

Intro:

Seen on a tombstone in an English churchyard

Beneath this stone, a lump of clay,
Lies Arabella Young,
Who, on the twenty-fourth of May,
Began to hold her tongue.¹

Is there anything more powerful than the tongue? Tongues build empires and can tear down cities. Tongues make marriages and tear apart homes.

Jas 3.5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

Once said, words cannot be taken back. It takes great wisdom to learn to control one's tongue.

What is wisdom? Spiritual skill – putting God's word in practice – going beyond the law

Proverbs, of course, has a great deal to say about the tongue and its use.

Pr 17.14 The beginning of strife is *like* letting out water,
So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

Pr 18.19 A brother offended is *harder to be won* than a strong city,
And contentions are like the bars of a citadel.

Proposition: Wisdom demands control of the tongue.²

I. Potent words: when you speak, be aware and beware

There are a great many verses in Proverbs that speak about the tongue. In this point I am going to belabor the point and quote many of them. In our later points, I will not quote as many. You need to note that since this is such a major concept of wisdom that there is much that God has to say about it, and not just in Proverbs.

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Killing Giants, Pulling Thorns*

² The topic and concept of this outline follow Robert Deffinbaugh's chapter "The Words of the Wise" in his e-book, Robert L. Deffinbaugh, *The Way of the Wise: Studies in the Book of Proverbs* (Biblical Studies Press, 1996), 76–82, www.bible.org.

A. The inescapable **power** of speech: Prov 18.21

Pr 18.21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruit.

B. The power of speech on those who **hear**

Pr 10.11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Pr 11.9 With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor,
But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

Pr 11.11 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.

Pr 12.18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,
But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Pr 12.25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down,
But a good word makes it glad.

Pr 13.14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,
To turn aside from the snares of death.

Pr 14.25 A truthful witness saves lives,
But he who utters lies is treacherous.

Pr 15.4 A soothing tongue is a tree of life,
But perversion in it crushes the spirit.

Pr 15.23 A man has joy in an apt answer,
And how delightful is a timely word!

Pr 16.24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb,
Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Pr 16.27 A worthless man digs up evil,
While his words are like scorching fire.

C. The power of speech on the **speaker**

Pr 12.13 An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,
But the righteous will escape from trouble.

Pr 12.19 Truthful lips will be established forever,
But a lying tongue is only for a moment.

Pr 13.2 From the fruit of a man's mouth he enjoys good,
But the desire of the treacherous is violence.

Pr 14.3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for *his* back,
But the lips of the wise will protect them.

Pr 17.20 He who has a crooked mind finds no good,
And he who is perverted in his language falls into evil.

Pr 18.7 A fool's mouth is his ruin,
And his lips are the snare of his soul.

Pr 18.20 With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be
satisfied;
He will be satisfied *with* the product of his lips.

When we were kids, we used to say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” Do you remember that?

How true is it?

How many of you have seen the movie, *Mutiny on the Bounty*? In that movie, Captain Bligh is depicted as a tyrant, a brutal dictator.

Reality is often different from movies, if you haven't noticed!

Captain Bligh was a student of Captain Cook. Both men were very concerned about the welfare of their men. They instituted measures to preserve the health of their men and the smooth running of their ship.

Bligh was not an overbearing disciplinarian. He had the power to punish with the lash, but used it less than other sea captains of his day.

What was his problem? His tongue.

When he and his ship left Tahiti with their cargo, ship's discipline had to be re-imposed. But a biographer makes this comment:

“With no curious islanders looking on, sometimes grieving when punishment was meted out, and drawing unpredictable conclusions, he could impose a simpler order within his wooden world, furthering his mission and at the same time whipping his officers back into shape. The men must relearn discipline while he relaxed his. And the goad for ship's discipline was his tongue, the deepest effects of which he was ever unaware.”³

II. Powerless words: when it is no use to speak

A. Words **from** a fool

Pr 26.7 *Like the legs which are useless to the lame,
So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.*

Pr 26.9 *Like a thorn which falls into the hand of a drunkard,
So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.*

B. Words **to** a fool

Pr 15.14 *The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge,
But the mouth of fools feeds on folly.*

Pr 17.4 *An evildoer listens to wicked lips;
A liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.*

Pr 17.10 *A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding
Than a hundred blows into a fool.*

Pr 23.9 *Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,
For he will despise the wisdom of your words.*

³ Sam McKinney, *Bligh! The Whole Story of the Mutiny Aboard H. M. S. Bounty* (Victoria, BC: Horsdal & Schubert, 1999) p. 68

C. Words with no **follow-through**

Pr 14.23 In all labor there is profit,
But mere talk *leads* only to poverty.

Pr 29.19 A slave will not be instructed by words *alone*;
For though he understands, there will be no response.

D. Words without **truth**

Pr 26.2 Like a sparrow in *its* flitting, like a swallow in *its* flying,
So a curse without cause does not alight.

Pr 24.12 If you say, "See, we did not know this,"
Does He not consider *it* who weighs the hearts?
And does He not know *it* who keeps your soul?
And will He not render to man according to his work?

Pr 26.25 When he speaks graciously, do not believe him,
For there are seven abominations in his heart.

Pr 26.26 *Though his* hatred covers itself with guile,
His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

E. Words **ill-timed**

Pr 27.14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the
morning,
It will be reckoned a curse to him.