

The Tongue and What It Tells Us

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The tongue is perhaps your most powerful tool of influence. James tells us that it is “a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things” (James 3:5). It is like the tiny rudder that steers a great ship, or the small spark that ignites a massive forest fire.



James also tells us that the tongue is difficult to keep under control. We have all experienced that difficulty. Nevertheless, the way you use your tongue exposes something important about your heart. Consider what Jesus said to a group of Pharisees:

You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. (Matt. 12:34-35).

Jesus went on to say that our words are not only revealing, they are also recorded.

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matt. 12:36-37)

The person who believes what Jesus said about words and the judgment cannot help but be concerned about what proceeds out of his own mouth.

Please consider four truths from the book of Proverbs about the appropriate use of your tongue:

1. Your words should be carefully chosen.

“When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise” (Pr. 10:19). “He who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles” (Pr. 13:3). “He who restrains his words has knowledge” (Pr. 17:27). “Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Pr. 29:20). *Resolve to think carefully before you speak, and say less rather than more.*

2. Your words should bring comfort and joy to others. “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings

healing” (Pr. 12:18). “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Pr. 16:24). “A soothing tongue is a tree of life” (Pr. 15:4). “A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word” (Pr. 15:23). “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances” (Pr. 25:11). *Resolve to say only that which, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 4:29 “is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” Make your words memorable in positive ways.*

3. Your words should promote truth and instruct others. “The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding” (Pr. 10:21). “He who speaks truth tells what is right” (Pr. 12:17). “Truthful lips will be established forever” (Pr. 12:19). “The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable” (Pr. 15:2). “The lips of the wise spread knowledge” (Pr. 15:7). *Resolve to speak truth in every circumstance, and to patiently instruct even the most resistant person in the way of truth, the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. “By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone” (Pr. 25:15).*

4. Your words should be pure. “The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverted” (Pr. 10:32). “Pleasant words are pure” (Pr. 15:26). “He who is perverted in his language falls into evil” (Pr. 17:20). “He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend” (Pr. 22:11). “Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverted in his speech and is a fool” (Pr. 19:1). *Resolve to be pure in speech always, never allowing vulgarity, profanity, deceit, slander, gossip, bitterness, or hatred to flow from your tongue.*

Words can be pleasant or painful, soothing or scorching, righteous or revolting, truthful or treacherous, delightful or destructive. So how is it with you? Are the people around you pleased when you open your mouth, or do they often wish you had kept it shut? More importantly, when all is said and done, will God be pleased with the way you used your tongue, or will you be filled with remorse and shame?

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

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