

Overcoming Abusive Speech

Jim Newheiser

I. Introduction. (Scripture references, if not otherwise identified, are from Proverbs)

A. The theology of words.

1. God speaks. John 1:1ff Heb. 1:1ff Gen. 1:3,6,9,11,14 2:18
2. God reveals Himself in language. II Ti. 3:16-17 Ps. 19:7f
3. Our speech is in His image.
4. Because of the Fall our speech is corrupted. Gen. 3:1ff John 8:33
5. Every time you open your mouth you are either promoting or opposing God's kingdom. Js. 3:1-2

B. Words are powerful (for good or evil). 18:21 Js. 3:3-6 *Death and life are in the power of the tongue.*

1. Persuasion or seduction. 16:23 *The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds persuasiveness to his lips.*
2. Edification or destruction. 11:11 13:14 Js. 3:5-6 *By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.*

C. Words are limited.

1. They are no substitute for action. 14:23 Mt. 21:28-29 *In all labor there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.*
2. Words alone cannot change a heart. 29:19 10:13 26:3 I Co. 2:14 *On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.*
3. Non-verbal language also speaks. 6:13 10:10

D. What you say reflects what is in your heart. 15:2,28 10:31,20 16:23 4:23 Mt.12:34f Luke 6:43-46 Jer. 17:9 Ro. 3:13-14

1. Your words express what you value and desire most. Js. 4:1-2
2. Speech is perhaps the truest indication whether one is wise or foolish. *The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly... The mouth of the wicked pours out evil things... Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life... The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.*
3. Your speech reflects the internal warfare between the flesh and the Spirit. Gal. 5:17,15,19-20,26,13b,14
4. You will be judged by what you say. Mt. 12:36-37 *Every careless word that men speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned.*

II. Don't use your speech to destroy. 11:9 *With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor.*

A. Flattery. 29:5 26:28b 6:24 7:21 Ps. 12:3 *A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.*

B. Lies. 26:24-26,28a,18-19 12:17,19,22 14:5,25 6:12,17,19 4:24 30:8a 10:18 17:7 25:18 26:18-19 Eph. 4:25 *Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD.*

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1. The source of lies is selfish hatred. 26:28a *A lying tongue hates those it crushes.*
 2. Lying destroys relationships. Eph. 4:26
 3. Perjury undermines justice. 19:28a 25:18 12:17 14:5 *A rascally witness makes a mockery of justice... Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.*
- C. Gossip and slander. 11:13 18:8 25:23 20:19 16:27-28 17:9 10:18 I Pe. 4:15 Lev. 19:18 Js. 4:11 *The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, they go down into the innermost parts of the body...A perverse man spreads strife and a slanderer separates intimate friends.*
- D. Angry speech. 11:9,11 Ecc. 7:9 *Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.*
1. Anger stems from murderous pride and selfishness. Js. 4:1-2a Mt. 5:21ff *What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.*
 2. Rash verbal outbursts. 29:22 12:18 14:17 15:18 *A hot tempered man abounds in transgression... There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword...A quick-tempered man acts foolishly... A hot tempered man stirs up strife.*
 3. Hateful words can escalate into violent acts.
 4. When is anger righteous? 11:23 Eph. 4:26 Nu. 11:33 Mk. 3:5 Re. 6:16 Js. 1:20
 - a. A real sin has taken place.
 - b. Your concern is for God's glory and kingdom, not your own.
 - c. Your anger is expressed righteously. *The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*
- E. Quarrels/strife/arguments. 18:6 6:14,19b 30:33 13:10 10:12 17:1,14,19 26:21 3:30 *A fool's lips bring strife and his mouth calls for blows.*
1. Pride and hatred produce fights. 28:25 13:10 10:12 Js. 4:1f *An arrogant man stirs up strife... Through presumption comes nothing but strife... Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions... Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife.*
 2. Don't be contentious. 26:21 17:19 Ti. 3:10 *Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife... He who loves transgression loves strife.*
- F. Other forms of perverse speech. 2:12
1. Filthy speech. 17:20 Eph. 5:3-4 *He who is perverted in his language falls into evil.*
 2. Cursing. Js. 3:9 Ro. 12:14
 3. Plotting evil. 24:2 12:6
 4. Boasting. 27:1-2 25:27 *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth...Let another praise you and not your own mouth.*
 5. Nagging. 19:13 21:9,19 25:24 27:15-16
 6. Grumbling. I Co. 10:10 Phil. 2:14
 7. Seduction. Pr. 7:21

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8. Untimely speech (teasing/humor). 25:20 26:18-19 *Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar on soda, is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.*
9. Hasty speech. 15:28 29:20 Js. 1:19 *Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*
10. Excessive and careless speech. 13:3b 10:19 *The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin... When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable. He who restrains his lips is wise.*
11. Dangerous and destructive speech often takes place electronically.
- G. Stay away from those whose speech is ungodly. 17:4 26:20 20:19 22:24,10 *An evildoer listens to wicked lips, A liar pays attention to a destructive tongue..... Do not associate with a gossip...Do not associate with a man given to anger, Or go with a hot-tempered man...*
- H. God judges those who misuse their tongues with both temporal consequences and everlasting judgement. 10:31,10-11 18:6-7 19:5,9 6:14b-15 19:19 12:13 26:26 22:12 14:3 Mt. 12:35f Rev. 22:15 *The perverted tongue will be cut out... 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...A false witness will not go unpunished and he who tells lies will not escape... A man of great anger shall bear the penalty...An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips.*

III. Learn to speak with excellence.

- A. Exercise self control. 13:3a 21:23 Js. 1:19
 1. Think (and listen) before you speak. 15:28 21:23 18:13,17 Js. 1:19 *The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things. He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles... He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him... The first to plead his case seems just, Until another comes and examines him.*
 2. Don't talk too much. 10:19 17:28 *He who restrains his lips is wise.... Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is counted prudent.*
 3. Don't lose your temper. 29:11 15:18b 12:16 14:29 16:32 19:11 Eph. 4:26 Ex. 34:6 *A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back... A fool's vexation is known at once... He who is slow to anger has great understanding... He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who captures a city...A man's discretion makes him slow to anger. It is a glory to overlook a transgression. The cure for anger is grace. Eph. 4:32 Mt. 18:21f*
 4. Avoid disputes. 17:14 20:3 26:21 15:18 26:17 19:11 25:8 *The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out... Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel...Like one who takes a dog by the ears, is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him.*
 5. Don't repeat gossip or slander. 11:13b 17:9 *He who is trustworthy conceals a matter... He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.*
 6. Some things may be true, but are best left unsaid. Eph. 4:29 *Let no unwholesome*

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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 to those who hear.

- B. Speak with integrity. 12:17,19 14:5 19:1 14:25 Ps. 15:3-4 *A truthful witness saves lives... Truthful lips will be established forever...He swears to his own hurt and does not change.*
- C. Use your words to build others up. 16:13 12:25
1. Praise and thanksgiving. Ps. 100:4 111:1 138:1
 2. Teaching. 15:7,2 31:26 II Tim. 4:1ff *The lips of the wise spread knowledge.*
 3. Wise Counsel. 27:9 *Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.*
 4. Evangelism. 11:30 *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. And he who is wise wins souls.*
 5. Rebuke. 28:23 17:10 24:25 26:4-5 28:23 27:6 Gal. 6:1-2 *A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than one hundred blows into a fool... He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with a tongue... Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.*
 6. Encouragement and affirmation. 12:25,18 16:21 *Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad... The tongue of the wise brings healing... sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.*
 - a. Affirmation acknowledges the good work God is doing in others. 1 Co. 1:4 4:5 11:2 15:10 Rom. 11:35-36 15:14 Js. 1:17 2 Th. 1:3-4 1 Th. 1:2-10
 - b. Affirmation is biblical. Pr. 31:28-30 Mt. 25:21,23 Heb. 11:1-2,39 Ruth 3:11 Lu. 7:2-5,28 21:3-4 Jo. 1:47 Mk. 14:6 Ro. 16:1-2 13:7 2 Ti. 1:16-18 Phil. 4:8
 7. Deliverance of the oppressed. 31:8-9 12:6 *Open your mouth for the dumb, For the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.*
 8. Sometimes it is wrong to remain silent. 27:5 *Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed.*
- D. Develop excellence in the manner of your speech.
1. Gentle and calm. 15:1 25:15 Ro. 12:17-18,21 *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger...By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded and a soft tongue breaks the bone.*
 2. Timely. 15:23 25:11 27:14 *A man has joy in an apt answer and how delightful is a timely word... Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in the right circumstances... He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be reckoned a curse to him.*
 3. Kind. 16:21 *Sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.*
 4. Humble. 1 Th. 1:15-17 Eph. 4:1-3
 5. Gracious. Eph. 4:29-32 Rom. 12:17-21
 6. Redemptive. 11:30 Mt. 5:9 Ro. 10:15 2 Co. 5:20
 7. Draw others out (and listen!). 20:5 18:13 Js. 1:19 Phil. 2:3-4 *A plan in the heart of a*

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man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out.

- E. God values and rewards excellent speech. 10:20 20:15 *The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver.*
1. Wise words bless those who hear. 16:24 12:18 10:21 15:4 14:25 *Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones... the tongue of the wise brings healing... The lips of the righteous feed many... A soothing tongue is a tree of life... A truthful witness saves lives.*
 2. God blesses the speaker. 18:20 12:14 13:2 *With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied. He will be satisfied with the product of his lips.*

IV. Concluding applications.

- A. Controlling the tongue is a crucial issue in life. Mt. 12:34-37
- B. Before your words can be changed, your heart must be transformed. Mt. 12:34f 15:18
Luke 6:45
- C. Jesus exemplifies perfect speech. John 7:38,46 I Pet. 2:23 Heb. 1:1ff *Never did a man speak the way this man speaks!*
1. He never sinned with His tongue.
 2. He spoke perfectly. His Words are life. 10:31 John 6:63
 3. Jesus speaks to you. 8:6-7 Mt. 11:28ff
- D. Who can tame the tongue?
1. The tongue is like a wild beast which is beyond taming. Js. 3:7-12 Mark 5:1-5
 2. Jesus tames the untameable tongue. Mark 5:6-15 Is. 6:5-8 Ps. 51:15 Heb. 13:15-16