless words. The television reality shows, talk shows, politics, are filled with empty, pointless, futile, negative, and destructive words. And that, of course, is likely to rub off on us. So you and I have to be careful about the influence of the world on us, and hence on our words.

Matthew 12:34-35 "Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

That is a general statement. They had rather evil hearts and so they generally said evil things. Their words gave them away. If you listen to their words, and where they are coming from, you can see what was in their heart. The same would apply to you and me. "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*" What fills up your heart, the way that you think in your heart, will come out in the words that you and I speak. The good

man for example, “*out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things.*” This is general, not just for the Pharisees, a good and noble person, a person who has a good mind and a good and honest heart, that person brings forth good things *by speaking*.

But, “*an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.*” We have talked before about the heart and mouth connection. The mouth gives away what is in the heart.

We also saw last week, in Ecclesiastes, that the Preacher said ‘Do not be rash or hasty with your words, especially when you go to the House of God. Especially when you are talking to God, be careful of the words that we say. Be careful of the promises or the commitments that we make. Let your words be few, and say what you mean and do it. It is better not to make commitments to God and then fail to deliver them’.

That applies generally, not just when we are in prayer to God. We saw in Psalms 34, that if any person desires life, then they should keep their tongue from evil. I guess that you and I would be individuals that would desire life, and length of days, and a good life? Well one way to achieve that, says the Psalmist, is that you keep your tongue from evil. That is our choice, whether we do or whether we do not. The more we talk, the more in danger we are sometimes of saying things that are unhelpful and inappropriate.

Proverbs 29:20 "Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."

Our mouth needs to be synchronized with our brain. If we are hasty or rash with our words, and do not engage the brain before starting the tongue wagging, we are in danger of saying something that we might regret. Those could be words of life and encouragement, in which case there would be no regret. But of course, the default position of our brain, mind and heart is usually to say things which are felt afterwards not to be terribly helpful. Sometimes it is far better to have the vocabulary of silence. If you cannot think of something good to say, perhaps it is better to say nothing at all. As it says here, if a person has a habit of being just hasty of word, well there is more chance of a fool succeeding. You and I do not want to be people that just talk first and ponder afterwards. Hmmm! Was that a good idea? I seem to have blown my friendships there, and destroyed people.

We saw a few cases last week, such as where ancient Israel came to the very borders of the Promised Land, and God said, ‘Go over and take it’. But they did not believe God. There were giants there, they said, ‘You brought

us out here to kill us, we are all going to die.’ Guess what? By their words they were condemned. They provoked God one time too often. They said, ‘We are going to die here, you brought us out to kill us here’ and they died there. They got precisely what they believed in their heart, and what they said with their mouth.

Then later on, we saw that David when he was fighting his giant, but David's words were, “Mr. Goliath, My God will deliver you into my hands, I am going to take your head off you this day.” And he did. He believed it and his positive words backed that up, and he got what he believed in his heart and said with his mouth.

We saw in James that if we can control our tongue, we can control our whole body, and be a perfect man. Just like you control a horse, by putting a bit in his mouth, you can get him to go to the left or the right. If we control *our mouths*, we control our body. James added that our tongues should be wholesome. It should not be the case that one utters curses and blessings from the same mouth. But unfortunately, James is implying that we do. Now maybe not you and me of course, because we are perfect (!), but out there somebody in the church occasionally uses their mouth to say bad things about the brethren and good things about God. This should not happen; a stream does not pour forth fresh water and bitter water from the same opening, it does not happen. Again, the implication is that you and I should watch what comes out of our mouths.

Last week we titled the message, “Guard our Lips.” This week it is “Choose Words of Life.” In other words, words that build up, rather than words that tear down. The words that build up actually are what the Bible calls blessings, and words that tear down are called curses. To devote somebody, or something, to destruction, is to curse them. Jesus gave examples of this:

Mark 11:12-14 Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it.

We see Him here *speaking to a tree*. You might say, ‘You would never catch me doing that.’ But that is why Jesus had things happen and you and I often do not!

Jesus knew a lot about fig trees, because after all He had created them. There was clearly something with this fig tree that was not right, it was in some way a corrupt tree, and Jesus thought that it should not encumber the ground any further. Perhaps it had a disease that could have spread to the other trees. We do not know exactly, but either way Jesus cursed it.

Mark 11:20-21 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

To express words of destruction is a curse. We are not talking about cursing in the sense of a "four letter" word, but we are talking about cursing something with our words. Jesus is very careful here to choose appropriate words for this particular situation, with His wisdom and knowing all about the fig tree and the condition of it. But you and I sometimes can utter words without a great deal of thinking. If those words are injurious and harmful words, then we are doing what James warned us against. Allegedly blessing God with one part of our mouth, but the other part we are stating words which are condemning people, and that would be very dangerous.

Mark 11:22-23 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

So again, you get the strong impression that words are important, because if we believe in our heart and *speak to a mountain* and say, 'Go', then Jesus says that person will have *whatever he says*. Of course, if we are not prepared to speak and say it, then we can forget it.

Mark 11:24 "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

If we speak to the mountain but do not believe, why do we expect results? This is Jesus giving instructions, and He knew whereof He was speaking. He just demonstrated that He had spoken to a fig tree and it withered up. He says here if there is a mountain in your life that you do not want to be there, *speak to it*. I guess if you can speak to the mountain *to go*, I guess you can speak to a mountain *to come*? After all, death and life are in the power of the tongue.

People might say, 'You will never catch me saying things like that.' Well people do. They do not recognize it, but they do speak like that. If you listen to yourself and I listen to myself, we would probably come across all manner of statements that we are speaking with our mouth and reflecting what is in our heart and it is going to come to pass. People might say things like, 'There is no point in me applying for this job, I never get the breaks in life.' Well, if they believe in their heart, then they will get what they say. People say, 'Things always go wrong in my life.' Or they say, 'I have heard on television that this year's flu is going to be the worst for twenty years. You watch, I will get it first, I always get what is going around.' Well, guess what? If you believe in your heart, and speak with your mouth, you will have whatever you say. In essence we are cursing ourselves! We are devoting ourselves to destruction.

People get into their car, and it is not working too well, and they speak to the car. 'You sorry useless thing, why did I buy you, you heap of junk. I bet you will die on me halfway down the road today.' Well — speaking to the car, or their gas cooker, or their television set. Of course usually the words are of the curse variety, rather than speaking words of favor and blessing on their motor car, or television set! Jesus says that you can have whatever you say if you believe in your heart. You may say, 'Well that is Jesus talking.' It is, but He said in verse 23, "*Whoever* says..." And that rather opens it up!

Matthew 21:18-19 Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away.

This is the same story, and I think that we know from putting the two accounts together it says, "*Immediately the fig tree withered away.*" Mark's version says that it withered away from the roots. Putting the two together one imagines that the immediate part was the part below ground, where the roots withered away immediately, but clearly the part of the fig tree above ground probably looked normal at that point.

Matthew 21:20 And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?"

Jesus had cursed it, and He had "assigned it to destruction," because He *spoke words*.

Matthew 21:21 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if *you* have faith and do not doubt, *you* will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also *if you say* to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done.

Some people will say, 'This is Jesus, and He can do these things, we cannot. Jesus has power beyond what you and I can imagine. He can do these things, but it does not apply to me'. Of course, that is turning the wine of God's Word into water, and diluted water even at that. It says here, "If *you* have faith and do not doubt, *you* will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done".

So Jesus said that *you can do that too*, you can speak to the fig tree too! You can not only do that, but while I am talking to you, you can also *say to this mountain*, 'Move'. But, of course, you would have to speak to the mountain and believe in your heart. This is part of the law of faith. Then the mountain would move. But, just believing in your heart and just staring at the mountain will not make it move. Just believing in your heart and asking God to move the mountain is not what Jesus said. He said, "*if you speak to this mountain, Be removed and be cast into the sea, it will be done*. You have to do the speaking; and no surprise, *our words are powerful*."

Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and you and I can be very careless about wagging our tongues and saying all manner of things. Now, of course, in our conversation there are lots of things that are just routine and not particularly important. "Do you like your eggs sunny-side up, medium or over-well?" This is not the sort of conversation that is going to cause big problems; but if we are talking about bigger issues in life, then we have to be careful what we are saying, because words can lead to life, and words can lead to death.

Matthew 21:22 "And whatever things you ask in prayer, *believing*, you will receive."

Christ does not say, "And whatever things you ask in prayer you will receive."

He says we must *believe*. Faith, as we have said before, is necessary. You might say that you do not think it will work for you. Well — it just did, because you do not believe in your heart, and you just said it with your

mouth, then nothing will happen and you just got exactly what you believed, and said — so it is working for you!

We think that our words are inconsequential, and it does not matter what we say. If we say, ‘I do not believe what I am saying myself, nobody else does, and God does not,’ well — that is huge problem. We should be saying *what we mean*, and meaning what we say, and doing what we say we will do. Our words should be *important*. We have plenty of opportunity to practice, because most of us tend to use words every day! I guess that if you are living on your own you might not say an awful lot, understandably, but maybe you have a dog or cat and you speak to them? But most of us, at least on many days of the week, have plenty of opportunity to speak to other people, speak to God, and speak to ourselves.

The big question would be, ‘If somebody recorded our conversation, and then edited it taking all of the inconsequential stuff out, just played back the more important words that we said, what would they sound like?’ Would they hear murmuring, griping, complaining, negative, and destructive words? Or would they hear words which are up-building, life-giving, filled with good nature, kindness, good humor? Remember, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. This shows a great deal about ourselves (which of course we might not like!). And if you do not like it, you can *change it*.

Matthew 17:14-16 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."

If you take a sick person to a minister today, and he anoints and prays the prayer of faith and nothing happens, we say, "well I guess it was not God's will, because if it was God's will he would be healed. Because he has not been healed clearly that is God's will." But that is not what Jesus said here.

Matthew 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me."

It is quite clear that Jesus was totally exasperated at this point. His disciples had been out previously, preaching, healing, and casting out demons; and here they come to Jesus with this epileptic boy and they failed

utterly to drive out the demon, and heal the boy. Jesus does not say, 'Well now, come on lads I guess you did your best, but at the end of the day sometimes you need Me around to show you how it is done.' "*Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation..."* 'You bunch of losers, how long have I got to be around you lot, how long can I even bear you? You are a drain on Me, bring him here to Me.' Jesus was not saying that because of *physical exasperation*, but because He knew that they should be doing better. Faithlessness does not please God; without faith it is impossible to please Him. Here Jesus is saying, 'This is not good, you should be well able to handle this.'

Matthew 17:18-19 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"

And Jesus did not say, 'Well because it was not God's will ... or it is good for him to suffer longer, and it brings him closer to God' ... and other theological ideas taken from the book of Hezekiah chapter 15. No, look at verse 20:

Matthew 17:20 So Jesus said to them, "Because of *your unbelief*; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

He said it was because they *did not believe*; it was not God's will for the illness to continue, do not blame God, or point the finger at God. 'It is *your lack of faith*, you faithless generation'. He told them, 'If you have faith *you will say*; you will *speak*'. Faith is released in the words that we speak, and here again Jesus said to *speak to the mountain*. If you had faith, even a tiny portion, you would speak to the mountain and it would move, it would obey you.

Matthew 17:21 "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

My take on that is that is talking about the *type of unbelief* rather than this type of demon; because demons obey words of faith. So here it is basically saying that if you had faith *you would say*, you would speak to the mountain, to the fig tree, or whatever.

Luke 17:5-6 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

Again, Jesus is reinforcing *the power of our words*. Jesus was not saying that only He could do this, because He was the Son of God, 'so these things happen for Me, but you guys cannot do it'. That is what we might like to say, perhaps, to try and excuse our own failings. Or we could say, 'but that was for the apostles in that day, in those days because it was prior to the scriptures being completed' and all of the rest of it. That does not come across in scripture anywhere. Jesus said *if you* have faith, even like a mustard seed, *you would say*. Because our faith in our heart is expressed, or released by our words, our words, once again, are important. You and I have no guarantee of receiving what we have faith for, unless *we do* what we are instructed to do. Jesus tells us *to talk to* the mountain.

Mark 5:25-28 Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."

We have read this a number of times, and I guess it becomes after a while ho-hum, but this is quite dramatic for this lady. She has had this issue of blood for over ten years, I would imagine if she had not been healed here she would die of her complaint. She leaves her home, and finds the Lord Jesus out somewhere. I guess that she looked for the crowds, and He is in there somewhere, and so she makes her way to Jesus. He is thronged by lots and lots of people, and you do not just walk up to Him, but you have to fight your way through. So this lady is taking action, she is demonstrating her faith. She probably had to get down on her hands and knees at one point, I suspect, to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. But, notice what she was saying. *"If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."* Jesus said that what you believe in your heart, and what you say with your mouth, you will have whatever you say. So here is a lady using the gift of her tongue rather wisely, 'If I can touch this man's clothes I shall be healed'. And she did:

Mark 5:29-30 "Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched My clothes?'"

Some people think that Jesus is just playing some sort of a game here, because He is "omniscient," and He knows everything. No He did not. He was a human being, the Son of God; but He had given up His eternal deity and His god-like powers. But, He knew that some power had left Him, and He wanted to know who it was.

He said, "Who has touched me?" The disciples said, "There are so many people around you, and you are asking who touched you, what is the matter Jesus?" But Jesus meant that somebody had touched Him in a special way.

Mark 5:31-34 And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."

It was not in this case Jesus' faith; it was *her faith* that had made her well. Jesus was not even, in that sense, consciously involved. She crept up in the crowd, reached out and touched His garment, and she was healed by her faith. Jesus detected that some power had left Him, and turned around and was asking what happened there, who has taken power from me? Eventually, of course, she realizes that she is not going to escape; and she comes and explains, and then Jesus blesses her with His words. She had *believed* in her heart, she *spoke words* of faith, and she received her blessing.

We have seen Jesus cursing in the sense of assigning, dedicating or devoting a fig tree to death; but Jesus also spoke words of healing, and words of blessing.

Mark 10:13-16 Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and *blessed them*.

Jesus came to do good, to heal and to preach. And here they are keeping youngsters away from the Lord Jesus, and He was not pleased at all.

When Jesus blessed them it was not some little religious ceremony. He blessed them — meaning that *He spoke words* over them, words of favor, words of good, words of success — and that would have happened, because death and life are in the power of the tongue. Jesus certainly used His tongue properly, He spoke words of life, and He spoke these words of life to these young boys and girls and they would have benefited for the rest of their lives. It didn't apply just for Jesus.

We saw how Isaac blessed Jacob, somewhat by mistake as Jacob had been disguised as his brother and was wearing goat skins and smelly garments, and trying to appear like Esau, and it worked in that sense. Isaac said, 'It smells like Esau, sounds like Jacob mark you, but his hands are all hairy and rough, I guess it is Esau'. At any rate, Isaac *blessed Jacob*; he said words of favor, prosperity, power and status. He transferred all of those blessings with his words.

Of course, Esau came later and said, 'Is there nothing left for me?'

Isaac said, 'I cannot do it, I cannot take it back'. The words that we say sometimes we cannot take back! It is important that you and I learn how to speak of other people, or to other people. Whether we speak words of favor and blessing, or words of condemnation and destruction, our words are probably more important than we think. I think that most people take their words to be meaningless, just hot air, but the scripture says death and life are in the power of the tongue.

There again, Jesus said that you and I will be judged by every idle word that we speak. We will be held accountable. It is just too easy for us to open our mouths and say the first thing that comes into it, and just think that we can blab anything we want. But the scriptures are quite clear, our words reveal a great deal about us.

There are clear instructions that you and I need to be using our tongues wisely.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Unfortunately, that sounds a bit religious. Other translations say, “*Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth,*” “*Let no evil talk word proceed out of your mouth,*” “*Let no harmful things proceed out of your mouth.*” Our words should not be evil, unwholesome, destructive, something that corrupts. Then in the second half of the verse we see, “*but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*” How do we impart grace or favor to the hearer? It is a choice that you have, and it is a choice that I have. We can either say things which are destructive, harmful, lots of murmuring and complaining, or we can speak words which are good, for necessary building-up, and words that impart grace, delight or favor to the hearers.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by which you were sealed for the day of redemption.

I think that is still in the context of *our words*.

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

So that again means the words that we use. We should have no corrupt communication, do not grieve God’s Spirit, let all bitterness (words), wrath (words,) anger (words), clamor (again words), and evil speaking (clearly words)...

What are we to do?

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Of course, we are not in a position to withhold forgiveness from other people; bearing in mind how much you and I needed from our God. Being kind to one another again would be being kind *in words*. He is saying do not use these nasty words, do not have words of anger, wrath and clamor, but *be kind*. So the implication in the

context is to be kind *in your words*, use tender words, and of course, words of forgiveness, just as you also have been blessed by God's forgiveness.

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

God does not speak words of curses against you and me, and so we need to be careful not to speak curses against other people.

Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

These are very similar words here to those used in Ephesians. I guess Paul had the same points to make to each congregation; the same problems in every congregation; and they are probably still around today for that matter.

How do you express anger, wrath, malice and blasphemy? Well, wag your tongue. With anger, you shout at people, with wrath you say nasty things, malice you say very nasty things, from a nasty heart, and blasphemy and filthy language. The words that you and I choose to use should be *words of life*, words that impart favor and grace. Our words should bless, not damn, destroy and corrupt!

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds...

Again, that is using our tongues.

We are supposed to put off the old man, or the old woman, and put on the new man; we have a different heart and we have different words.

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Well that is perfect, let your speech always be with grace; grace is favor, it is kindness, it is delight. Then you season it with salt, not too much, not too little, so that it is just appropriate and good. Your words build up, they

add value, they are kind and necessary, but shunning the carnal stuff. This is what you and I are supposed to be doing, and of course our language and our words do rather give us away. If our words are harsh, critical, argumentative, and unwholesome and unpleasant, fault finding, well “Out of the abundance of the heart.” The abundance — that rather gives the game away, doesn't it?

If our heart is at peace, and we have a thankful and a gracious heart, then our words will reflect that. Sometimes it is only under pressure that the game is given away. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth *leaks*, as we have said in the past. The example I have given is a hypothetical illustration, not one that you should actually do. Ladies, when your husband is asleep at night, and he is all nice and cozy, you take his hand and put it on the bedside cabinet, you take a hammer, you move one finger into the centre, and you take the hammer and — *bang* on his finger. Then you will find out what is in his heart! If he leaps up and shouts ‘Hallelujah!’, you have a good one — but if it is other words, then he has some work to do! But under pressure it does give the game away of what is in our hearts. Our hearts and our mouths are linked.

Psalm 19:12-14 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the *words of my mouth* and the *meditation of my heart* be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

To be fair, you and I do not always see our weaknesses. We see here again the heart and mouth connection. “*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD.*”

We want God to be pleased with the way that our heart and mouth works. What we meditate on, what fills our heart, what we dwell on and ponder, that does affect the words of our mouth. And really, if our mouth is not doing too good, it is really *the heart* that needs the attention. If our thoughts are right, if our thinking is right, then our words are likely to be right. Like the Psalmist says, ideally the words of our mouth and the meditation, the pondering of our heart, should be acceptable in God's sight.

Proverbs 4:20 My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.

We can take this as being God the Father speaking to us, as His son or daughter, advising us to pay attention to His Word, the scriptures, and incline our ear to His sayings.

Proverbs 4:21-22 Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh.

Jesus said elsewhere that His words are spirit and they are life.

Proverbs 4:23-24 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you.

One translation for “*deceitful mouth*” it says, is a crooked mouth, a warped mouth. When it says, “put *perverse* lips far away,” one translation says, “thrust” perverse lip far away. You and I do not need to have conversation and words which are perverse, and backward. We must avoid it, and we must keep our heart and watch our words.

Proverbs 4:25-27 Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil.

You and I must *guard our lips*. It is regrettably too easy for us, in this negative selfish world, to acquire that sort of mentality, it just sort of rubs off, and our language ends up matching a carnal mind. It is not so much in our case, hopefully, that it is swear words, or four letter words. (I have heard a few from time to time in God’s church, including even on one occasion from a minister!). It is more a question about the negative words and the critical words.

In fact, we went to the Feast some years back to Edinburgh. We were at a special Medieval Banquet and we thought that it was just all church people. The people opposite us were swearing; using the well known four letter word quite a lot. We thought, ‘How did they get in here, it is supposed to be church people?’ They used swear words plentifully throughout the evening. It turned out that he was a church member — from Canada, I have to say. So, we have to watch our words.

Very occasionally it is right to point out another person's error, *very occasionally*. Paul criticized those of the circumcision that taught false doctrine. Paul named Alexander the Coppersmith, and the Apostle John, identified Diotrephes as a dangerous minister. That was not just careless talk from Paul and John, but that was them taking responsibility for the safety of the members. In our case, the danger is you and me just talking nonsense, blessing and cursing at the same time; we should not do it.

Proverbs 16:21 The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning.

I think one translation says, the more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is. So a person choosing words which are very fitting, or appropriate, helps to get the point across.

Proverbs 16:23 The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips.

Again, the heart and mouth connection; a wise person is careful how they speak, and careful with the words that they choose. Essentially, with our words we must be building up, adding grace, and avoiding being injurious.

Proverbs 16:24 Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.

Or sweet to the mind and healing to the body; they are pleasant words carefully chosen by a wise heart.

Proverbs 16:25 There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

Because, unfortunately, what seems right to the world is to use any old words that you want, and shout, argue, humiliate, seek to prove that you are right and the other person is wrong. That does not work, though that way might seem right. "I will demonstrate my integrity by shouting at that person and being nasty to them." No, a wise person selects his words and it is like a honeycomb; it is sweet to the mind and healing to the bones. That is the way that God would do it.

Proverbs 15:28 The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.

Again, you can see the heart and mouth connection. “*The heart of the righteous studies...*” One translation says, “*ponders*” how to answer. It is going to take a bit of time here, we have to think about it, and we need to ask ourselves what is *the best way* to express myself here? What is the best way to build up, to edify, and to help? Whereas “*the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.*” No thought — just lets it all rip, and that is an evil person. A good and righteous person ponders how to answer, and how best to use his words. Hopefully, they are saying in their mind, I am walking like God, I am seeking the best for other people, I want to do good here, I want to do good for them, as I would want people to do good for me. How do I answer this question in a way that is up-building? The wicked person does not care, just blah, blah, blah.

Proverbs 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

Guard your mouth. It does not mean that we cannot speak, we can say a lot of things, and we do. That gives us plenty of opportunity all day long, 24/7, but we should be pondering, we should be guarding our mouths and tongues at times depending on the circumstances, who we are with, the topic being discussed. Again, if you are in Denny’s, whether you want chocolate sauce or caramel sauce, at the end of the day it is hardly a death and life in the power of the tongue issue.

But sometimes there will be topics which are being discussed where it will be possible to build up or destroy. We must guard our mouth, and sometimes *saying nothing* is the very best thing to say. Your job and my job, is to watch what we are saying, and to make good choices that build up, encourage and impart grace to the hearer — and not just belch forth garbage.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

Because a teacher clearly teaches, and a teacher therefore is going to be saying words to a number of people. It might be a small class of about 5 or 10, or it might be a big group of 10,000 or 100,000; but a teacher can influence the beliefs and the behavior of many other people. So clearly if the teacher teaches what is wrong, or teaches what is false, or teaches that which could lead to death, then it is no surprise that the teacher is going to receive somewhat stricter judgment; because potentially they cause a lot more damage.

James 3:2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

If we do not stumble in word; in other words if we are always very careful of what we say, how we say, and when we say it, if we could do that perfectly then we are a perfect person. I guess none of us do it perfectly.

James 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!

Like in the body you may have big feet, big shoulders, but a little tongue, but it boasts great things. The tongue is small, but it can cause immense pain and suffering.

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

They are quite complex sentences there from James. But the gist of it is that the tongue is a fire, and a fire can obviously do good, or be immensely destructive. A little fire can destroy an entire forest. It says, "*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body,*" That may mean that if you use your tongue incorrectly, if you say words that are negative and destructive, you can affect your own health and well-being, and it defiles the whole body: "*...and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*"

James 3:8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

I'd put it this way, no *unconverted* man or woman can tame the tongue, but with God's Spirit we can and we should. The unconverted person's tongue lets just anything out, it says anything, and it can be immensely painful. There are some passages in Psalms saying that the tongue can be like a razor blade. Used incorrectly a few words can just slash at somebody and leave them scarred for life.

James 3:9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

And cursed does not just mean a four letter swear word, it is saying things that potentially are injurious.

James 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

And for a believer, they need not be so.

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Hearing God's word is easy. It is easy to turn up for Sabbath services, listen to a Bible study, or turn on a tape and hear the word. But it is not the hearers, it is the doers. We hear, and think that we are doing a great job; yes we are doing something, as hearing certainly is the start. Jesus said in one place, 'He who comes to Me and hears My word *and does it*, is like the man that dug the big foundation and built his house on it. But he who comes to Me and hears My sayings and *does them not* is the man who built his house on the sand, and along comes a storm and sweeps it all away'. The difference is that one of the men heard and did, and one *just heard* and deceived himself.

James 1:23-25 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

We *must do* what we hear.

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

You can say, "I am a believer, I have been in the Church of God for forty years, twenty years, fifteen years, whatever, yet scripture says "*and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.*"

So if any of us think that we are religious — but our tongues are out of control — then we are deceiving our heart, and our religion according to James, is pointless, and it is useless if we do not bridle our tongue. We must guard our lips.

In conclusion, you and I talk pretty much every day, and we have multiple opportunities to choose our words wisely. We must choose words that tend to life, and conversely if we do not pay any attention, if we do not ponder, and we do not study what is in our heart, then we can speak words which are foolish, idle words, unprofitable words, and words that lead to death, in our lives, and in those around us.

So, brethren, “Choose Words of Life.”

Transcript by Patricia Plunkett (thanks Trish!)