



WHEN WORDS BECOME WEAPONS

Death and life are in the power of the tongue ... Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV)

“Sticks and stones may break my bones,” but words can crush my spirit, devastate my sense of self-worth, and destroy my dignity. Verbal abuse, unlike physical abuse, leaves no outward scars. It cannot be proven by photographs or other evidence. No one but the victim will ever fully know the pain and distress that it causes. Jesus understands. He discussed verbal abuse in connection with murder and anger (Matt. 5:22). We must take it as seriously as He did.

What does verbal abuse involve? Dr. Jay Grady provides this partial list:

Yelling - Accusing - Using sarcasm - Threatening - Insulting - Treating another with scorn - Intimidating - Humiliating - Putting another down - Ridiculing - Blaming - Disparaging another's ideas - Name-calling - Belittling - Rejecting another's opinion - Criticizing - Mocking - Trivializing another's desires.

You and I could use this checklist on ourselves. We could ask our spouses, children, and others, “Does my language or tone ever leave you feeling that I am accusing, using sarcasm, humiliating, etc.?” Regardless of our professed *intentions*, if our words have these perceived *effects*, we have no business using them! Parents, employers, church leaders, and others in leadership positions must be especially cautious, lest we appear to misuse our authority to take advantage of those under our direction. We must correct our children, for example, without derogatory, demeaning words that leave them emotionally crippled.

If my spouse, child, or another person answers, “Yes, I do feel that way (intimidated, etc.),” as a Christian I know I should say, “Please forgive me. I genuinely love and respect you. Tell me whenever you feel this way again.” According to Grady, “The underlying premise of verbal abuse is control, which is a means of holding power over another.” When I sincerely ask your forgiveness, I make it clear that I am not about control or manipulation. I set both of us free.

“The underlying premise of verbal abuse is control...”

Because I am a sinner, I can so easily justify my words, insisting I have done no wrong. I can say, “I was just joking!” See Prov. 26:18-19. I can say, “You're too sensitive!” I can say, “I didn't mean that the way you heard it!” But, because I truly want you to be blessed, I'll just say, “If it does not edify, help, and encourage you, I won't say it or do it. Period.”

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. Ephesians 4:29 (NKJV)

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