

Proverbs-Tongue

As far as I can remember, I have only preached one message based primarily on a passage from Proverbs (31 Mother's Day)... Probably one of the unique things about Proverbs is the diversity and quantity of subject matter. In most cases, each proverb, designated by a separate verse number in our modern bibles, addresses a different subject or theme. This makes it somewhat difficult to put together a coherent, palatable message. But there are some recurring and related subjects throughout proverbs that can be assembled into a message format. That's what I would like to do these next few weeks, if the Lord is willing. Today's subject is the tongue/speech.

The tongue is one nasty little appendage. I would guess that it has done more broad and lasting harm than all the weapons ever fired at human beings. Wounds from a weapon either bring death and eternity or injuries that can certainly do a lot of physical damage. But, wound's from words can eat away at the heart and soul of a man until he is transformed into something or someone else he never would have dreamed of becoming. The old saying "sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me" is a lie probably generated by some cruel individual who got some sick pleasure out taunting others and wanted to relieve his perverted conscience.

The tongue can also be a mighty and powerful instrument for God's purposes and glory. It can lift the most noble and glorious praise to our Maker. It can proclaim the precious truths of scripture to those who are hungry for truth. It can be used to encourage the weak and suffering. And, the tongue is, and

always has been, the most valuable and effective instrument for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus had quite a bit to say about what we say. So did Paul and James. Let's see what Solomon, human author of Proverbs, identified in scripture as the wisest man in his day, has to say. Of course we know that this wisdom was a gift from God. And, even more importantly, Solomon was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Lessons from Proverbs on the tongue:

1. Be careful who you listen to.

⁴ A wicked person listens to malicious talk; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue. **Prov 17:4** (HCSB)

²⁴ Don't make friends with an angry man, and don't be a companion of a hot-tempered man, ²⁵ or you will learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare. **Prov 22:24-25** (HCSB)

Truth: Our words and actions, particularly those identified as sinful, are greatly influenced by who or what we choose to listen to. Who do you listen to? Ophra, Rush, Glenn, Sponge Bob The people you and I choose to expose our conscious and even subconscious minds to become the well, the composite source of what we think, who we are, and eventually what we say and do.

I've had some pretty heavy discussions with people who say, "I can watch what I want to watch, listen to what I want to listen,

and hang out with the people I want to hang out with. It won't affect or change who I am, what I believe, or what I say."

Bologna!!!

You were led to your first drink, cigarette, cuss word, by the words and influence of someone else. And, you were also just as likely influenced to read God's Word, pray, and come to Christ by the loving, encouraging words of a parent, friend or church leader.

2. Less is better

7 Excessive speech is not appropriate on a fool's lips; how much worse are lies for a ruler. **Prov 17:7 (HCSB)**

28 Even a fool is considered wise when he keeps silent, discerning, when he seals his lips. **Prov 17:28 (HCSB)**

Truth: Less is better/safer.

How many times, especially when involved in a heated verbal conflict, have you wished you had said more? How many times have you wished you had said less?

"I have often regretted my speech, never my silence." **Publius, a Greek sage.**

Choose your words carefully. Sometimes it is even better to say absolutely nothing. It is not necessarily best to always get the last word.... At times, Jesus was even silent.

19 When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise. **20** The tongue of the righteous is pure silver; the heart of the wicked is of little value. **21** The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense. **Prov 10:19-21 (HCSB)**

3. Choose words carefully/prayerfully

14 To start a conflict is to release a flood; stop the dispute before it breaks out. **Prov 17:14 (HCSB)**

19 One who loves to offend loves strife; **Prov 17:19a (HCSB)**

Truth: Choose your words carefully. Once you let them go, it is like a flood, a breached levy, a rain swollen river, a ruptured dam. The water begins to rush through in such an uncontrolled fashion that property damage and human life become endangered.

You can never bring back your words. You can't retrace your steps a pick up all the careless words you've strewn around, so chose them carefully.

27 The intelligent person restrains his words, and one who keeps a cool head is a man of understanding. **Prov 17:27 (HCSB)**

18 There is one who speaks rashly, like a piercing sword; but the tongue of the wise [brings] healing. **Prov 12:18 (HCSB)**

How many politicians have ruined their careers by a few thoughtless words? How many marriages have begun a downward slide by something said hastily or in anger? How many children's spirits have been crushed by criticism spoken in haste or anger?

Suggestion: Always before you speak, especially when you find yourself becoming potentially angry or judgmental, ask God to guide and bless your words. Ask for wisdom.

23 The one who guards his mouth and tongue keeps himself out of trouble. **Prov 21:23 (HCSB)**

4. Speak the truth

16 Six things the LORD hates; in fact, seven are detestable to Him: **17** arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, **18** a heart that plots wicked schemes, feet eager to run to evil, **19** a lying witness who gives false testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among brothers.^[2]
Prov 6:16-19 (HCSB)

19 Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue, only a moment. **Prov 12:18-19 (HCSB)**

When is it acceptable to lie? Never? What is a white lie? Fib? Partial truth? Tale? They are all futile attempts to soften the sinfulness of a lie. Yes, it is a sin to lie (command. #9). We figured out how to lie when we were very young to avoid getting in trouble. We figured out that it is "safer" to lie to our family and friends than tell them what they really need to hear. We lie

to our wives when we say “no that doesn’t make you look fat.” We lie to God when we say we have no sin.

How reliable are you if every other thing you say is a lie? One out of ten? One out of a hundred?

⁶ Making a fortune through a lying tongue is a vanishing mist, a pursuit of death. **Prov 21:6 (HCSB)**

²⁸ A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth causes ruin. **Prov 26:28 (HCSB)**

5. Always **Speak with kindness and gentleness**

⁴ The tongue that heals is a tree of life, but a devious tongue breaks the spirit. **Prov 15:4 (HCSB)**

²⁴ Pleasant words are a honeycomb: sweet to the taste and health to the body. **Prov 16:24 (HCSB)**

As far as we know, Jesus only spoke harshly to the corruption of those who turned the temple into a market place and to the hypocritical practices of the religious leaders of the Jews. All the rest of His ministry Jesus spoke with gentleness and kindness. He is our perfect model. So by His example, we should only raise our voices once or twice a year when righteous indignation leads to confront evil or hypocrisy. The rest of the time, kindness and gentleness should be the seasoning of our speech.

¹⁴ A man will be satisfied with good by the words of his mouth, **Prov 12:14a (HCSB)**

² From the words of his mouth, a man will enjoy good things, Prov 13:2a (HCSB)

6. Instruct/rebuke carefully

¹⁰ A rebuke cuts into a perceptive person more than a hundred lashes into a fool. Prov 17:10 (HCSB)

Parents, employers, teachers, and those who are in ministry leadership roles have many, or at least occasional, opportunities/responsibilities to instruct and/or rebuke. This is a necessary element of teaching and leading. Please understand though that rebuke must always be given in gentleness and love, never in anger, and always with corrective alternative instruction. You can't just say "what you did was bad, stupid or wrong." You must instruct in what is good and right. You must offer an alternative to the negative behavior. And by all means, don't forget to demonstrate by your own words and behavior what you are trying to teach.

²³ One who rebukes a person will later find more favor than one who flatters with his tongue.^[24] Prov 28:23 (HCSB)

Conclusion: We all have our moments of light and darkness, good and evil, godly and ungodly, especially when it comes to our mouths. How can we get **better control of our tongues** and use them for more good and God's glory?

1. See the power of the tongue.

21 Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. **Prov 18:21 (HCSB)**

2. Surrender your tongue and the heart and mind that control it to the Lord.

3. Slow down Don't be so quick to speak, condemn, judge, gossip, complain or criticize.

4. Speed up Be diligent and purposeful to speak more often with words of encouragement, kindness, praise, and thanks.

5. Supplicate Ask God to guide and bless every words that proceeds out of your mouth. It may seem a bit tedious at first, but the offences avoided and blessings achieved will be worth it.

6. Seek God's glory in everything you say.

7. Speak often of Christ as you go through your day. Remember your tongue, word of mouth, is the most effective tool you have to spread the good news of Jesus and promote God's kingdom agenda on the earth. Use it!