



WISE SPEECH AND FOOLISH SPEECH
10:11, 13-14, 20-21, 31-32; 12:18, 23; 14:3; 15:2, 4,
7, 23, 28; 16:20, 23-24; 18:7, 20-21; 20:15; 21:23;
25:11; 29:11

The book of **Proverbs** and the Word of God in its entirety has much to say upon the subject of speech, the use of words, the governing and discipline of the tongue. **James** in particular speaks of the **power** and **dangers** of the “*tongue*” and the need to have it properly governed and disciplined [**James 3**]. An individual’s speech is a direct manifestation of the condition of their heart. It is the heart that affects the “*tongue*” [**Matthew 12:34; 15:10-11, 18-20**], and government of the heart leads to government of the tongue. Therefore if an individual’s “*religion*” does not have a direct influence upon his speech, such “*religion*” is vain [**James 1:26**], because it has not affected the heart!

Solomon declared in **Proverbs 18:21** that “*death and life are in the power of the tongue*” and **James** made reference to the **power**, the **impact** of the “*tongue*” by alluding to “*bits in the horse’s mouths*” [**James 3:3**] and ships “*turned with a very small helm*” [**James 3:4**]. THE POWER AND IMPACT OF SPEECH EMPHASIZES THE NECESSITY OF CONTROL! **Solomon** said in **Ecclesiastes 3:7** that there is “*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak*” and it is a mark of true wisdom to be able to discern the times! There are those **proverbs** that deal with the subject of **talkativeness** and **silence** [**10:19; 11:12; 13:3; 17:27-28**]. Speech has a powerful impact upon life, and the Bible teaches that our “*tongue*” (our words) can be used for both **evil** and **good** [**James 3:9-10**].

Included in evil speaking is:

Talebearing-This is “*malicious communication of secrets*” [**Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 11:13; 17:9; 18:8; 20:19; 26:20, 22**].

Whispering-This is **gossip** which is “*unconstrained conversation about other people*” It is “*the spreading of rumors*” [**Psalms 41:7; Proverbs 16:28**].

Slander-This is “*making false statements damaging to a person’s reputation*” [**Psalms 50:20; 101:5; Proverbs 10:18; 11:9**].

Backbiting-This is “*malicious talk about someone who is not present*” [**Proverbs 25:23**]. A “*backbiter*” would much rather talk about someone rather than to someone.

Hasty [**Proverbs 29:20**]. The one who is “*hasty in his words*” is the one who is quick to speak without much thought or forethought [**Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19**].

By evil speaking; **friends are separated** [**Proverbs 16:28; 17:9**], **deadly wounds are caused** [**Proverbs 18:8; 26:22**], **strife is stirred** [**Proverbs 26:20**], and there is **discord** [**Proverbs 6:19**]. Therefore the tongue that speaks evil is said to be as a **razor** [**Psalms 52:2**], as a **sword**

[Psalm 64:3], as an arrow [Jeremiah 9:8], and as fire and poison [James 3:6, 8]. From this, we see that sins of the tongue are hurtful [Jeremiah 18:18] and destructive, and are therefore called “*grievous* (irritating) *words*” [Proverbs 15:1]. *Paul* mentions some specific sins of the tongue in II Corinthians 12:20, and the *Psalmist* was determined not to sin with his tongue [Psalm 39:1].

On the other hand are “*the words of the wise*” and their words are gracious [Ecclesiastes 10:12], and stimulating and stabilizing [Ecclesiastes 12:11]. “*The words of the wise*” are referred to as “*the tongue of the learned*” [Isaiah 50:4]. The “*words of the wise*” will have the characteristics of “*wisdom*” [James 3:17]. The proverbs before us teach that the “*wise*” in heart govern their speech and speak that which is good and edifying, and as a result enjoy life [I Peter 3:10]. The “*foolish*” in heart fail to govern their words and speak that which is evil and destructive.

“The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked” [10:11].

The life within a child of God, and the *Holy Spirit* within are like a “*well of water*” [John 4:14; 7:38]. The mouth is the outlet of the heart, and the words of the “*righteous*” are said to be like “*a well of life*” That is, the words of the “*righteous*” flow to the benefit of others, and they refresh and make a difference to the surrounding barrenness. The words of the “*righteous*” are wholesome, cleansing, fruitful and reviving. In contrast is “*the mouth of the wicked*” which is harmful, detrimental and destructive.

“In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding. Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction” [10:13-14].

Those who possess spiritual insight, “*wisdom*” shall be found in their words [Psalm 37:30]. Their words will be spiritually instructive, and informing. In contrast is the one “*void of understanding*” in spiritual matters, and speaks that which is foolish and wicked to his own destruction. People of wisdom “*lay up knowledge*” by reading and studying the Word of God, by meditation on the things of God, and by hearing the Word of God, and by so doing are able to speak that which is beneficial and helpful to others, but in contrast is the “*foolish*” who speak that which is disastrous and deadly.

“The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom” [10:20-21].

The words of the “*just*” are compared to “*choice silver*” because they are precious (invaluable), they are profitable and beneficial to others, bringing enrichment! On the other hand, “*the heart of the wicked* (and therefore their words) *is little worth*” The words of the “*wicked*” are not profitable and beneficial to others and do not bring spiritual enrichment to others. In contrast, “*the lips of the righteous feed* (provide, strengthen, support, and encourage) *many*”

“The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness” [10:31-32].

“The mouth of the just bringeth forth (from the heart) wisdom” and it does so **freely**, **abundantly**, and **constantly** as the earth or a tree brings forth fruit. Contrary to this is the *“froward tongue”* The *“froward tongue”* speaks of words that are contrary to what God says, and therefore that which is displeasing to God. *Solomon* wrote in **Proverbs 6:12** *“A naughty (disobedient) person, a wicked (evil) man, walketh with a froward mouth”* and it is stated in **Proverbs 8:13** that God hates the *“froward mouth”* and in **Proverbs 4:24** we are to *“put away from thee a froward mouth”* That which is *“froward”* is unacceptable to God [**Proverbs 3:32; 11:20**], and the *“froward tongue”* are words that are unacceptable to God, but *“the righteous know what is acceptable”* and they speak that which is acceptable and pleasing to God.

“There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health” [12:18].

The phrase *“piercings of a sword”* speaks of that which is **excruciating**, **agonizing**, **hurtful**, and **destructive**, and has reference to the **unkind**, **inconsiderate**, and **thoughtless** words of the foolish [**Psalm 57:4; 59:7; 64:3**]. On the other hand, *“the tongue of the wise is health”* or a source of **strength** and **vigor**.

“A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness” [12:23].

A *“prudent man”* is one who shows care and thought, one who is judicious, and sensible, and such does not feel it necessary to tell everything that he knows. He does not speak needlessly and unseasonably, but waits for proper times, proper places, and proper people. He communicates knowledge when it is beneficial and necessary to do so. In contrast, *“fools”* proclaim whatever is in their hearts and minds.

“In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them” [14:3].

Solomon uses the figure of a *“rod”* to describe the *“foolish”* individual’s tongue or speech. Their words are like a *“rod”* in that they are **injurious** to others [**Jeremiah 18:18**]. *Eliphaz* spoke of the *“scourge (affliction, curse, and plague) of the tongue”* [**Job 5:21**]. In contrast to the **harmfulness** of the words of the foolish *“the lips of the wise shall preserve (protect and guard) them”* from doing mischief and hurt to others with their tongue, and from bringing mischief upon themselves.

“The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness” [15:2].

Knowledge in the heart of a wise man is a great blessing. He uses it correctly, for the **edification** and **benefit** of others, and when he speaks, he speaks with **knowledge** and

wisdom. He expresses what he knows **prudently** and **gracefully**, taking due care as to what, and when, and to whom, and in what manner he speaks. On the other hand, *“the mouth of fools poureth (gushes) out foolishness”* He speaks that which is **corrupt**, **evil**, and **vain**.

“A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perversness therein is a breach in the spirit” [15:4].

The word *“wholesome”* is that which *“promotes health or well being of mind or spirit”* A *“wholesome tongue”* is a **healing** tongue [Proverbs 12:18]. A *“wholesome tongue”* does not speak **error**, or **scandal**, or **blasphemy**, or that which is **unholy**, **foolish**, and **irreverent**. A *“wholesome tongue”* is like *“a tree of life”* that is, it is useful in preserving and promoting spiritual life! *“Wholesome”* words strengthen spiritually. On the other hand is the tongue that speaks perverse things (that which is improper, incorrect, opposing that which is right) and such a tongue *“is a breach in the spirit”* The word *“breach”* means *“to break, to rupture, or to tear”* Such a tongue **wounds**, **corrupts**, and **destroys!**

“The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so” [15:7].

The one who possesses spiritual wisdom and knowledge in the heart, will freely communicate that to others as they have opportunity. On the other hand, the *“foolish”* has not that which is good to *“disperse”* (scatter).

“A man bath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it” [15:23].

The child of God is to be always ready to give an answer concerning their hope [I Peter 3:15]. **Solomon** gives instruction upon this in **Proverbs 26:4-5** where the child of God is forbidden, and yet commanded to answer a fool. The child of God is not to answer in the same foolish manner as the fool [I Peter 3:9]. The concept taught in **Proverbs 26:4-5** is that at one time it may be wise to restrain from answering a fool, and at another time it may be wise to speak. A *“word spoken in due season”* is a word spoken just when needed! It is a word spoken in the right way and manner.

“The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things” [15:28].

Wise consideration is an important part of Christian character, and is so very important when it comes to the tongue. THE RIGHTEOUS IN HEART EXERCISE RESTRAINT OF THE TONGUE, *“but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things”* without much thought [Ecclesiastes 10:12-14]. THE USE OF THE TONGUE MUST BE A MATTER OF CAREFUL FORETHOUGHT AND DISCIPLINE!

“The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” [16:23-24].

The heart directs the speaking, and teaches the mouth **what** to speak, and **when** and **how** to speak. The phrase *“pleasant words”* has reference to those words which a wise heart teaches

the mouth to speak, and such are *“sweet* (savory and satisfying) *to the soul, and health* (strength and vigor) *to the bones”*

“A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul” [18:7].

A *“fool’s”* mouth is hasty to enter into contention [18:6], and ready to speak hurt [18:8]. A *“fool’s mouth”* is not only destructive to others, but to himself as well.

“A man’s belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” [18:20-21].

Verse 20 speaks of the fact that when a man’s words are wise, they are satisfying to himself. Verse 21 speaks of the **power** of the tongue *“death and life are in the power of the tongue”* A MAN MAY DO A GREAT DEAL OF GOOD, OR A GREAT DEAL OF HURT, BOTH TO OTHERS AND TO HIMSELF BY WHAT HE SPEAKS! There is a deadly power in **careless** words, in **false** words, and in words of **slander!** On the other hand, there is the power of life in **wise** words, in **gracious, comforting, and encouraging** words! They that love to use their speech in a way that brings about death, and they that love to use their words in a way that promotes life, both *“shall eat the fruit thereof”*

“There is gold, and multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel” [20:15].

There is gold in the world, and there are a multitude of rubies in the world, but the words of the wise are of far greater worth.

“Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles” [21:23].

The one who keeps his mouth and words from that which is **offensive** and **provoking** keeps his own person from much trouble.

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” [25:11].

A word that is **timely** and **properly** spoken as to **matter, method, time, place,** and **persons** is a beautiful thing! *“A word fitly spoken”* is an **appropriate** word, a word that is **suitable** to the occasion, and **proper.**

“A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards” [29:11].

A *“fool”* speaks what he knows, thinks, and intends, with no thought to edification and benefit to the hearers, he keeps talking until he has poured out all his foolishness. But a man of wisdom carefully considers, and is able to hold in what is not useful and beneficial.