

FLY PAPER

Proverbs 15:4 ... "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit."

Matthew 15:10-11 ... "When he had called the multitude to himself, he said to them, 'Hear and understand: not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.'"

When I was a kid we used Fly Paper on the farm to catch flies. There are different forms of it here; either a sheet or strip of paper or plastic covered in a thick, sticky glue. It has a scent that flies like and when they land on the Fly Paper, they get stuck to it and die. It is actually a pretty morbid story now that I think of it. But, Fly Paper has certain characteristics that we can find in our own lives.

The words we speak carry more impact than we realize. This is true both of words that are kind or unkind. You may use certain words you feel are not offensive, but that are very offensive to someone else. You may tell a joke you consider funny, but that someone else finds hurtful. Knowing this, it should help us consider our language and words very carefully. However, many people refuse to take responsibility for their words and blame the persons who are offended for being too sensitive. The problem can easily be demonstrated by Fly Paper. Anything you throw at that sticky sheet or strip, sticks and is impossible to remove. Words that you throw at people, may stick to them for the rest of their lives, not because they are overly sensitive, but because you are overly insensitive, perhaps momentarily unkind or even cruel.

Today's passage from Proverbs warns us that kind words give life, but hurtful words break peoples' spirits. Those breaks and hurts can last a lifetime. Jesus tells us in Matthew that what you say can defile you. The word "defile" is defined as filthy and polluted. Imagine that a single bad, unkind, obscene or profane word that you say in the presence of another person, makes you filthy and them wounded for years or even life. Words are powerful and although the speaker of bad words may confess their sin and be forgiven by the person to whom they were directed, the offense sticks to the victim like flies on Fly Paper.

If you are of the opinion that you are free to say anything you like and use any words you like, you may be defiling yourself and hurting others. Allow the definitions of today's words from scripture rattle around in your brain for a while; words such as perverse, broken spirit, defile, filthy, and polluted. How do you speak to your spouse, your children, co-workers, neighbors and others? Are you leaving a trail of tears, broken hearts, broken spirits, and a filthy legacy behind you? I wish I could retract some of the unkind words (though I've never cursed) I've spoken over the years, most of which were unintentional. I can only ask forgiveness and pray that the wounds I created with those words, eventually healed and were forgotten. We all have that responsibility.

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