

Words Matter!

“Sticks and stone can break my bones but words can never hurt me!” Is that true?

The word “word” means, “a speech sound or series of speech sounds that symbolizes and communicates a meaning”; “a written or printed character or combination of characters representing a spoken word.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

This immediately implies that in order to communicate a meaning or idea, we must understand and agree upon the definition of the word being used. If not, what may it lead to?

- ◆ Definitions of words may change over time. The Webster Dictionary of 1828 defines “marriage” as, “the act of uniting a man and woman for life”. It is NOW defined as, “the state of being united as spouses in a consensual and contracted relationship recognized by law.” (no mention of gender)
- ◆ The word “love” has many uses in English (I love you. I love ice cream, I love my dog, etc.) In the Koine Greek (the common Greek used to write the New Testament), the word “love” is expressed in four different words (agape, phileo, eros, and storge). They all mean different things.
- ◆ The word “tolerance” may refer to the respecting of a person while agreeing to disagree on a point of view, idea or opinion. We tolerate the other person while disagreeing with their belief or opinion. Recently, it seems that “tolerance” means AGREEING with one another, otherwise you are not respecting the other person. This is not the truthful meaning of the word “tolerance.”
- ◆ Another example may be the word “equality.” Does this mean equal opportunity, or equal outcome? What is the difference. What does the Bible say on this? (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10-15)
- ◆ Our cultural “world-view” has changed over the years. As a culture, our view of the world used to be based on teachings and practices of the Bible. There is right and wrong; unchanging truth. Now, our culture has shifted to a world-view that is “relativistic;” one that contains no absolute truth, right or wrong. My “truth” may be different than your “truth.” (see John 14:6; Hebrews 13:8)

Words Matter. Some key concepts include:

- 1) When communicating with someone, it is essential to understand and agree upon the definition of a word to avoid misunderstandings, unnecessary arguments and damage to relationships. When needed, we should ask for clarification and seek understanding (1 Corinthians 14:9; Proverbs 4:5).
- 2) “Non-verbal” forms of communication are important (Proverbs 6:12-14):
 - 1) Facial expressions
 - 2) Body language
 - 3) Voice tone
- 3) It is very valuable to recognize that, even as followers of Jesus Christ, we will not agree on everything. We can compromise. However, we must also think about the “non-negotiable” differences of opinions. There are differences of opinion that may be deal breakers in a relationship such as whether or not it is OK to steal, have sex outside of marriage or to go against God’s teachings if we so desire. (1 Corinthians 5:11 as an example)
- 4) Why will some think what we say is foolish even if we agree on the words? (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Questions to consider:

- 1) When someone says something offensive, what is your first reaction? What might you do instead?
- 2) How can you encourage others to seek the truth of God’s Word and His plan for their lives?
- 3) How do words and expressions of judgement and condemnation shut down discussions?
- 4) Why is the manner and timing of our words important? (see Proverbs 25:11)
- 5) Are you “loving” in words alone or also in your choices and behavior? (see 1 John 3:18)

Better that love be without words, than words be without love!