

EVERY WORD COUNTS!

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Our neighbours recently installed security cameras for their house. It cost them mega bucks for the latest technology: Infrared cameras covering all 360 degree angles of approach. Hours and hours of recording time on a continuous loop, etc..

However, there was one feature they chose not to include ... voice recording. Apparently in a court of law, criminals can get off scot free because you didn't ask their permission to record their words! Go figure!

The Bible says our words have consequences --- not only for time but also for eternity, not just for this life but also for the next. Jesus said, **“For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (v. 37).** God's video is always set on audio --- and He does not need our permission to record! What has been spoken secretly behind closed doors may be loudly broadcast from the roof; what has been spoken in the dark may be declared in the light (Lk. 12: 3). Jesus gives this solemn warning;

“But I tell you that men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” (Matthew 12: 36).

SCARRED FOR LIFE BY AN *IMAGINED* WORD

God created the cosmos by the spoken word. Similarly --- on the natural level --- our words can bring new worlds into being by changing those around us for either good or bad.

I know of a boy who overheard his mother talking on the telephone. At the time he was only 6 or 7. He *thought* he heard her say, **“Johnny will never amount to anything much”.** Turns out she never said anything of the sort. But, for many years her young son carried that message in his heart. That's what she said, he imagined, and it changed his whole outlook on life, not to mention his entire attitude towards his mother.

Johnny grew up with poor self-esteem believing his mother didn't highly value him, and that in spite of her selfless love and devotion to him, he took on patterns of self-abuse and addictions. He had trouble assimilating into normal society and keeping a good job down. Late into manhood Johnny still bore the deep scars of an imagined message his mother never really said. When the mother later learned how Johnny had carried those imagined words all those years, she was naturally heart-broken. She had never said anything of the kind!

A LIFE OF GOOD INFLUENCE BECAUSE OF A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

On the other hand I know of another boy who used to sit in the classroom thinking he was hopeless and not up to scratch in anyone's eyes.

One day he sensed the teacher standing behind his shoulders and he felt so embarrassed. "Oh no", he thought, "Now Miss R. will really know how pathetic I am!" Turns out she was reading his little composition totally unaware of the hell he was going through on the inside: "I can't write. I am no good. I'm useless."

Finally, the teacher spoke to him, "James, your writing is beautiful and your story is enthralling. You have a great future in front of you!" Those encouraging words changed James forever. His heavy heart soared with newfound belief and hope.

At that moment he thought, "I am going to be a teacher like Miss R. and I am going to help other kids find their reason for life." He did, and I know of dozens of lives he inspired to achieve greatness in their own fields ... all because of a few kind and encouraging words.

These days social media is a huge factor in the way our kids grow up. Stories of on-line bullying are rife. How tragic that many youth have even committed suicide by taking the words of others --- often anonymous --- to heart.

Yes, words, real or imagined can change a whole life, a whole character, a whole destiny. Words can cut. Words can heal. Words can build up and words can tear down.

As if this isn't sobering enough, our Lord Jesus takes the influence of our words to a whole new level. He says our words have the power to last into eternity. How sobering when He warns that **men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned**" (v. 37).

CONTEXT

Jesus gave this solemn teaching because of the terrible words the Scribes and Pharisees had just uttered against him. They had been witnessing the mighty miracles of Jesus and seeing the real-life testimonies of people powerfully changed by our Lord. In the immediate context, they had just seen a man demonised now set free by the very power of God through Christ.

On the one hand, the people were impressed so much that they wondered, "**Could this be the Son of David**" (Matt. 12: 23)? Could this be the promised Messiah?

But the Pharisees who were eyewitnesses to these astonishing works refused to admit the Kingdom of God was breaking into their very midst. They sneered at the peoples' suggestion that Jesus might be their Saviour; "**This fellow**" they mocked, "**drives out demons by the Devil himself**" (vs. 24)!

They insinuated that the good works of Jesus were actually evil works. But, woe to those who call evil good and good evil. Woe to those who call bitter sweet and sweet bitter. To deliberately twist the patently obvious, to suppress the God's truth and turn it upside

down, is a very dangerous place to be. In fact, Jesus says that to wilfully shut out God's voice --- that is, to **speak against the holy Spirit** --- is to **blaspheme** and risks getting to the place where repentance and change will be forever impossible for,

“Anyone who speaks against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matt. 12: 31-32).

Observe that Jesus is talking about an on-going persistent and wilful attitude. Whilst ever these hostile religious leaders wish to continue in their current attitudes to Jesus there can be no forgiveness. If this dishonest mindset persists then they will remain unforgiven into the next Age, i.e. forever. But there is still the possibility of change even for them. ^(1)

THE SIN BEYOND FORGIVENESS

How are we to understand this sin against the Spirit that is beyond forgiveness? **William Barclay** wisely counsels;

To understand what Jesus was saying one thing is completely necessary. We must grasp the fact that Jesus was not speaking about the Holy Spirit *in the full Christian sense of the term*. He could not have been, for He was speaking to Jewish Scribes and Rabbis who knew nothing of the [official catholic] doctrine of the Holy Spirit ... This must be interpreted in light of the Jewish conception of the Holy Spirit. ^(2)

Yes! The Jews, of course, knew about the Spirit of God. They knew the holy Spirit was YHWH God Himself in personal action in His creation. But they knew nothing of the later Christian invention of “God the Spirit” (a term found nowhere in Scripture!). ^(3)

In this context Jesus says **idle** or **careless** words about him will result in either justification or condemnation forever. ^(4) What a person says about Jesus Christ reveals what is in the heart of that person and that s/he will be judged accordingly.

A SPIRITUAL LAW

Jesus is laying down a spiritual law here. He is saying that the true state of our hearts is manifested through our words. You can see a man's character by listening to his words ... **“a tree is recognised by its fruit ... How can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (vs. 33-34).**

¹ The **subjunctive mood** in this verse puts an element of doubt in, which leaves open the possibility of a future change of heart from the Scribes and Pharisees.

² **William Barclay**, *Gospel of Matthew, The Daily Study Bible*, Vol. 2, St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 6th Impression, p48 (Italics original. **Brackets mine**).

³ It took the Christian Church until the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. to finally and officially dictate the Deity of the Holy Spirit as the third member of the Trinity. For a fuller treatment of the doctrine of the holy Spirit see the chapter **Another Spirit** in my book *They Never Told Me This in Church!* Or see the section **God, Jesus & the Holy Spirit** at www.thebiblejesus.com/articles

⁴ ἄργος / **argos** is from the negative prefix **a** meaning without, and the word **ergon** meaning work. So anything described as **argos** is that which produces no good thing. In the Bible **argos** can describe a barren tree, fallow ground, an idle man shunning the labour he should be performing --- unemployed (**Matt. 20:3**).

The spiritual law is that our tongues can only produce what is already in our hearts. “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him” (v. 35).

As a young lad I remember sitting in the company of men who would swear and be foul-mouthed and tell dirty stories. But as soon as a woman walked in the door, it was as though my grandmother had suddenly washed their mouths out with soap! Never mind that a young boy had been listening all along! (These days the women can swear and tell potty stories as good as the men! How society has deteriorated in my lifetime.)

The best thing you can say about somebody who swears all the time is that they have a lazy mind. I used to tell our kids that instead of putting the same old boring swear word in, find an apt and more colourful adjective to describe what you are trying to say.

It doesn't take long after meeting someone for the first time to work out what kind of a character they are. Are their words kind or cruel? Encouraging or critical? Full of cursing or blessing? Is their mind lucid and sharp or are they muddled and confused?

WE WILL ANSWER FOR OUR CARELESS WORDS

Jesus lays the principle down that we will be judged ultimately by our words for they reveal who we really are, what we are on the inside. Specifically, we will give an account to God for our **idle** or our **careless words**.

This does not mean we cannot make “small talk”. It doesn't mean we can't talk about the weather or football and cricket, or even politics! Rather, *the careless word, the word uttered without any thought of the effect it will have on other people ... shows something of what we are deep down ... and it will be taken into account on Judgment Day ... for the words we take lightly will then be seen to have meaning, for they show what we are in our innermost being. (5)*

We need to try to examine what comes out of our mouths in our unguarded moments when we are not really thinking. Sometimes it would be good if somebody could play back to us what we have spoken over the last weeks. Would we be embarrassed to listen to ourselves? What have we been saying in our homes? In private? Would we be ashamed to have it published for the world to see? It's quite possible to carefully guard our words in company, but it may only be carefully calculated hypocrisy!

And what about when our emotions are running high? Have we not all said things in a moment of hot temper and anger that we would never say normally? Does this not prove that we say in anger what we really are thinking and only wished we could have plucked up the courage to say it long ago?

Yes, it's possible to be courteous, charming, amenable in front of strangers, but irritable, sarcastic, unkind, critical when we think others are not around. Security cameras have blind

⁵ [Leion Morris](#), *The Gospel According To Matthew; The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, p322

spots, limited recording space before starting again and erasing all previous events. We can even opt to turn off the voice recorder if necessary. But Jesus affirms that God's recorder is always running! *Every Word Counts!*

Politicians are very skilful at saying what they judge to be popular and vote-winning. But how many have come unstuck when they think there is no microphone recording, and their true thoughts come out to bring them down ... "I wish to apologise for the inadvertent hurt I have caused so-and-so. If my words have caused embarrassment or hurt, then I am sorry. What I really meant to say was this ... !" Ah, the idle word!

No wonder king David prayed, *Set a guard over my lips (Ps. 141:3)*. Once our words have been scattered to the wind, the blessing or the damage is done. Yes, we may sincerely apologise for an idle word by saying we never really meant what we said. It was just a slip of the tongue. However, the wound caused to the other may last for years and years, even a lifetime. *Every Word Counts!*

FEATHERS BLOWING IN THE WIND

I always remember the illustration I heard a preacher give years ago. Turns out there was a gossip in his parish who was doing irreparable damage by his loose tongue. So the preacher took a pillow full of feathers when he visited that gossip. "Let's take a walk to the town lookout," he suggested.

Once on top of the hill overlooking their town the pastor took a knife and slashed the pillow and shook it into the wind. He then said to the gossip, "Now, I want you to go and gather every single feather the wind has just blown all over the town."

"Impossible" said the bemused parishioner, "how can I possibly gather every feather the wind has swept all over the town?" "Precisely", replied the minister, "you have scattered all over the town your gossip and soul-destroying words. They can never be regathered."

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Forgive us for the hurt and damage we have done to others by our careless words. We have torn down when we should have built up. We have hurt when we should have healed. We have complained when we should have blessed.

O Lord, help us to make this right with anybody You bring to our minds who needs our sincere apologies. Thank You for Your grace to write that letter, send that email, pick up the phone or, if possible, to physically visit that person we have offended.

Father God, we ask for grace to tame our tongues and that You would indeed set a guard over our mouths. May our hearts be transformed to love and desire above all else Your kingdom so that our conversations may reflect the true value of our hearts. The fruit of Your Spirit's indwelling will always be health-giving, life-giving. Give us good hearts so that our words may bear much fruit for Your eternal glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

