

The Devastating Consequences of Careless Words

“I tell you, on the day of judgement people will give account for every careless word they speak for by your words you will be justified, and by words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37, ESV).

I’m not sure that there is a more sobering verse I could type at the top of this page, but there it is. I was just humming along—reading about good fruit and evil fruit, good treasure and evil treasure—when these two verses seemed to literally jump off the page and stun me.

Have I read them before? Yes. Have I heard them? Yes. Today, though, they seemed to hit a part of my heart that hadn’t been touched before. Give an account for every careless word I’ve spoken? If I have ever wondered whether I need God’s mercy, I certainly don’t anymore. I’m sure I haven’t lived a single day since I could speak, when no careless words came out of my mouth.

A good old Merriam-Webster definition for careless is: “Indifferent, unconcerned ... unstudied, spontaneous.” How many words have flown out of my mouth spontaneously without thought to their consequence or true impact? The answer—countless words.

So what does it look like to care for our words? Jesus didn’t give us some formula to plug them into and decide whether they’re good or bad, careful or careless. I believe the difference between careless and careful words is that—just like thoughts taken captive, they are free of selfish ambition or an agenda that does not come from the kingdom of God. This does not mean they are void of authenticity or character.

As a friend of mine once said, “Jesus is not a walking

typewriter.” He has life and personality. I fully believe He has a great sense of humor, and He talked about many different things in everyday life while He was on earth. He sometimes spoke in angry tones, sometimes in kind tones; He spoke in very compassionate tones, maybe even sarcastic tones at times. He had normal human characteristics and emotions. He also had an intimate relationship with His Father, and He depended fully on Him for the direction of His life—even His words. By the power of Holy Spirit, He did not only do what the Father was doing, but He also only said what the Father was saying.

We live in a culture that highly values free speech. It is probably the amendment to our Constitution that gets brought up the most. We as a people truly value our ability to say what we want, when we want and how we want. In the kingdom, though, this doesn’t seem to be the way to operate.

The Father has given us free will which means we can say whatever we want, whenever we want and how we want to say it. However, if we desire to see His kingdom come on earth, our words must be submitted to His heart. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus reminds us that “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45, BSB). When our hearts are connected to the Father, our words will reflect what He is saying. In order to know His heart we have to be in relationship with Him, and from that place our words will flow from His heart through our mouths. We will put aside our own agendas, reasoning and preconceptions to humbly speak what we believe He is saying.

Again, this does not put our words into a box that says they only sound one certain way. Jesus spoke with many different tones and emotions throughout His time on earth, and at the same time He fully submitted to the Father. We may not always intentionally measure every word before it comes out of our mouths, but the deeper we get in knowing our Father and being connected to His heart, the more our words are automatically going to match His.

Another thing Jesus understood was the weight that His words carried. He spoke with authority. It was an authority that seemed to astound people and grab their attention. Who was this man from rinky-dink little Nazareth to speak words that carried a weight beyond human knowledge and ability?

Here's the crazy thing; He has now given us the same authority (Matt. 28:18). This means our words carry the same kind of weight that His did. This being said, they carry weight both positively and negatively. We can either allow them to add to His kingdom on earth, or we can add to the kingdom of darkness. No matter how we spin it, we are always choosing one or the other.

It is incredibly humbling to realize how much power the words we say really carry. When we understand this, we will be much less compelled to quickly spout our own opinions, thoughts or judgments without first knowing that they have been inspired by Holy Spirit. We will also be more serious about speaking the words that He does give us.

We are His ambassadors of reconciliation on this earth. If we choose to passively ignore the authority and words that we've been given to speak, it is just as bad as letting careless words come out of our mouths. The enemy loves to attack the church and the world through words. He uses both the spoken and unspoken kind.

I would like to say that the point of this article is not to make us all be more cautious or anxious about our words. The point is always to draw us deeper back into our original intent, which is walking in intimate friendship with God and one another. He is the only source we can draw from that will keep our words healthy, humble and bold. Commune with Him, and bring your whole self with all your thoughts and words to Him first and stay there all day, every day. {eoa}