

## The Power of Words

After saying something that she shouldn't have, a sister in Christ followed her statement with (paraphrased, as it was many years ago!), "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that-sometimes I say something before I think." While I knew full well what she meant, I replied, "No, the problem wasn't that you didn't think before you spoke, it was that you shouldn't have been thinking what you were thinking." Full disclosure: I recognized *her* problem immediately because I had (and sometimes still *have*) the same problem!

While James has much to say about the *evil* and *destructive power* of "*the tongue*" (cf. James 1:26; 3:1-12), Jesus identified the "root-cause" of the problem as a failure to control *the mind*. Please read carefully- and aloud if it helps, His words from Matthew 12:34-37,

*"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? **For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.** The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."*

The Greek term translated by the NASB (the translated quoted above) is **argos**. In other NT uses, it is rendered as "**idle**" (cf. Matthew 20:3,6; 1Timothy 5:13), "**lazy**" (cf. Titus 1:12), and "**useless**" (cf. James 2:20; 2Peter 1:8). If we put all these meanings of **argos** together, perhaps we can come to a better understanding of the type of *careless* words to which Jesus refers:

- Words that are "*idle*" in that they come from a brain that isn't engaged/working;
- Words that are "*lazy*" in that sufficient consideration hasn't preceded them; and,
- Words that are "*useless*" in that they accomplish nothing worthwhile or beneficial.

Surely, such words are "*careless*" with regard to prior consideration as to their propriety or worth! But don't miss the main point. While **we** may dismiss such words as merely *careless*, **Jesus** said they: are from a *heart* filled with "*evil*," vv.34-35; must be "*accounted for*" in *the day of judgment*, v.36; and, can be the basis of eternal *condemnation*, v.37. So, while we may flippantly write off such utterances as mere *thoughtless* words, Jesus clearly does not and will not!

Having a tight rein on the mouth can prevent us from giving voice to problematic thoughts, but the real issue is that we aren't controlling our thoughts the way we should. "I can't help the way I feel," or, "I'm just saying what I think" are copout excuses for not *watching over, keeping, and guarding* our hearts with sufficient diligence, Proverbs 4:23 (NASB, KJV/ESV, NIV)!

However, let's not overlook the positive side of these things. There is no doubt that words can be negative and *destructively* powerful, or they can be positive and *constructively* potent! If you think about it, words can be: *thoughtlessly* or *thoughtfully* motivated; *useless* or *useful*, *empty* or *effective*, *hopeless* or *hopeful* in their content; *carelessly* or *carefully* delivered; and *harmful* or *helpful*, *hurtful* or *healing*, *discouraging* or *encouraging*, *despairing* or *inspiring* in their effect. Therefore, "*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person,*" Colossians 4:6. And, "*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear,*" Ephesians 4:29.

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