

RUMOR ALLEGE
SLANDER UNDERSTAND SAY
CONVERSE DECIDE RECALL INTRIGUE PROCLAIM
CHITCHAT WHISPER VOCALIZE CHAT SHOUT HEAR

THE POWER OF WORDS: TALKING & LISTENING

DISCOURSE UTTER DECLARE MURMUR EXPRESS
GOSSIP LISTEN VERBALIZE CHATTERBOX MUTTER
CONVEY SECRET DISCUSS ARTICULATE

Sticks and stone may break my bones,
But words will never hurt me.





Introduction

When God created Adam and Eve in His image, the *imago Dei* (the image of God), the idea was, according to theologian Louis Berkhof, that “God was the original of which man was made a copy. This means, of course, that man not only bears the image of God, but *is* His very image.” While various schools of thought have sought to conclusively define what the divine image in man is, Carl F.H. Henry cautioned that “the Bible does not define for us the precise content of the original *imago*.” It is clear, however, that created man was “constituted a *personal being* in self-conscious spiritual fellowship with his Maker.” Henry also notes that Adam’s “created dignity consisted in knowledgeable and responsible relationships to the supernatural world



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and to fellow humans (emphasis added).” Man, therefore, as the apex of creation, has been designed to know and communicate with God and with other image-bearers as well.

In her book, *Peoplemaking*, noted scholar, therapist, and author, Virginia Satir (1916-1988) invited us to look through her eyes: “I see communication as a huge umbrella that covers and affects all that goes on between human beings. Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him.” Nowhere is this truth more obvious than in the pages of the Bible. The self-revealing God used words by which to communicate with us and has given specific commands, precepts, and

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laws regulating how we use our tongue (words) and our ears (listening). James told his readers: “And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness (image) of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both



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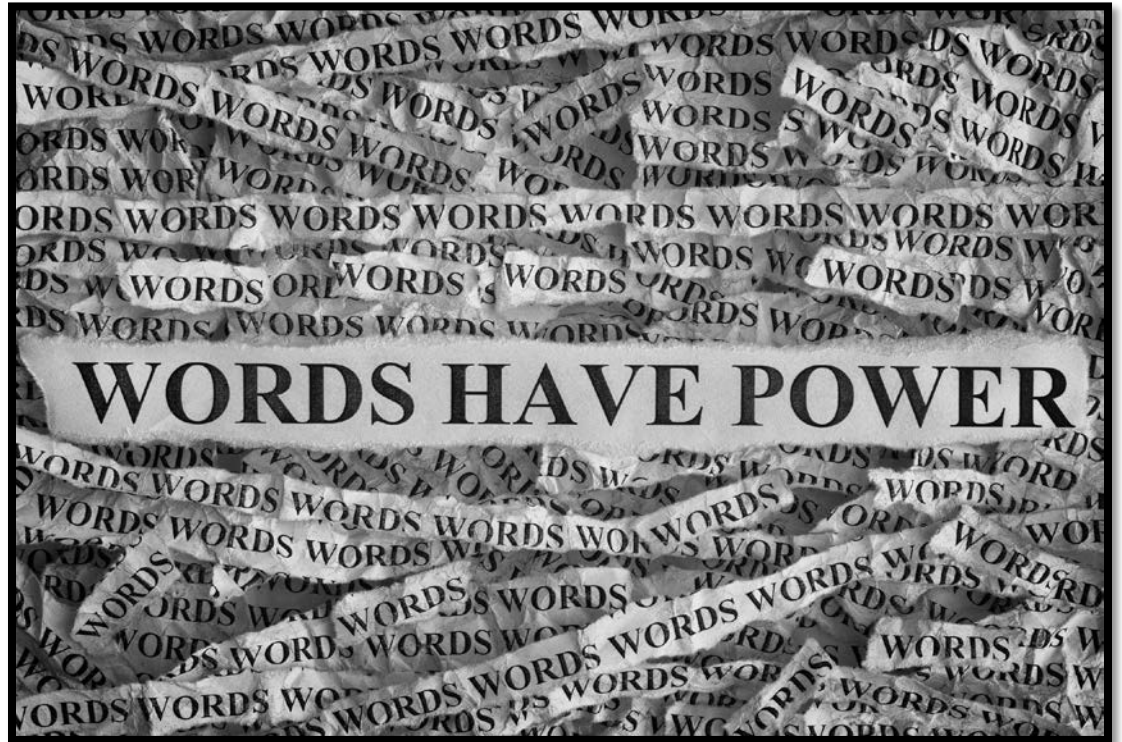
fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh” (James 3:6-12). “The tongue in our body,” writes James Adamson, “with its (the body’s) base instincts, is like a fire (e.g., an unguarded campfire) in a forest; any minute, there will be a conflagration...In plain, and perhaps not really too free English: ‘the tongue is a monster of inconsistency’ – or even better, a ‘monster of caprice’ *full of deadly venom.*” In short, James, the half-brother of Jesus, explains the tongue’s *multum in parvo* (much in little) power quite clearly. It is comparatively small, yet produces a great effect. Who has not been hurt or damaged by this small member? Whom have we hurt or damaged by our little tongues?

The Commandment Against Decaying Speech

- “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” (Eph. 4:29, NASV).
- “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (NIV).
- “Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift” (The Message).
- “Do not use harmful words in talking. Use only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you” (Good News).

The Origin & Effects of Words

The words we speak are complex, meaningful sounds that originate in the heart, proceed to our tongues, leap into listening ears, and produce powerful effects in the hearts of those who hear.





The Meaning of *Unwholesome*

- **“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth.”** The literal meaning of the Greek word in Ephesians 4:29 that is translated *unwholesome* is *decayed* or *rotten*, while the figurative meaning is translated *bad*, *evil*, or *unwholesome*.
- **The literal meaning can easily be seen in biblical references to decaying trees.** “Even so every good tree bears good fruit; but the **rotten** (useless) tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a **rotten** tree produce good fruit” (Mt. 7:17-18). “For there is no good tree which produces **bad fruit**; nor on the other hand, a **bad** tree which produces good fruit” (Lk. 6:43).

The Meaning of *Unwholesome*

The figurative meaning is used in Scripture for worthless or bad fish. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a drag-net cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the **bad** (no good as food) they threw away” (Mt. 13:48).



The Meaning of *Unwholesome*

- **The figurative meaning can also be seen in James' Epistle:** "Come now, you rich, and weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have **rotted** and your garments have become moth-eaten" (James 5:1-2). Kittel's *Theological Dictionary* understands this text to mean: "Your riches go the way of everything earthly, they decay."
- In summary, "both the offensiveness of the process of decay and the fact imply that rotting objects are old and usually, though not always, of little worth or even quite unserviceable." The word has a "sinister overtone" indicating that the word implies "of little worth." (Kittel).

Real Damage to Human Hearts

Unwholesome words are invisible bombs that explode in the soul, creating gaping wounds and lasting pain.



A Broken Spirit

“A gentle tongue is a tree of life,
but perverseness in it breaks the spirit” (Prov. 15:4).

Ashley Montagu



Ashley Montagu

1905-1999

“Words possessing a high emotional charge are the most effective with which to swear, not because they normally force their way to the surface more readily than others, but because of their puissance (power) they constitute the most **pulverizing verbal projectiles** at our disposal.”

- *The Anatomy of Swearing*

A Biblical Catalogue of Unwholesome Words

- 1. Perverse Words:** Words that are used to entice others to turn away from God's ways and to live lives that are contrary to His commandments. "The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and **perverted** speech I hate" (Prov. 8:13). "The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the **perverse** tongue will be cut off" (Prov. 10:31).
- 2. Slander:** Untruthful words and evil reports that are used to ruin or defame another person's reputation or life. "The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters **slander** is a fool" (Prov. 10:18). "A dishonest man spreads strife, and a **whisperer** separates close friends" (Prov. 16:28). See also Proverbs 25:23.

A Biblical Catalogue of Unwholesome Words

- 3. Flattery:** Insincere or false words of extraordinary praise which are used to deceive or seduce others onto some devious path. “A man who **flatters** his neighbor spreads a net for his feet” (Prov. 29:5). “A lying tongue hates its victims, and a **flattering mouth** works ruin” (Prov. 26:28).
- 4. Lying:** Untruthful words that are used to intentionally deceive and hurt others. “**Lying lips** are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight” (Prov. 12:22). “Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is **false speech** to a prince” (Prov. 17:7). “Therefore, laying aside **falsehood**, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (Eph. 4:25).

A Biblical Catalogue of Unwholesome Words

- 5. Harsh Words:** Words that are deliberately used for the sole purpose of hurting others. “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a **harsh** word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).
- 6. Many Words:** Unnecessary and incessant talking. “Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who **opens wide his lips** comes to ruin” (Prov. 13:3). “In all toil there is profit, but **mere talk** tends only to poverty” (Prov. 14:23). “When words are **many**, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent” (Prov. 10:19).
- 7. Hasty Words:** Words that are spoken quickly and prematurely without wisdom. “Do you see a man who is **hasty** in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Prov. 29:20).

A Biblical Catalogue of Unwholesome Words

8. **Gossip:** Secrets that are gained by idle talk and prying into another's heart and life and then revealed to those who ought not know. "Whoever goes about slandering **reveals secrets**; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler" (Prov. 20:19). "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who **repeats a matter** separates close friends" (Prov. 17:9).
9. **Profanity:** Filthy, unholy words. "...and there must be no **filthiness** and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:4).
10. **Devious Words:** Words causing others to swerve out of the right way. "Put **devious** lips far from you" (Prov. 4:24).

A Biblical Catalogue of Unwholesome Words

- 11. Deceitful Words:** Words used to cause others to believe what is false and erroneous. “Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not **deceive** with your lips” (Prov. 24:28).
- 12. Foolish Words:** Words lacking in wisdom and good judgment. “The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out **folly**” (Prov. 15:2).
- 13. Evil Words:** Ungodly and depraved words. “The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out **evil things**” (Prov. 15:28).

What Words May Cause



Decay, n., “the process of falling off from a prosperous or thriving condition; progressive decline; the condition of one who has thus fallen off or declined; wasting or wearing away, disintegration; dilapidation, ruinous condition” (OED).

“Decay implies a slow change from a state of soundness or perfection” (Webster).

Personal Story of Decay

“If only my leg was broken, or perhaps I had cancer. Then they would know I was suffering. But no one sees me suffer. No one understands because no one sees my wound.’ The invisible wound which this young man was carrying was an emotional one. He had experienced many years of belittling at the hands of an alcoholic and often cruel father, and the result was much inner emotional pain.”



David G. Benner
Canadian Psychologist & Author
1947 -

What Unwholesome Words May Do

- Affect our attitudes toward ourselves and others
- Elevate our self-esteem through flattery
- Breed doubts in our minds and hearts
- Damage our faith
- Tempt us to sin against God and leave His paths
- Stir up and spread unrelenting strife
- Fuel anger and resentment
- Lead to ruin
- Separate intimate friends

A Broken Spirit



- “A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed” (Prov. 15:13).
- “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Prov. 17:22).
- “A man’s spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?” (Prov. 18:14).

On the Tip of Our Tongues

- Our text, Ephesians 4:29, paints a picture of our words coming or going out of our mouths (or, *proceeding*), as if going on a journey. They leave the heart where they are formed and travel to the mouth, then on to the tip of the tongue (so to speak). From there, they leap into the air, enter the ears of those who are present, and descend into their hearts where they will be interpreted and processed.
- “Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that **proceeds** out of the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4).
- “Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what **proceeds out of the mouth**, this defiles the man” (Mt. 15:11; cf. Mk. 7:15).

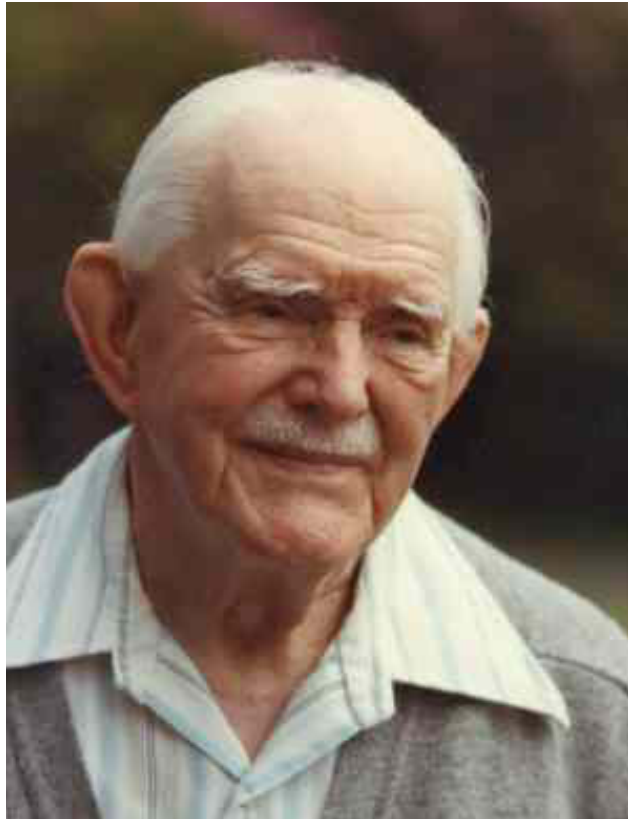
On the Tip of Our Tongues

- “But the things that **proceed out of the mouth** come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Mt. 15:18-19).
- And He was saying, ‘That which **proceeds** out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, **proceed** the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things **proceed** from within and defile the man” (Mk. 7:20-23).

The Heart as the Manufacturing Center

“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 it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned” (Mt. 12:34-37; cf. Lk. 6:45).

The Connection Between Heart & Tongue



Norman Grubb

Son-in-Law & Biographer of C.T. Studd
1895-1993

“What rules the heart, wags the tongue.”

The Transformation of the Heart



- “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23).
- The heart is the seat of your dearest treasure (Charles Bridges).
- The natural heart, without Christ, is a fountain of poison.
- If the heart is seized, the entire man will be captured.
- Ask Jesus Christ to transform your heart and thus your speech.