

All In a Word

I am grieved to think of the endless stream of people who have poured out their pain and exposed their emotional wounds to me in the security of my office. I am saddened as I recall their tears and eyes full of sorrow. The irony of it all is that so much of what I have seen and heard was not the result of physical mistreatment or abuse. Their pain had been inflicted by words.

Words are powerful.

They can help or hurt, heal or destroy. King Solomon wrote that we all possess a deadly verbal sword that can pierce the soul of another (Proverbs 12:18). The apostle Paul penned an extensive passage on the use of words (Ephesians 4:25-32). In verse 29 of this text he summed up the good and bad of the matter by saying, "Don't 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".

God commands that we weed out the *unwholesome* (destructive) words in our speech and replace them with *edifying* (constructive) ones.

The word unwholesome means *decayed, rotten or diseased*. Biblically, it was used to describe rotten fruit or fish. If you have ever smelled, touched or tasted either one, then you know how offensive and potentially harmful unwholesome words can be. Putrid food is good for only one thing -the TRASH CAN! They only tear down, hurt, destroy and offend.

If our words are negative, critical, complaining, cutting, accusing, belittling, sarcastic, nagging, exaggerated, vengeful, insulting, or threatening, then God says we must get rid of them. They are destructive! God has called us to strengthen the relationships we have with others. He wants us to build others up rather than weaken and destroy them.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Do my words build up the people in my life or tear them down?
- 2) Are my words what they need at this particular time?
- 3) Do my words benefit them in some way?

Obviously, it takes real effort at times to speak in a way that conveys tenderness, gentleness, kindness and love and still gets our point across. Some will protest by saying, "Sometimes I don't feel like being nice. Besides, it would be hypocritical to speak that way when I'm feeling nasty".

Note: Doing what God commands is not hypocrisy; it is obedience.

While it is helpful to understand exactly what we are feeling and admit it to ourselves, it is far more important to think and act properly. It is difficult to control

our feelings, but we can control our thoughts and actions. Thinking and acting properly will eventually transform our feelings. God says we are to hold back those *biting, smart alecky* remarks that seem to come to us automatically and respond *righteously*. That does not mean that we must soft-pedal, avoid or minimize a problem or issue in our attempt to build someone up. On the contrary, we must speak the truth, but in a loving way.

As Gods people we must take His Word **seriously** and begin to weigh our words. We must *weed out* those that damage people and cause relationships to crumble. We must replace them with words *that build up*, meet needs and give benefit to those who listen. We will be the beneficiaries in the end as we experience the joy of harmonious relationships.