

September! Already? Yes! My, how time seems to fly by. The colors of leaves begin to change. Summer vacation (for some) changes and school ... at whatever level ... takes on new challenges. And with the passing time, we have birthdays ... and the former year passes, and a new one begins. Changes! But there are realities of life that never change. The Triune God ... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit NEVER changes. The reality that one day ... whenever ... we will have to face Him in eternity never changes. And, I am so thankful that His Word NEVER changes. It is true now, and forever. I want to share some truth from that Word that I trust will be both a challenge and a blessing.

LORD, KEEP MY WORDS SWEET TODAY;  
TOMORROW I MAY HAVE TO EAT THEM!

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris  
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“The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom.” (Proverbs 10:21)

The title of this Devotional is an expression spoken often by a dear Christian brother, and long-time preacher friend of mine. I recall him saying this more than once. This Devotional focuses on what we can learn about our spoken words from some of the Proverbs.

In his 1978 book, *Killing Giants – Pulling Thorns*, later published in 1980 by Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon, author and pastor Charles Swindoll included a statement that is etched on a gray slate tombstone on a windswept hillside in an English country churchyard:

Beneath this stone, a lump of clay,  
Lies Arabella Young,  
Who, on the twenty-fourth of May,  
Began to hold her tongue.

It is possible that the number one problem area of the human race lies in the misuse of the tongue. By the word tongue is meant the act of speaking, words that are spoken. Therefore, it is little wonder that one of the most frequently discussed subjects in the Book of Proverbs is the use of the tongue. The misuse of one's tongue, inappropriately spoken words, is not only a common problem, but also a crucial matter in life.

The tongue is capable of achieving either great good or great evil. The issue focuses on this key thought: “Of all the things that are absolutely impossible in life, there is one that looms larger than all others: A word spoken can never be unspoken.” Added to that is the corollary thought: “It is more difficult to undo damage done by the tongue, than to measure the good that can come from the tongue.”

Many people have developed little sayings that attempt to control how we are to consider our speech, our words, our evaluations, our characterizations, and so on. Most of us have heard some of them, and one that many people like to use goes something like this: “Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it necessary?”

At the same time, there is the possibility of such good coming from the appropriate use of the tongue that it is not only measurable but may produce positive results that have eternal dimensions. Therefore, the following poetic verse the Lord gave to me on June 30, 2006, is likewise true:

If by my tongue a life can be saved,  
a pathway to success with happiness paved;  
A future built of good embraced,  
a hurting heart with faith be graced;  
If by my tongue some bitter tears are dried,  
if love flows into a heart to abide;  
If a broken heart with hope is filled,  
then never let my pure words be stilled!

It isn't any wonder that King Solomon to whom God gave wisdom above any other person in the history of this world except our Lord Jesus Christ wrote these words: “A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.” (Proverbs 18:19)

To know and understand the sheer power of one's speech or the tongue as the Biblical term is used, is one of the most valuable lessons ever learned in life. It is James, the half-brother of our Lord who captures the heart of Solomon's teaching regarding how we use and misuse the tongue or how we use and misuse the ability to

speak words to one another or about one another. He wrote powerful words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (Read James 3:1-12) I challenge you to read that passage.

But for this study, what can we learn about the use of our words, the use of our tongue as it relates to life, to our conversations with God, to our conversations with others, and to our conversations about other people? In other words, if something we are about to say, disclose, announce, or declare does not meet those criteria, then it is probably best NOT to make the statement. There is another very interesting little proverb (as one might so designate it). I do not know from whom it originates but it goes like this: "Better to keep the mouth closed and be considered stupid, than to open it and remove all doubt!"

What are some of the helpful insights from the Book of Proverbs that related to our words – our speaking, that will help us? The following is only a very few of the available Proverbs in reference to the importance of taking care of and watching our speech! For the following Proverbs, I am quoting from one of the following: The New King James Version, The Holman Christian Standard Bible, The New International Version, or The New American Standard Bible.

1. Some of our words have the potential for good or for evil. The truth is that there is no real shortage of words. We speak when and where and to whom we desire. We may be uncomfortable speaking in front of a crowd. We prefer to speak to close friends and family members. We fail to realize the impact our words may have on ourselves and on those to whom or about whom we speak. But speak we do! Note the potential of words in just a few of the Proverbs.

"The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered." (Proverbs 11:9)

"There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health." (Proverbs 12:18)

"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit." (Proverbs 15:4)

"The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked." (Proverbs 10:11)

"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight." (Proverbs 12:22)

"The words of a man's mouth are deep waters, the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook." (Proverbs 18:4)

"Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones." (Proverbs 16:24)

2. Some words have no power when foolishly invested. The key here is to remember that just as there are some things money cannot buy there are some things that words cannot accomplish.

"Like the legs of the lame that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of fools." (Proverbs 26:7)

"Like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools." (Proverbs 26:9)

"In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty." (Proverbs 14:23)

"A servant will not be corrected by mere words; for though he understands, he will not respond." (Proverbs 29:19)

"Whoever falsely boasts of giving is like clouds and wind without water." (Proverbs 25:14)

3. Some words are better left unsaid than said. One of the major differences between a wise person and a fool is that the wise person exercises constraint in the use of words while the foolish person has a "hair-trigger" lip.

"In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise." (Proverbs 10:19)

"The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil." (Proverbs 15:28)

"He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit." (Proverbs 17:27)

"Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive." (Proverbs 17:28)

4. Some words are destructive and should never be spoken. Some words are forbidden by Scripture while others receive a word of caution from the Lord. Some Proverbs are blunt, but accurate and very instructive.

"A gossip goes around revealing a secret, but the trustworthy keeps a confidence." (Proverbs 11:13)

"Don't take a matter to court hastily, Otherwise, what will you do afterwards if your opponent humiliates you? Make your case with your opponent without revealing another's secret; otherwise, the one who hears will disgrace you, and you'll never live it down." (Proverbs 25:8-10)

"A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter." (Proverbs 11:13)

"A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape." (Proverbs 19:5)

"A disreputable witness scorns justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity." (Proverbs 19:28)

“A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin.” (Proverbs 26:28)

“Don’t let your mouth speak dishonestly, and don’t let your lips talk deviously.” (Proverbs 4:24)

5. Some words are like gold when wisely invested. Living in any kind of a societal setting, words become necessary vehicles of communication. They are called for, and in such instances, silence is far from golden. The Book of Proverbs gives to us some of those instances when our words are like gold.

“The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but the heart of the fool does not do so.” (Proverbs 15:7)

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.” (Proverbs 25:11-12)

“A true witness delivers souls, but a deceitful witness speaks lies.” (Proverbs 14:25)

“He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend.” (Proverbs 22:11)

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1)

I want to share with you the Scripture verse we quoted at the close of every Sunday evening meeting of our Church Youth Group when I was in Jr. High and Sr. High. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my Strength and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14; NKJV)

In 1739 Charles Wesley captured the meaning of these kinds of Proverbs and wrote it this way:

O FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES TO SING

1. O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise,  
The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!
2. Jesus! The name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease;  
‘Tis music in the sinner’s ears; ‘Tis life, and health, and peace.
3. He breaks the pow’r of cancelled sin; He sets the pris’ner free.  
His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me.
4. Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ;  
Ye blind, behold your Savior come; and leap, ye lame, for joy.
5. My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,  
To spread thro’ all the earth abroad, the honors of Thy name.