The Explosive Nature of Our Word

I'm no explosives expert, but I watched enough Tom & Jerry cartoons as a kid to know that you don't mess around with dynamite. It was years before I realized dynamite has beneficial purposes in industries like mining and demolition. It's safe to say that only a cartoon cat or mouse would actually hold a stick of dynamite while he lights it.

Warfare is one area you wouldn't think to find dynamite as a weapon, but it's been tried. In 1890, the US Navy commissioned a cruiser for just such a purpose. The ship did not have the standard armaments; instead, it used dynamite guns, huge 15-inch pneumatic guns that could launch 550 pounds of dynamite.

The ship was aptly named the *USS Vesuvius*, named after the infamous volcano that erupted in 79 A.D., killing thousands. The *Vesuvius* joined the United States fleet on October 1, 1890 and was used in the Spanish-American War. It was certainly a unique vessel, launching hundreds of pounds of dynamite with pneumatic guns. It was also much quieter than the typical ship with its roar of gunfire.

That's the only plus the *Vesuvius* offered in battle. It was the only dynamite gun ship commissioned, and it didn't serve well because it was hard to aim and its range was too short.

But it's the safety factor that catches my attention. Yes, 550 pounds of dynamite could do some serious damage to an enemy, but it was just as dangerous to the crew on the *Vesuvius*. Dynamite could blow up inside its casing when being launched at a high speed. The sailors had to regulate the air pressure in the guns carefully. Very carefully.

One naval officer gave the Vesuvius little chance of surviving a battle. With a hull full of dynamite, one well-placed round from the enemy could quickly destroy the ship and anything around it. Since other ships could easily outmaneuver and outfight it, the *Vesuvius* was quite defenseless.

A ship that is as dangerous to its crew as it is to the enemy is not a good ship.

It's easy to toss sticks of criticism at others. If we don't like the way they look, drive, or chew their food, we criticize. If their choice of music or fashion is not up to our standard, we criticize. Criticism comes easy to us. We find the differences and assume our preferences are correct, so we criticize their poor choices.

We can also toss bombs of gossip. Gossip comes easy because in the process of talking others down, we are subtly lifting ourselves up. Besides, it's more fun to highlight someone's foibles than to talk about their virtues.

Such unChristlike behavior is not just harmful to those we seek to wound; it harms us as well. It's dynamite that is as dangerous to us as it is to those at whom we're tossing it.

Even the world acknowledges what our harsh words say about us as a person. Someone who is always critical gets the label of a negative person. People tire easily of being around negative people. Such constant negativity pulls them down, and who needs that?

When we gossip, people are less likely to trust us. We want our friends to be open with us, but who's going to open up in a private conversation if they think what they share will be passed on? Furthermore, gossips are not always perceived as truthful. How many times have you heard some gossip only to discover it was untrue or at least grossly exaggerated?

Even a pagan culture sees such poor use of our words as a liability. But look at this as a follower of Christ. If you are a believer, you *belong* to Christ and you represent Him.

- How do your words reflect Christ?
- Does your speech and conversations attract people to Christ? Or do your words leave people thinking there's no difference between a Christian and a non-Christian?

God had some serious words about our words:

- "I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:36-37).
- "I will destroy anyone who secretly slanders his neighbor" (Ps. 101:5).

To guard your words and ensure that everything you say is pleasing to Christ, let Ephesians 4:29 be your guide:

> "No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29).

Don't you prefer to hear words that build up rather than destroy? Before you light the fuse on what you're about to say, consider what harm it might do to others. And consider the harm it might do to you.

Let's start building instead.