

FEAR FACTOR
PROVERBS 15:1-33

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One thing that I really like about the Proverbs is that it forces us to take a look at what we say we believe, and then invites us to see if what we believe matches how we are living.

Take for example this morning's passage; the poet invites those of us who are believers to give ourselves a little test. All of us would want to say that our hearts belong to Jesus. However, if we were to examine the things that come out of our mouths and our behaviors, would we be able to say that based on this objective data, that our hearts belong to Jesus or that our hearts belong to this world?

These passages are always tough for me to preach, not because they are hard to understand, and not because they are hard to illustrate ... but they are hard for me to preach because God brings me face to face with what a hypocrite I am in so many areas of my life.

Based on today's passage, we should all be able to objectively look at our lives and see to whom our hearts belong. Are we really interested in God and His kingdom ... or are we more interested in entertaining ourselves.

Listen, we do have to be careful what comes out of our mouths, because they betray what's going on inside of our hearts. Let me give you an example: I'd like to say this happened at the church that was so tough, but it didn't; it happened right here at good old Devon Church.

One day, one of my friends came to church to preach for me. He preached for 15 minutes and he was done. At the end he explained, "I regret to inform you that my

dog, which is very fond of eating paper, ate that rest of my sermon.” After the service, while we were shaking hands with the people as they were leaving, I overheard one of our board members say to him, “Sir, if that dog of yours has any puppies, I sure would like to get one to give to our pastor.” I’m not mentioning any names, but I know which board member it was.

As we study through this morning’s passage, you will immediately be able to pick up on three themes. In the first section, words and themes related to how we speak dominate the verses. We are invited to examine the kinds of words that come out of our mouths.

The last section is dominated by the concept of fearing God, our behavior and attitudes should reflect a healthy fear of God’s judgment.

The second section is dominated by issues that have to do with our hearts. This middle section is meant to govern the first section dealing with our words, and the last section which has to do with our behavior. If we truly love and fear God, this should influence the way we think, the way we act, and the way we talk. The main idea of this morning’s passage is this: **OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS ARE GOOD INDICATORS OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR HEARTS.**

I. OUT OF OUR MOUTHS (Vs. 1-7)
HOW WE SPEAK SAYS A LOT ABOUT WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WE REALLY ARE.

The first section of this morning’s passage, verses 1-7, has to do with what comes out of our mouths: **HOW WE SPEAK SAYS A LOT ABOUT WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WE REALLY ARE.** You know, we spend an awful lot of time talking

about all kinds of sexual immorality, and rightfully so. I think that we as Christians behave not much differently from the world. Sexual immorality is a huge problem in the Christian church, so we should talk about it.

However, we should also discuss the way we talk. Listen to what Jesus said about our speech, “You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. A good person produces good words from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil words from an evil heart. And I tell you this that you must give an account on judgment day of every idle word you speak. The words you say now reflect your fate then; either you will be justified by them or you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:34-37 NLT).

We always quote the Apostle Paul when arguing against homosexual behavior. We say that homosexuals will not inherit the Kingdom of God, but if you were to look at the list, he also says that slanderers, gossips, liars, and those who cause dissension, are not going to inherit the Kingdom of God either. OOPS! Now we’re stepping on toes, aren’t we? And don’t forget sexually immoral heterosexual behavior as well. But, for now let’s just focus on speech.

A. PEACE (Vs. 1-2)

Verses 1-2 state that our mouths should be used to bring peace. If we were to combine these two verses, it becomes evident that wise people, godly people, know that we are called to speak the truth in love. You see, there are two parts there; yes, the godly person has truth to tell, but she always does it gently, and lovingly.

On the other hand, fools may or may not have the truth, but whatever is on their minds, we are sure to hear it. I love this description in the second line of verse 2.

Stupidity just gushes out of the fool's mouth. The word gushes usually has to do with liquid. Blood gushes out of a wound. Water gushes out of a broken faucet. What liquid gushes out of our mouths? ... Let's see ... Oh I know, its vomit. Stupid people, ungodly people, never hesitate to vomit out their opinions on you. Look at the result in the last half of verse 1; they stir up anger and their words are not helpful at all. I'm sure if you were to take a moment to think, we all know of people who just vomit out words. They simply speak what's on their minds without thinking. We've all been vomited on by these people, haven't we?

Those of us who have raised children recognize the truth of this immediately. We could be telling our kids all sorts of good and right things, yet they never listen to us. But, if one of their friends or some other adult told them the same thing, they would receive it and do it. Maybe that is because they felt the advice was given in love. We need to speak the truth, but it must be done in love. Quit vomiting on others.

B. ACCOUNTABILITY (V. 3)

Why? Look at verse 3: Because, we will be held accountable for every word. Keep in mind that basically this whole section of Proverbs has been built on antithetical parallelism. From way back in chapter 10 up through this entire chapter, the common technique of the poet has been to have the second line contradict the first line. But as we have seen, when there is an exception, we should pause to see what's going on. Verse 3 is one of these verses that the poet wants us to stop and ponder. Not only does it not follow the same poetic technique, it mixes the metaphors. These seven verses have to do with speech. We would expect the verse to read, "The ears of the LORD are everywhere." However, the poet says that the "eyes" of Jehovah are everywhere, and

further, His eyes are vigilant. They see absolutely everything. This watching is not just some onlooker who is merely observing, God watches with intent to judge. He will judge the wicked and the good. Here is what the poet is saying: God sees everything because He is omnipresent. He is everywhere at once. He sees and hears everything. But further, God is omniscient. He knows everything. He knows our thoughts and motives as well. We may be able to fool one another, we may even be able to fool ourselves, but God knows all, and will judge all. That's frightening. That should lead to some authentic fear of the **LORD**. When I think that God is going to hold me accountable for every stupid thing I've said, I feel almost totally hopeless.

C. LIFE (Vs. 4-7)

Verses 4-7 remind us that our speech was designed by God to bring life. In verse 7, the poet uses an interesting illustration where he says that if we use our speech to heal people our speech is equivalent to a tree of life. Tree of Life in the Bible reminds us of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden and The Tree of Life found in heaven described in the book of Revelation. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were forbidden to eat any more from the Tree of Life. It's interesting that the Tree of Life in Revelation brings life and healing to the nations. Look at verse 7: God's people are to spread knowledge.

If we were to take these two verses together, we could see that as believers, we have great potential to speak life and healing into people around us. We have a wonderful message for those who don't know Jesus. God wants to be in a relationship with them. When was the last time you told someone that Jesus loves them and wants to be in a right relationship with them? We have been given the privilege of speaking the message of eternal life and think of the privilege of being able to pray for one another.

We should use our mouths to pray for one another, to speak good words to one another, and to bring the Gospel message to the lost. How exciting is that?

Consider the option where fools reject this instruction. They have no desire to use their speech in godly ways. Fools are out to make themselves look good and important by running others down. I know that I am extremely good at being sarcastic and I have a natural talent for good comebacks and put-downs. But if I were to examine where that talent comes from, I don't think it takes much thought to come up with the source of that talent. It's Hell! That cleverness comes straight from Hell. It has gotten me into trouble in the past, and if I don't get rid of it, it is sure to get me in trouble in the future.

You know our parents used to always tell us, "If you don't have something good to say, don't say anything at all." That's pretty sound advice. Our mouths should be used for God's glory. That's what true wealth is all about, speaking healing, hope, love, and life into people around us. God will judge our every word. The truth about what we say is this: **HOW WE SPEAK SAYS A LOT ABOUT WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WE REALLY ARE.**

II. IN OUR HEARTS (Vs. 8-24) **WHAT WE SAY AND DO, REVEAL WHO OUR HEARTS BELONG TO.**

And that is a great segue into this next section. What comes out of our mouths is a good indicator of what's in our hearts. Verses 8-24 deal with this concept and develop it a little further: **WHAT WE SAY AND DO, REVEAL WHO OUR HEARTS BELONG TO.** Just take a quick peak back at verse 7 which makes the connection between what's on our lips, indicates what's in our hearts. Now this section will continue with the theme of what's in our hearts. The poet is using the word heart in

the sense that it is the location of who we are at our core. In Christian terms we could say, “Are we united with Christ or are we lost to the Devil?” We say things like, “I love you with all my heart.” That’s fine. That’s the idea. Who do we love with all our heart? If we indeed do love God with all our heart, then we should be characterized by hearts that are pure, happy, and humble.

A. A PURE HEART (Vs. 8-12)

Verses 8-12 command us to have a pure heart. Let me just take a quick minute to point out that in almost every use of the **LORDS** name in this chapter, it is used in a negative context. Three times the poet says, “The **LORD** detests,” something. Two times “The **LORD**” is used in the context of His seeing and judging. One time the **LORD** is tearing down something. One time the poet informs us that “The **LORD**” is far from the wicked. Even in its positive usage, it is used in the context of fearing “The **LORD**.” There is no fooling God. Not only does He see what we do, hear what we say, and know what we think, He knows our hearts. He knows whether or not we love Him. Look at verse 11: Death and Destruction lie open before God. In the Hebrew, two places of the dead are mentioned, Sheol and Abaddon. Death and Destruction are good, but the Hebrew has more to do with the afterlife. If God can see into Hell, how can He not be able to see what’s in our hearts? So God knows who loves Him and who doesn’t.

God loves the pure in heart. Look at verses 8-9: God loves those who pursue righteousness and the prayers of these righteous people please Him.

God detests the way of the wicked and the prayers of wicked people disgusts God. It’s almost as if when wicked people pray, God wants to puke. Have ever seen some of these Mafia movies where the mob boss and his family will be going to church

to baptize their children, while at the same time his men are out brutally murdering someone whom he ordered killed?

We quickly see the irony of that and know how really stupid that is. We can imagine this mob boss presenting his child to the Lord in baptism, and God puking all over him.

But can we see us coming to church to worship after a week of using our mouths for evil? Can the same mouth that gossiped all week, that spoke unkind words to others and about others, the same mouth that hurt people's feelings, the same mouth that cursed and talked dirty, come here and sing songs to God on Sunday?

Can the same body that committed adultery during the week, the same body that has been fornicating during the week, the same body that has hurt someone come here and raise their hands to worship on Sunday?

Can the same mind and attitudes that are judgmental, unforgiving, and bitter, come here Sunday and give glory to God?

The answer is no! Worship is not a Sunday event. Worship is a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week proposition. Let me tell all of us this right now and I'm especially including myself in this, since I'm the one preaching it, and I need to apply it to my life; If we are not living holy lives during the week, then it's no use to come to church on Sunday. Verses 8-9 say that God detests our way of life and He detests our sacrifices. When we come here on Sunday looking so holy after a week of living like crap, we make God want to vomit all over us. I know that strikes a lot of fear of The **LORD** in my heart. We have to be pure in heart.

B. A HAPPY HEART (Vs. 13-17)

Second, as verses 13-17 point out, we should be characterized by happy hearts. Let's look at the happy heart which is characterized by a cheerful face. A discerning heart is characterized by the desire to seek knowledge. The cheerful heart is characterized by continually feasting. Here is the sequence of verses 13, 14, and 15: Those who continually seek knowledge enjoy a continual feast from God, which leads to a cheerful face. A discerning heart leads to a cheerful heart, which ultimately gives us a happy heart.

On the other hand, fools feed on folly. This practiced folly leads to a wretched life, which ultimately leads to a crushed spirit. The words of a fool bring an oppressed heart which ultimately brings him nothing but heartache.

Let me just say that in general, if we are Christians and if we are walking in His will, we should be experiencing joy and happiness. Now notice, I said 'in general'. We will experience times of grief and times of suffering, but those times should be transitory. If we are not finding joy and happy hearts, we need to go back and ask who we are worshipping. The **LORD** detests the worship of the wicked because the wicked worship themselves, their own lusts, desires and their own agenda. Sometimes we don't experience happy hearts because we are worshipping ourselves rather than God.

You see, having a happy heart depends on knowing what's valuable. If we think something is valuable that God thinks is not valuable and won't give us, then we will never be happy. Fearing God and loving God is what brings true wealth. We can all understand these two verses, can't we? If we are with someone that we love and who loves us, it really doesn't matter what we do, where we go, or what we eat... we are happy. On the other hand, there are many men and women who stay married to wealthy

spouses, because they feel financially secure. But just ask them and they will tell you that there is no real happiness in their lives. The formula for the happy heart is simple; fear the Lord and worship Him alone. That brings love, peace, and joy. That's true wealth and no amount of money can buy that. If you are in a prolonged state of unhappiness, it's time to ask yourself why. Who are you worshipping and who are you living your life for?

C. A HUMBLE HEART (Vs. 18-24)

In addition to having a heart that is pure and happy, God blesses those who have a humble heart as described in verses 18-24. Humble people have teachable spirits. They desire to grow in holiness, to serve God, and to serve others. Humble people are characterized by patience, hard work, discipline, dedication to learning, and by listening to those who are godly. Humble people usually succeed in all that they do and they bring joy to their parents, to the people around them, and to God.

On the other hand, proud people are argumentative, they think they know it all, they don't listen to godly advice, and they usually end up by screwing up. They can truly sing with Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way."

It's important to guard our hearts. It is important to give ourselves totally to Jesus in love. Our hearts must be pure, happy, and humble. They will be that way only if Jesus lives there. If we say we are Christians then we are saying that Jesus lives in our hearts. If our hearts are not pure, happy, and humble, then how can we say that Jesus lives there? Verses 23 and 24 don't pull any punches. If we have pure hearts, and if we speak healing and life into people's lives, then we are headed for eternal life, but if we continue to worship ourselves, then we are headed for death and destruction. Here is the

truth of this section: **WHAT WE SAY AND DO, REVEAL WHO OUR HEARTS BELONG TO.**

III. THROUGH OUR BEHAVIOR (Vs. 25-33)
WHAT WE DO NEVER ESCAPES GOD’S NOTICE. HE WILL JUDGE US FOR WHAT WE DO.

I want God to change my heart. I desire to be pure in heart, happy in heart, and humble in heart. I desire to use my words for good and not for harm. I want to be the kind of person that God uses to speak healing and life into everyone I come in contact with. And even more, as verses 25-33 indicate, I want people to know my heart for God through my behavior. Again, this section describes fear of God as the motivation for right behavior: **WHAT WE DO NEVER ESCAPES GOD’S NOTICE. HE WILL JUDGE US FOR WHAT WE DO.** I know that some of us have come to believe in a cheap form of grace that has nothing to do with the Bible’s definition of grace or salvation by faith. Faith in the true biblical sense has a direct effect on our heart, on our mouth, on our attitude, and on our behavior. If our lives are characterized by immoral behavior, sinful talk, and harmful attitudes, then there is no reason to think we are saved.

A. GOD CARES WHAT WE DO (Vs. 25-26)

Let me give us a few examples that God cares what we do as described in verses 25-26: Again we see those frightening words, “The **LORD** detests.” He detests the thoughts of the wicked, and in verses 25 He connects the wicked with the proud. If we are proud, stubborn, and arrogant, then we are probably headed for hell. Let me give us a very clear example; I will allow you to take any sin and apply it to your own life. If you are sitting here this morning, and having an extramarital affair, then there is no reason for you to think that you are a Christian. There is no basis for you to say, “I am

saved.” If we continue to live in sin, and try to justify it in any way, then we should have no assurance of salvation. Biblical faith in Jesus, the kind that saves says, “I believe in Jesus and have committed myself to living life the way He commands in the Bible.” The Bible says to be sexually pure. If you refuse to be sexually pure, then you’re probably headed for Hell. The Bible says to forgive. If you continue to hold on to grudges, then you are probably not saved. Bible faith, saving faith, has a direct effect on our thoughts and behaviors. If we continue to be proud, stubborn, and arrogant, there is no reason to think we belong to Jesus. Verse 25 says that He tears down the proud man’s house and verse 26 says that He detests the thoughts of the wicked.

B. GOD TAKES A STAND (Vs. 27-29)

And make no mistake, verses 27-29 describe God as taking a stand, not only does He see, He takes a stand. People who are proud, greedy, and self-centered are headed for a real eye-opener. Look at verse 29 for a real frightening revelation. Often times we talk about ourselves in our proximity to God. We say things like, “I don’t feel close to God,” as if the proximity depends on us. The point is not that wicked people are far from God it is that God removes Himself from the wicked and God takes a stand far from them. You see if I’m far from God, then I can move close to Him. But if God is far from me, then if the gap is to be bridged, He has to move towards me. The Bible is very clear; God takes a stand against the proud, God takes a stand against the immoral, God takes a stand against those who oppress others, God takes a stand against the gossip or the judgmental and God takes a stand against the wicked.

C. GOD REWARDS (Vs. 30-33)

But as verses 30-33 demonstrate, God rewards those who humble themselves before Him. Those who listen to good godly teaching, those who give themselves to understanding Who God is and what He expects of us, become wise. That wisdom, that knowledge of Who God is and who we are leads us to humility. As we humble ourselves, and dedicate ourselves to serving God, our hearts are filled with joy, peace and contentment. This passage ends by putting it all in perspective. Life is not at all about you or me; life is all about God. We should first come to know Him through fear; He is the One Who sends people to Hell for eternity. We all deserve that fate, none of us are good. The only way to heaven and eternal life is by humbling ourselves before God. The faith we place in Him should change our thoughts and behaviors. Fear of the **LORD** is truly the beginning of wisdom: **WHAT WE DO NEVER ESCAPES GOD'S NOTICE. HE WILL JUDGE US FOR WHAT WE DO.**

Christianity is a religion of the heart. God created us to worship. Further, He created us with the ability to only worship one thing. Either we will worship Him ... or some false god. Either our heart belongs to Him ... or our heart belongs to this world. We have to choose and our thoughts, our words, our attitudes, and our behavior will reveal our heart: **OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS ARE GOOD INDICATORS OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR HEARTS.**

Phillips, in his commentary on Proverbs forces us to ask where our hearts are.

He says:

“This passage takes us into the daily round of a believer’s activities and into the various meetings and gatherings of God’s people. We are taken first to the prayer meeting: ‘The Lord is far from the wicked: but he hearth the prayer of the righteous’ (Proverbs 15:29). A prayer meeting is about the last gathering a wicked man wants to attend. He cannot think of anything he would like to do less. He will willingly go to the tavern, the show, and the

ball game. You will easily find him at his business, his favorite golf course, or his vacation site. He will gladly attend college and university functions or visit museums and art galleries. You will often find him in his living room, shouting himself hoarse in front of his television screen as he watches an exciting sports event. But if you invite him to a prayer meeting, he will respond incredulously, ‘You’ve got to be kidding!’ The proverb states that God is far from the wicked. This is much more serious than the wicked being far from God.”

As I studied through this passage all this week, I was forced to examine whether or not what I say I believe, is actually what I live: I find my heart extremely attracted to the things of this world, and my speech and my behavior bear that out. In reality, there is never a night that I could go to sleep and say, “God, I truly lived a righteous life today,” because I’m the guy that is more attracted to the ball game, the golf course, vacations, movies, and television, than I am to prayer meeting.

And I know that I can only change by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. I don’t know where you are, but I trust that you too have heard God speak.