

August 1, 2020

Hello Brethren,

“Violent language often is as deadly as a lethal weapon.”

From time to time you’ve probably heard me quote “The Country Parson.” That was the name of a short newspaper column published in at least 28 newspapers across the Midwestern US beginning in 1955. It was written by Frank A. Clark, who happened to be my great uncle. I have most of the books of his quips, and still read through them from time to time. The quote above virtually jumped off the page at me earlier this week in light of all we see happening around us – and I don’t think great uncle Frank would mind me using some of his material.

When I was a little boy my mother taught me: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” I’ve thought about it many, many times. But as well-intentioned as it was, it simply wasn’t true. Words DO hurt!

Dr. Hyder Zahed wrote an article titled “The Power of Spoken Words.” At the beginning of the article he says *“Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity. We can choose to use this force constructively with words of encouragement, or destructively using words of despair. We have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble.”*

Wise old king Solomon certainly agreed when he succinctly wrote *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue...”* (Proverbs 18:21). What we choose to say really does matter!

Consider the power of words of hatred and defiance on a placard being carried by a protester in Seattle. Consider the words of anger and venom being shouted through a megaphone to a riled up crowd. Consider the words of disrespect and attack from one political leader to another.

Or consider the words of comfort from a friend to one in need. Consider the words that uplift someone trying to master a new skill. Consider the impact of words of love and affection from a spouse or family member as you are struggling with a trial.

Consider even the importance of correction that is given out of love and concern and with an eye toward helping us improve. Solomon wrote *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”* (Proverbs 27:6).

It seems to be the norm today for many to “let it all hang out” and say whatever they think or feel. Social media platforms are used to attack, malign and bully almost with impunity. I mentioned in a recent sermon two political opponents being interviewed on a TV news show as I watched a couple of weeks ago. They never did answer the question the host posed, rather they spent their entire time name-calling, attacking and reviling the other and the opposite party. No dignity. No respect. Only using words as if they were arrows or bullets.

All around us we see words being used with devastating effect within families. Parents disparage and ridicule their children. Children say hurtful and angry things against parents, sometimes calling them vile names. Husbands and wives may get upset with each other, and with their words they slice and dice, spitting their mate out the other side like a wood chipper.

Sometimes the impact of hateful or hurtful words will echo in the mind for decades, long after the speaker may have forgotten about it.

And sometimes the gentle and kind words of encouragement will buoy the heart and mind likewise for decades, and once again after the speaker may have entirely forgotten.

How have you used your words in the past? How do you use your words today? No one is perfect with his words (James 3:8), but we can always learn to do better.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. We would each do well to take care how we use ours.

Tomorrow my family and I will be in Van Buren for morning services, and then we'll travel down to Mena for afternoon services. I hope you all have a wonderful Sabbath.

Best regards,

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