

# OpenTheo

## Proverbs: The Tongue



### Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg delved into the various problems associated with speech according to the Book of Proverbs. The wise use of words can promote Christ's interests and establish the credibility and acceptability of the speaker in the eyes of people, while the opposite is true for the words of the wicked. The tongue is a sharp, two-edged sword that can either be a source of life or promote violence. Gregg stressed the importance of being mindful of the words we speak and using them to edify and impart grace to others.

### Transcript

The last topic we want to take in the Book of Proverbs has to do with the various problems associated with speech. It's amazing how something like words, which really don't have any physical existence, can do so many things, can accomplish so many things. You know the old thing children say, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words may never hurt me.

Well, sticks and stones are physical objects that can break your physical bones, but words can hurt you. Words can actually do a lot of harm, or they can do a lot of good. In fact, the harm that words can do is often considerably more devastating than breaking bones, which heal rather readily.

Many times the wounds that are inflicted by words are not so easily healed. And the tongue is, as Solomon says at one point in the Proverbs, a soft thing, a soft object, and yet it can break the bone itself. We say sticks and stones may break my bones, but actually Solomon said a soft tongue breaks the bone.

He's speaking figuratively, of course, but he is indicating that though the tongue is not a hard object, and though words themselves are not physical objects, that there is a need to be very careful about wielding such a tongue, such a sword. Jesus' words, coming out of his mouth, are likened to a sword in Scripture. In Revelation 19, we see him depicted as riding on a white horse with this sharp, two-edged sword coming out of his mouth, clearly a reference to his words.

And his word is the sharp, two-edged sword. We're told that in Hebrews 4.12 and also

Ephesians 6.17, that we take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And in Revelation, he has this sword coming out of his mouth, and with it he strikes the nations and defeats them with the words.

And we can see historically that it's been the word of God, it's been the gospel preached, the spoken word, that has in fact conquered a huge portion of the world so far. Starting out with only a few people in Jerusalem, now there are over a billion people who would call themselves Christians, probably a billion and a half the world over, that call themselves Christians, whether they're sincere or not, it's God's to judge. But the point here is that nothing but the word of God has done that.

Now, Islam, on the other hand, has spread very rapidly too, partly through just reproduction, because they have a lot of kids, but also by the sword. But the word of God, the kingdom of God has never been promoted by the sword. Yes, there have been crusades and such, but they never did promote the kingdom of God.

They are shameful things that we wish had never happened. They never did promote the interests of Christ. But the interests of Christ have been promoted worldwide without that, simply by the power of the word.

The power of the word to destroy, the power of the word to heal, to bring life, is this really an astonishing thing to contemplate. And Solomon had given a lot of thought to that himself, as any philosophical person would. How is it that just so many sounds, proceeding from the mouth, sounds that, if you had never become familiar with them, would sound as meaningless, as a bird chirping or a dog barking or whatever.

I mean, sounds which, if you don't know the language, mean nothing at all. Yet, if you do know their meaning, they have a tremendous impact to change the direction of your life, even to end life, Solomon said. And words are one of the things that are related, in my opinion, to what we are calling the pride of life.

Proud words are often spoken, boastful words, lying words. There are many things that are defects in speech that Solomon identifies. Not all of them, but many of them are directly related to pride.

A person's words are often a thing of which they are very proud. That's why they often do not wish to retract their statements. It's hard to get somebody to publicly retract what they've said or admit that they were wrong.

They don't want to change their words. Their words go out and they're as good as their word. They've spoken it, they mean it, so they think.

And then there's this attachment to those words, a proud attachment. They're my words, they're my thoughts. I stand or fall with the credibility and the acceptability of what I say in the eyes of people, in many cases.

There's a psalm, I don't remember which one, I'm sorry to say, I was hoping to remember it, where the arrogant rebels are said to say, Our words are our own, who is Lord over us? So, defects in speaking are often directly related to the issue of pride. There are no doubt some speaking sins that aren't related to pride. There are certainly things like gossip, being overly boisterous, drawing too much attention to oneself, flattery, boasting and so forth.

These are all different ways in which our speech is an expression of our pride. And so I have saved this subject, although a psalm has a great deal to say on it, to be considered under this other heading of the pride of life. Now, there's three headings I'd like to look at this subject under.

The power of words for good or ill, the defects in habits of speech, and the fruits of a well-bridled tongue. These are the headings. So, let's look at Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 11.

We're going to talk about the power of words for good or for ill, to do good or to do harm. In Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 11, it says, The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. I'm not sure what violence covers the mouth of the wicked means, frankly.

The phrase is somewhat obscure, but it's obvious that what he's saying is in contrast to the words of a mouth of a righteous person, which is a wellspring of life. People can draw life from the words of a righteous person speaking, but the opposite is true of that person who is wicked. His words are violent or may cause or incite violence.

So, words, it is interesting really, many times violence, riots, wars are caused by nothing else but words. Originally, of course, they're conducted with weapons and sticks and stones and guns and things like that. Violent behavior is conducted with physical objects, but often it begins because of words.

And absent those words, there would be no violence. Amazing how that is. Them's fighting words, you know.

But on the other hand, a person's speech is capable of ministering life to people, spiritual life, and maybe even physical life in some cases, because it is possible that a person can intervene and save a person's life that is endangered by diplomacy or by fair speech or by reasoning. Certainly, a defense attorney, by his words, may be able to save a person's life. So, words can actually give life physically and spiritually, or at least preserve it.

The words of a righteous person are well of life, are a source of life. But the words of the wicked can actually lead to violence. In chapter 18 and verse 21, I think many people are familiar with this verse, although sometimes I think it's misunderstood.

In 1821, it says, Now, death and life are in the power of the tongue. What does that mean? Within Christian circles, there's a popular teaching that you hear frequently, and even those who don't hold it sometimes understand this verse in the same sense as they use it. The word of faith people actually emphasize the power of words.

Words of faith, especially. That it is faith that has power, and it is the words that activate that power. So, they say that you will have whatever you say.

That's how much power they believe exists in words. And they often quote this, life and death are in the power of the tongue, and they suggest that what you say is going to contribute to your own life or your own death. That you can be well, if you speak words to that effect.

Or sick, if you speak words to that effect. You can be rich or poor, depending on how you confess. That the power of words is seen as almost a magical power.

I don't think that that's what Solomon has in mind. That is, I don't believe he's saying that by saying the right words, you can bring about, contrary to the laws of nature, some kind of supernatural thing. Now, I don't deny that in some cases, supernatural things have been accomplished by words.

Elijah, when he showed up at Ahab's door, said, there will be neither rain nor dew, until I say so. My word. And so also Jesus would often heal with a word, or cast out demons with a word.

Or conduct a miracle, stop the storm with a word. And his disciples did the same sometimes. But we can't always do that.

That's not a general power that exists in words all the time. It's not like everybody, Christian and non-Christian, can make supernatural things happen by their words. In the case of Jesus, or Elijah, or the apostles, the reason they were able to do things with their words is because they were given divine authority.

They were speaking with an authority that God had given them. And authoritative words bring about results. That's what the centurion said to Jesus when the man had a servant who was sick and dying.

And Jesus said, I'll go and heal him. And the man said, oh no, Lord, I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof. Just say the word, and I know he'll be healed.

He says, because I'm a man under authority, and I have authority over others. And I say to one, go do this, and he does it. And I say to him, do that, and he does it.

In other words, I know that a word spoken by a true authoritative person, a person with the authority to speak, that word gets things done. And he said, therefore, just say the

words, and I know my servant will be healed. And Jesus marveled at that man's faith, the Bible says.

And said, I've not seen such faith in all of Israel. The man was a Gentile. But the point here is that Jesus and others in authority can just speak.

And if their authority exists in reality and is recognized, then their words are obeyed. Their words make things happen. But not everybody has the authority to just command supernatural events.

That's a special authority Jesus had, or the prophets, or the apostles. And maybe there are people today who have that authority. In fact, we do have the authority to speak anything according to God's word, even though we're not maybe apostles or prophets.

We still have the authority to speak what God says to be true and declare it to be true. But I don't personally understand the scriptures, as some people do, who would say that we actually have been given sort of a carte blanche to write our own check with God, write our own ticket with God, and just say whatever we want. And if we say it with enough faith, then it happens.

Faith is not the same thing as authority. To have authority means you have to be authorized to say and do the things that you're doing. Having faith, in the Christian sense, means that you have the word of God giving you a promise and you believe his words.

But sometimes people understand faith to simply mean if you just have enough confidence in your own words. If you have enough confidence in the thing you want, and you just put enough positive thinking toward that and say it, then it'll happen. That's not the kind of power that's in the words.

That's not what Solomon means when he says life and death are in the power of the tongue. It's very probable that he's thinking of his own power, of his speaking, that when a criminal is brought before him for judgment, he, with his words, can either determine whether that man will live or die. This is probably how he's looking at it.

He's amazed. I'm sure he's marveling, as anyone would, as they contemplate what words are and what words do and what they accomplish. That just a word from the king can be a man's death, as David made very obvious.

The man who brought him news of Saul's death, David said, kill that man. He did. Saul said to Doeg, kill the priest, and he killed him.

The command of the king. There was a word of the king. And his words carried life or death to any person that was at his mercy.

And so, one needs to be cautious. Of course, we aren't kings and people aren't carrying out our commands in the way that people carry out kings' commands. But, in a sense, we do influence people by our words.

And it is entirely possible that people will believe what we say, or if we speak in an authoritative tone, even if we have no real authority. Just that an authoritative tone may intimidate people to do what we ask them to do. It's possible that words can influence people, even with the result of people living or dying, as a result of what we say.

Not always. He's not making a universal statement. He's just observing that there are times when this is even true.

Nothing other than a word is required to be the end of a man's life. In chapter 10, verses 20 and 21, Saul says, The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom.

Now, notice in verse 20 the contrast between the tongue of the righteous and the heart of the wicked. These are treated as if they were exact opposites. They're a contrast.

The tongue and the heart. We know from what Jesus said in Matthew 12, that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And, therefore, when a righteous person speaks righteously, it's coming from a righteous heart.

And a wicked person's heart is going to speak out wicked things. It's not spelled out in so many words in this verse, but it's given as the clear opposite. The words, or the tongue, of the righteous is contrasted with the heart of the wicked.

Of course, the heart of the wicked speaks also, but speaks wickedness. But the lips of the righteous feed many. When you speak, you can influence for good or for ill.

You can feed people. Now, of course, the only way I know that we feed people with our words correctly is spiritually. We feed people's minds.

We feed people's spirits with our words. But that is a real feeding. Even in the Old Testament, that was understood.

In Deuteronomy 8, God said, I fed you with manna and caused you hunger, that you might learn that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. People have to eat bread, but they also have to eat, as it were, the words of God. In Isaiah 55, 1 and 2, it says, Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the water, and he who has no money, come, buy and eat.

It says, hearken diligently to me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. And he says, why do you spend your money on that which is not bread,

and your labor on that which does not satisfy? So, he says, to hearken diligently to me, meaning listen to him when I say, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in fatness. He's talking about the need to not spend your money on what only, you know, is temporarily satisfying, but on that which is ultimately a value that feeds you in another way.

And so, in the Old Testament, as well as the New, there's a strong emphasis on eating the word of God. Jeremiah said, thy words were found, and I did eat them. And thy word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.

Job said, I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. The lips of the righteous can feed many, and Solomon is almost certainly thinking of spiritual feeding, that the righteous man can impart knowledge of the word of God, of God's laws, of that which is spiritually nourishing, so that people can be spiritually fed and spiritually healthy, as a result of having sat at the feet of somebody who spoke words that fed them. And you can definitely feel fed after you've been in the word of God, or heard the word of God read or expounded.

You can certainly feel almost full, in a sense, because you feel like you've been fed. In chapter 12, in verse 18, it says, There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. So, again, the power of words, for good or for ill.

To pierce somebody with a sword is a deadly activity. It's killing somebody. It's at least injuring somebody.

If you miss a vital organ, you might only injure them and wound them. But there are people whose words have that effect on the soul, on the mind, on the emotions, on the heart of an individual. Words of a certain type, spoken in a certain tone, carrying a certain spiritual dynamic, can do harm spiritually and emotionally to other people.

But the tongue of the wise promotes health. This is like what Paul said, that you let your speech be with grace, seasoned with salt. Remember that statement in Colossians? Though I don't have a reference, I think it might be Colossians 3 or 4, but Paul says, Let your speech be with grace, seasoned with salt, for you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

The wise person knows how to answer in a way to promote health. And that can even be an unpleasant message. It can be a message of reproof to somebody.

But spoken in a manner and with a spirit that promotes health, as opposed to harm. A relatively harmless comment stated at an inopportune time or in a wrong spirit can do a lot of harm, even though it's a relatively innocuous comment. The manner and the spirit in which something is spoken can harm, like the piercing of a sword.

But a wise person, even if they have to give a harsh comment, even if they have to give a harsh criticism, can speak in a way to promote health. So that Paul said in Galatians 6.1, Galatians 6.1, he said, Brethren, if any of you are overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. Now, he's talking about somebody going the wrong way and you have to bring correction.

Well, you come in a spirit of meekness. A humble reproof. A meek reproof.

Now, you have to be spiritual to do that. Paul said, you who are spiritual, do that. If you're not spiritual, don't appoint yourself to the assignment.

Because you may do more harm. But a spiritual person, a wise person, can promote health with their speech. Whereas a less wise person will do damage.

In chapter 26 of Proverbs, verses 18 and 19, it says, Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, I was only joking. So a man who lies and seeks to deceive someone but gets caught in his deception and then kind of tries to cover for himself and says, well, I wasn't serious about that, actually. I was only joking.

That person is doing more damage than he knows. He's like a madman hurling firebrands around. He's going to catch fires everywhere.

Words can catch things on fire. Spiritually speaking, James certainly said that, didn't he? In James chapter 3, James had quite a bit to say on the same topics that Proverbs speaks about. In fact, James might be viewed as sort of a New Testament counterpart to the book of Proverbs.

Like Proverbs, it has a number of the same subjects. It talks about wisdom, righteousness, the tongue. A great number of the subjects that Proverbs is focused upon, James is focused upon.

And like Proverbs, James kind of wanders from one subject to another and revisits it and so forth. It's kind of like a wisdom book in the New Testament, but it's an epistle. But in James chapter 3, just at the very beginning, it says in verse 2, For we all stumble in many things, but if anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man or maybe a mature man.

The word can be translated that way. Able also to bridle the whole body. If you can bridle your tongue, that's the hardest part to bridle.

In all likelihood, you've got the rest under control, too. One might argue that this means that don't expect to have your tongue bridled until you've got the rest of your body bridled, because it's going to be the hardest one. Although sometimes it's one of the



priorities, because you can do more harm with it if you don't bridle it.

Now, the Bible does say, actually James does, no man can tame the tongue. Actually, in this chapter, chapter 3, no one can tame the tongue. But you can bridle it.

Why can't you tame it? There are certain animals that can be bridled, but cannot be tamed. Everyone knows that you take a wild horse, and if you know how to do it, you can break its spirit and make it a domestic animal. You've tamed it.

You can do that with a lot of wild animals. I understand, from what I've been told, you can't do that with a zebra. A zebra is too wild.

It will not be broken. It cannot be tamed. It will always be a wild animal, even if you bring it into captivity.

It will always be wild, but it can be controlled. It can be bridled. Even a wild horse that has not yet been broken can be controlled by a skilled cowboy, if he puts a bridle on it, and he can make it do what he wants it to do.

Taming and bridling are two different things. When you tame something, you've changed its nature. You've changed its disposition.

You've really eliminated the danger that existed by its wild nature, by removing the wild nature and giving it a different nature. But bridling is just controlling. The bridled animal may still be wild, but it has no choice but to do what the person who put the bridle on it is required to do.

And so, James actually tells us you cannot tame it, but you can bridle it. Your tongue will never be safe to take the guard on. Because as long as there is any sin in us, and there will always be some, that will be in our heart, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

And so you have to be aware that as long as there is sin in your heart, even a little bit, it may express itself. And you can't really change the nature of the tongue, but you can put a watchman at your mouth and bridle your tongue. And he says the man who does bridle his tongue is a man who's got control of his whole body, because that's the hardest part to get control of.

Indeed, he says, we put bits in the horse's mouth that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships. Although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.

Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.

The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire

the course of nature, and it is set on fire by hell. And he says for every kind of beast and bird and reptile and creature of the sea is tamed, and has been tamed by mankind, but no man can tame the tongue. It's an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

And he goes on to speak more about it. But the point he makes there in verse 6 is the tongue is a fire. That's like Proverbs 26, 18.

Like a madman hurling around firebrands and coals, spreading fires, places. That's what it's like to have an unbridled tongue. To be a deceiver, to be casually deceiving people and just thinking if you get caught, you go, I was just joking, having an unbridled speech, unbehaving in your speech.

It's like causing fire. Now, why is it like that? Well, if you hurl a hot coal somewhere, it's going to catch things on fire. Once you've done that, you don't have to do anything more.

The fire will just spread. Once you light a fire, if there's kindling or if there's wood, then the fire will continue without your further involvement. Of course, if you have to feed the fire, if it's in a wood stove or something, you have to keep putting in fuel.

But he's talking about forest fires in James. Or a house fire. If you're throwing coals and firebrands around in a house, or anywhere else that there's flammable things, a field grain or anything, you're going to start a fire.

After that, it's out of your control. You've started something, but it has a life of its own, and it's a destructive life of its own. Once you pass on gossip, once you tell a lie, once you do anything that is verbally bad, once it's left your mouth, you can't get it all back.

You can't find all the people who may have heard it in the chain of gossip and retract it. Or even if you can, everyone's heard in courtroom scenes in movies, you know, how a witness says something, or a lawyer says something, and the other says, I object, and the judge says, sustained, and they say, okay, strike that from the record. Jury, disregard that remark.

Right. They're going to disregard that remark. They know something now, and they're supposed to pretend like they don't know it.

You can't take it back. Once you've said it, it's out there. And once it's out there, it may spread many places you never intended for it to go, because you can't control who's going to repeat it.

And to whom, and how many, and so forth. So, guarding the tongue is essential because of the life that your words have of their own after they leave your mouth. Once they've gone out into the atmosphere, once they've gone out into the forest, the fire can spread totally beyond any degree that you would have ever imagined or intended.

And the damage can be, of course, very devastating. So, what specifically are the wrong kinds of uses of the tongue? Many are identified in Proverbs. The first would be speaking too much.

In Proverbs 10, in verse 19, it says, In the multitude of words, that means if you talk a lot, sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The person who talks a lot is going to sin some, because it's not good to just start the motor and let it run of your mouth. Because it's going to just end up, if you don't weigh your words, things are going to come out that shouldn't be said.

Not necessarily wrong things that are in themselves untrue, but maybe things that are true that shouldn't be said, because it's not the right form, it's not the right hearers, it's not the right time. You just have to be wise in your speech. And that requires that you don't just set your mouth running and let it go.

And some people do in certain settings. They talk too much. I remember even reading Thomas Akempa many years ago, I've re-read him many times since, but I remember the first time I read *Of the Imitation of Christ*, there being a remark that he made, which almost everyone who's read the book says this remark struck them too, because it strikes so close to home.

And it was something like this, he says, how seldom we return from any conversation without having something to regret about what we said. And it was almost never that you have a lengthy conversation with someone that afterwards you think, I shouldn't have said that, or maybe I spoke too much, or maybe I shouldn't have mentioned this thing to them. Just because we speak unguardedly and we allow our mouths to run.

If there's a multitude of words someone said, there's going to be some things said that shouldn't have been said. So, it's possible to speak too much. And it's an honorable thing to know how to hold back.

Not say all you know. A lot of times we want to say all that we know because we think it will impress people that we know so much. About a situation.

About a particular scandal. About something. We know so much and we'd like people to know how much we know.

And we let it all hang out. And if you let it all hang out, some of what hangs out is going to be regretted later on. In chapter 17, verses 27 and 28, it says, He who has knowledge spares his words.

And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Not this nervous chatter. Sometimes we talk a lot just because we're feeling nervous.

But to have a calm spirit means that we can weigh our words before we speak them. And

only speak when we have something that will feed others or that will be useful to others. Remember what Paul said in Ephesians chapter 4? About that, verse 29, Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

When you speak, you should be mindful of the goal to speak what is good and edifying and that ministers grace to those who hear you. But that's not going to happen just naturally. You're going to have to bridle your speech.

You might say edifying and good things a lot of the time. But if you don't bridle your speech, you're going to counterbalance that with things that are unedifying. It's in Ecclesiastes that Stoltman said, that as dead flies in the apothecary's perfume cause the mixture to stink, so a little bit of folly in him who is reputed for wisdom is similar.

You know, just as you have a few flies, dead flies fall into the big vat of perfume, it causes the whole thing to stink. So if you in general have a reputation for being wise and having good things to say, once in a while if you have a little foolish things to say, it kind of spoils the whole thing. And so, guarding your words.

A man of understanding is of a calm spirit. He'll spare his words. It says in verse 28, even a fool is counted wise if he holds his peace.

A man who's foolish is not going to reveal it if he doesn't talk. He'll be regarded to be wise. A man who holds his peace will be given credit probably for being wiser than he might even be.

It says when he shuts his lips, he's considered perceptive. And everybody knows that old proverb, you know, it's better to keep your mouth shut and have everyone think you're a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. If you have foolishness in your mind and you say nothing, people might think you're a fool, but they won't be sure.

They might think you're wise, as Solomon says. But if you speak foolishly, then there'll be no question in anyone's mind that you are in fact a fool. In chapter 29, in verse 11, it says a fool vents all his feelings.

I think the King James says speaks all his mind or all his heart. But he ventilates, in other words. Anything he feels, he says it.

There's no restriction. There's no bridling. He just says anything he thinks.

He talks too much. A wise man holds his feelings back. That is, he doesn't say everything that comes to his mind.

A wise man pays attention to what's going through his mind and before he speaks, asks himself, is this something I really ought to say or not? If a person doesn't restrain his

speech, if a person does ventilate all his feelings verbally, he's going to be sinning. He's going to speak more than he should. He's going to speak too much.

And so one defect in our speaking is that we speak too much and simply ought to speak less. We simply ought to pay attention to what we're saying and ask ourselves before we say it, is this really necessary? Is this helpful? Will this minister grace to the hearers? Will it be edifying? Those habits are the habits of the wise and therefore will go a long way toward avoiding the damage that can be done by an injurious speaking habit. Now, in addition to speaking too much, it's possible to speak too soon.

We've seen this verse before in other connections, but in Proverbs chapter 18 and verse 13, Proverbs 18, 13, He who answers a matter before he hears it, it's a folly and a shame to him. Speaking too soon, giving an answer before you really have collected enough information to be able to give a responsible answer. Sometimes people are looking to you to either confirm their own ideas or to maybe if they see you as a wise counselor, to give them your own ideas and you've heard only part of the information.

But sometimes people are so confident in themselves, and this is pride. I'm so sure of my own opinion and my own first impressions, I go ahead and give a pronouncement when I haven't really taken in all the information. I'm not wise enough or humble enough to realize that until I have more information, I can't really answer this matter.

I have to just withhold comment until I hear both sides. Speaking too soon is a defect in speech habits. In chapter 10 and verse 14, Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.

That is, wise people store up knowledge because they hold it in. They store it within themselves. They will release it through their words in proper measure and at proper times, but wise people keep their knowledge under their hat until such a time as it's appropriate and necessary to use it.

In James chapter 1, on this point of speaking too soon, James chapter 1, verse 19, James said, Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to rap. Don't get angry when you hear a report unless you've heard enough of it to know the whole truth. Don't quickly get angry.

Don't quickly speak, but be quick to hear. He that answers before he hears is a fool. It's a folly to him to answer a matter before he hears it.

Therefore, be quicker to hear than to speak. As people have often pointed out, God gave you two ears and one mouth. And therefore, you probably should spend twice as much time listening as speaking.

In Proverbs 15, in verse 28, The heart of the righteous studies to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil. Again, the wicked man just pours out whatever comes to

his mind, does not restrain himself, does not hold back. The righteous man gives consideration before answering, studies to answer, means he holds back his speech until he's had time to give consideration to it, to whether this sustained the right thing, or this is something that needs to be said.

Otherwise, he's likely to speak too soon, and have reason to regret it later on. In Proverbs 29, verse 20, So do you see a man hasty in his words? There's more hope for a fool than for him. A one who speaks rapidly, quickly, prematurely, really.

It's not talking about how fast his words pour out, but how prematurely his speech is. Hasty in words means he speaks too soon, too prematurely. He has not really given it sufficient thought before answering.

So, there is the problem of speaking too much, there's also the problem of speaking too soon. Sometimes there are things that should be said, but they shouldn't be said as soon as they are said. A person needs to consider timing.

A third defect of speech is speaking too loudly. Now, this is not a sin in itself, but it can be either inappropriate, or an annoyance, or it can be motivated wrongly, because a lot of times, I mean, I have, like my younger son, just has a really loud voice, and just when he's speaking normally, he's not shouting, just when he's speaking normally, his voice can be heard throughout the house, just an interesting quality of voice that he has. Some people are just louder.

That's not a fault. That's basically the equipment that God gave them. And they probably aren't aware, because they're not really trying to protect their voice, they can just be heard.

Other people have really soft voices, they're hard to hear. This is not what we're talking about. We're not talking about a person's natural voices.

We're talking about their speech habits. And there are definitely people who lift up their voices in a group of people, at a party, or in a fellowship, or somewhere, and speak louder than everyone else, not because everyone needs to hear them, but because they want to be noticed. It is an attention-getting device.

Sometimes, really, for evil reasons, as in the case of the woman in chapter 7 and verse 11, the harlot. She is loud and rebellious. This is said about the seductress more than once, in Proverbs warnings to his son, in Proverbs chapter 9 and verse 13.

It says, A foolish woman is clamorous, that means loud, boisterous. She's simple and knows nothing. She's talking loudly because she's trying to hawk her wares to customers.

She wants her offer to be heard by passers-by, and so she talks louder. She wants

people to notice that she's there. She's got something for sale.

That, of course, is a special problem. I mean, not everyone who talks louder than they should is trying to seduce somebody to do something wrong, but there are certain people that you just know when they're in a crowd, they're going to be talking louder on purpose. Not just because they have a loud voice, but because they're clearly trying to make sure that other people notice them, hear their jokes, know how clever they are, how wise their statements are.

Even in speaking in a small circle of people, they'll be lifting up their voice so they can be heard further out in the room. I'm sure that everyone has seen this before. I certainly have seen it many times, and it's obvious in those cases that the person is not content to not be noticed.

They want everyone to know they're there. In 1 Peter 3, in contrast to this foolish woman that's described in Proverbs, 1 Peter 3, verse 4, speaking about godly women, it says, well, you've got to read verse 3 and 4. Do not let your beauty be the outward adorning of arranging the hair, wearing of gold, or putting on apparel. But let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

Now, a person who's quiet, you can be too quiet, frankly. You can be so quiet that people are nervous around you, like, how come they're not talking? But, on the other hand, some people are just quiet because they're unobtrusive. They're not trying to draw attention themselves.

They might speak when they have something wise to say, but they're quiet people. You know, the Anabaptists in the 16th century got a reputation for being quiet people. They were often referred to as the quiet of the land.

That was actually what people referred to them as, the quiet of the land. They didn't talk endlessly. They didn't talk a lot.

They didn't talk loudly most of the time. They tried to govern their speech and say only what needed to be said. Now, that doesn't mean that you should never say anything just for entertainment.

Sometimes the setting calls for that. It's just there to have fun. But even then, to always be the one who has to be heard above everybody else is not really a desirable trait.

And not only women are told to be of a meek and quiet spirit in 1 Peter 3, but in 1 Thessalonians 4. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is talking to men for the most part, probably to all people, but men primarily. And in 1 Thessalonians 4, 11th says that you should also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, to work with your own hands as we command you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, that you may

lack nothing. This is addressed to men.

So men and women both are encouraged to be quiet people, if possible. Simply because being quiet is a function of humility, and humility is always attractive and good and pleasing to God. Sometimes you have to raise your voice.

There's times when I have to speak in places where people are at a distance, I don't have amplification, and I have to raise my voice. I have never liked the quality of my voice when I have to raise it. My voice sounds thin and unattractive when I shout, and I know it does.

I've heard myself record it. I like it better when I have a microphone, because then I can talk like this, and everyone can hear me. I don't have to thin my voice out as it does when I'm trying to project it.

A projected voice loses pleasantness of quality. Sometimes it's necessary. You've got to shout to somebody to get their attention or to warn them about something, or to preach to a crowd or something.

There are times when speaking loudly is called for. Other times, it's just unnecessary and annoying. In chapter 27, in verse 14, Solomon said, He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted a curse to him.

So, blessing people even can be a curse to them if it's annoyingly loud and early in the morning. But whether it's early in the morning or not, sometimes people just like to have some quiet and some peace. And unnecessarily loud, this is irritating them.

I have to say, I'm an old man now. My nerves are not what they used to be. I used to like loud music and loud situations.

Now that I'm old, I kind of like a more tranquil environment. I like music to not be so loud. I find that some of the music I used to enjoy, if it's up at the volume I used to listen to it, it's very irritating to me.

And I have to assume that that's how a lot of people are. They're more sensitive to noise. And to maintain a quiet environment is actually pleasing.

It's always possible to bring in more sound, more volume when that's helpful and necessary or desirable to everyone present. But in general, to live a quiet life and to maintain a quietness of sorts is a pleasant and considerate thing. So, speech can be too loud.

Speech can be without tact. That is, it's just not sensitive to how they're going to take something you say. It says in Proverbs 10.32 The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse.



Now, a righteous person, their lips know what is an acceptable thing to say. What is tactfulness? You sometimes may have to say things that people would rather not hear. But if it's said with tact, if it's said with diplomacy, it nonetheless does not offend.

And it may penetrate and reach their mind and overcome their resistance even though it's something they'd prefer not to hear. A tactful word, a wise person has to speak acceptably. In Chapter 31 of Proverbs, we're talking about the virtuous woman.

One of the traits that it mentions about her is in verse 26, she opens her mouth with wisdom and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She is wise and kind in her manner of speech. That's tactful.

That's acceptable to people. If you speak something to someone, it should be because you think it's worth them hearing. It's worth them knowing.

If you're just trying to ventilate something, you don't care, you don't think they have any useful information, you shouldn't be speaking at all. That's too many words. But if you have something to say and you think people should know it and receive what you have to say, then you have to know how to say it in a way that's acceptable because if you say something that they need to hear, but it's tactless, it's undiplomatic, it's insensitive, they're not going to be receptive to what you have to say.

They may even be resistant more than they ordinarily would. Of course, there's lies. That's another kind of speech defect.

So far, everything we've talked about could be a defect even when you're telling the truth. You can still talk too much, speak too soon, speak too loudly, speak tactlessly, but there's also the problem of lying, speaking untruthfully. There's a number of Proverbs that talk about that defect of speech.

Chapter 4, verse 24 says, put away from you a deceitful mouth and put perverse lips far from you. A deceitful mouth, obviously, a habit of lying. In chapter 10, verse 18, whoever hides hatred has lying lips.

Whoever spreads slander is a fool. Hiding hatred apparently means that the person is indeed hateful, but they're concealing that. They don't want to let their true feelings known.

And so they lie and they deceive rather than represent their feelings correctly and truthfully. In chapter 12 of Proverbs, in verse 22, it says, lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight. Truth is a very high value to God.

Jesus is the truth. And therefore, we should have a high commitment to truth. The Bible seems to indicate that people who don't love the truth are not worthy of it.

In 2 Thessalonians, it speaks about people who did not receive the love of the truth, and therefore God sent them a strong delusion that they should believe the lie. People have no commitment to truth. That's another way of saying they have no integrity.

They don't deserve the truth. God will eventually let them be deceived. A person who loves the truth wants to always tell the truth and always wants to know the truth.

But if a person is compromised in their integrity, then they don't always tell the truth. But then they will not always know the truth either, because if you don't value the truth, God will not let you have it. And he will send strong delusions to those who don't love the truth.

So, lying lips, deceptive lips, are one of the speech defects Proverbs condemns. Another is gossip. Now, gossip is not always lying.

Gossip is often truth. Slander is another story. Slander is a form of gossip, of course, where you're saying something bad about somebody that isn't true.

But if you say something bad about something that is true, but it's the wrong setting, that's also wrong. There are times when you have to expose the misbehavior of somebody else to protect others from the harm they may do or something like that. There's times when you have to confront.

And there's times when you have to take it beyond just you and the person. Jesus said, if your brother sins against you, talk to him privately about it. If he repents, you've won your brother and don't let it go any further.

If he doesn't hear you, then take one or two others. Don't spread it around, but bring in more witnesses. He said in the mouth of two or more witnesses.

Every word will be established. And if the person doesn't hear the two or more witnesses, then you have to make it public. Take it to the church, he said.

Of course, that's Matthew 18, verses 15 through 17. So, Jesus said, when you know something bad about someone, go to them privately about it. Don't blab it.

If they won't hear you when you're alone, keep it still as private as you can. Bring two or three, but no more. If it has to go public, then it has to go public.

But anything other than that is gossip. Gossip, I think, is when you are talking about a person who is not present, say negative things about them to somebody else who is neither a part of the problem nor a part of the solution. Now, you may have to talk about somebody's errors to somebody who is a part of the problem with them or to somebody who is rightfully part of the solution who needs to intervene.

But sometimes we just like to talk bad about other people or, I mean, even true things.

Pass along juicy morsels of gossip as Proverbs refers to it. Why? Because one thing, it makes us feel better about ourselves.

If we can point out bad things about other people, we look better by contrast to them. But also, I think we have a sense that it will make us more popular if we can tell people things that are juicy that they will like to hear. Most people say they hate gossip.

And at least I've heard people say that. I feel like I hate gossip. I used to have breakfast regularly in a little cafe where a lot of local people in a small town would come in and you'd hear the people at the counter and they're all gossiping about someone else and talking about all the scandals about them.

And I think that is disgusting. I have no interest in hearing this. I wish these people wouldn't gossip.

It's so foul. But then, when I'm with my friends talking about somebody who's not there that we both know, there's that strong tendency to gossip. Or at least an appreciation for hearing it.

It's not so much that I have an urge to gossip, although sometimes I might. But there's something about hearing gossip. People like to hear gossip for whatever reasons.

Usually, I think, because they feel better about themselves when they can see somebody else's errors or flaws. And that's why these tabloids that sell at supermarkets sell so many, hundreds of millions of copies because they're all about gossip. And people like to hear gossip.

And Proverbs speaks about gossip in chapter 11 and verse 13. A tail-bearer. That's Solomon's word for gossip.

Somebody who bears a tale, a story, carries a story around. A tail-bearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter. In the course of people confiding in you, you will become privy to secrets.

Things that they trust you to know, but they don't want everybody to know. They consider you a friend, and they trust you with the information, but they wouldn't trust everybody with the information. Now, if you are a faithful person, you'll keep that information private.

If you're a tail-bearer, you'll reveal those secrets to others outside the circle. And many, many people are tail-bearers for whatever reasons. I've got to use my discretion about whether to pass along any information.

I know it may be sometimes necessary for me to pass along information, but I will seek not to do that when it's unnecessary or when it's inappropriate. Unfortunately, we love to

pass along information even when it's not necessary. In chapter 26, verse 17, the Proverbs says, He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel that's not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears.

A person who gets involved in someone else's story, in somebody else's quarrel, in somebody else's business that's not your business, that you have no place in, you're just kind of jumping in because you've got an interest in it. You get involved with somebody else's quarrel, you're taking on troubles that it'll be hard to extricate yourself from necessarily. It's like taking a dog by the ears.

I don't know where Solomon got that image, but I can imagine what it probably means. You don't usually take a dog by the ears, but if you're holding a dog by the ears, he's probably going to be angry. I'd be angry if you took me by the ears.

Dogs are even less kind than I am sometimes. It's likely to be wanting to bite you. But once you've got it by the ears, it can't.

But you can't let go. You've got the dog by the ears, but how do you ever get away from the dog? If you get involved in a quarrel that's not your own, you're putting yourself in a position that you may not be able to safely get out of again. And therefore, taking up a grievance, listening to somebody else's story about someone else's fault, and getting involved as a concerned party is not always the right thing for you to do.

In chapter 26, verse 20, it says, where there's no wood, the fire goes out, and where there's no tailbearer, strife ceases. Just like you let the fire go out by not adding more wood to it, you can see contention and strife disappear as soon as the tailbearer is removed from the situation. As charcoal is to burning coals and wood is to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.

The words of a tailbearer, verse 22, are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body. You know, it's tasty to hear gossip. It's something we have an appetite for hearing, but it's wrong.

It's unloving. Really, the way to know whether you're gossiping or not is to ask yourself, given the general rule, as you would, that men would do to you, do likewise to them, ask yourself if you were the person being talked about in the setting that you're hearing this information or about to share the information, if you were the subject of the story, the person whose story is being told, and you were not present, how would you want people to talk about it? In all likelihood, if it's not a flattering story, you'd prefer they wouldn't talk about it at all, and therefore just omit it. Or, if it has to be discussed, you'd want them to talk about it as charitably and as sympathetically as possible, as the facts would allow, at least.

The point is that when you talk about other people, you should put yourself in their

position and say, if I was them, how would I want them talking about me? If you follow that rule properly, you'll probably avoid gossip. Now, in addition to speaking too much and too soon and too loudly, there's such a thing as being too reticent to speak, not speaking when you should. That, too, is a speech defect, holding back when you should speak.

In chapter 28, verse 13, it says, He who covers his sins will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. There's times when you ought to fess up. There's times when you're being silent and you should be speaking up, admitting something that you know or something you've done when that information is necessary or appropriate, but maybe something you'd rather not mention.

In Psalm 32, when David's talking about his sin with Bathsheba and the torment of his soul that took place before he confessed it, he says in Psalm 32, 3, When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long, for day by day, excuse me, day and night, your hand was heavy upon me. My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin.

I finally spoke up and confessed, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. There's times when it's really necessary for you to say something.

Many times it's confessing your own involvement in something that was wrong or your own being privy to something that should be and must be made public, but if you don't speak up, then you are doing the wrong thing. Now, flattery is also a speech defect. Flattering someone is something you do when you're trying to manipulate them, win their favor, or get something out of them.

In chapter 29 of Proverbs, verse 5, it says, A man who flatters his neighbor spread the net for his feet. That is, a person who's flattering you is trying to trap you or get you to do something for them. Now, a genuine heartfelt compliment is not flattery.

Or deserved praise for something that was commendable is not flattery. Flattery is when somebody is just trying to butter you up. They're complimenting you profusely in ways that are maybe beyond what the truth is or simply beyond what is necessary.

They're not just encouraging you. They're manipulating you. There's plenty of flattery referred to in Proverbs.

In chapter 2, in verse 16, it says that the seductress is the one who flatters with her words. A lady who's trying to seduce Solomon's son would be one who uses flattery as a means of seduction. In chapter 6, likewise, in verse 24, again the seductress, to keep you from the evil woman from the flattering tongue of the seductress.

Chapter 7, verse 5, also refers to this flattering behavior of the immoral woman. That

they may keep you from the immoral woman from the seductress who flatters with her words. Flattery seems to be a common denominator in many of the discussions about how seduction takes place because flattery is a manipulative device to get somebody to behave a certain way that they might otherwise not.

People like to be stroked. People like to hear good things about themselves. People will often accommodate somebody who keeps complimenting them.

And people know that too and so they use flattery to manipulate. In chapter 26, verses 24 through 28, it says, he who hates disguises it with his lips and lays up deceit within himself. When he speaks kindly, do not believe him.

For there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the whole congregation. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it and he who rolls a stone will have it rolled back on him.

A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it and a flattering mouth works ruin. This whole section is about people trapping other people through their words and flattery being chief among them. Saying kind things when they really hate you is flattery.

It's insincere praise. Then in chapter 28, verse 23, 28, 23 says, he who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue. The person who flatters you is giving you strokes that you appreciate at the moment.

The person who rebukes you, it's fiends. You know, you'd rather not be rebuked at that moment. However, in retrospect, you appreciate more the person who spoke truthfully to you the words you needed to hear, even painfully.

Even at the risk of you not liking them, they told you the truth. You respect them more for that. And the person who flattered you, you have nothing but disgust for in hindsight, realizing that they were just sucking up.

They were just trying to be a, you know, a psychophant who's just trying to get something out of you by flattery. Now, there are a lot of positive things of the tongue in Proverbs. We don't have time to look at them all now.

We've run out of time. But if you look at your notes, the tongue is useful for encouragement of others, according to Proverbs 12, 25 and Proverbs 16, 24. With the tongue, we influence people's behavior.

We can change their whole life with our counsel or with our verbal influence in their life. Chapter 25, 15. We can make peace with our tongues where there's strife.

In Proverbs 15, 1. It says a soft answer turns away wrath. You can be a peacemaker with your tongue. You can feed others.

We already saw chapter 10, verse 21. The tongue of the righteous feeds many. There is a place mentioned in chapter 25 and verse 12 where a wise rebuke can be given with the tongue that is useful to the person who hears it.

And perhaps last of all, we can look at chapter 21, verse 23. It says whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles. Guarding your mouth is like bridling your tongue in James.

James says whoever does not bridle his tongue is foolish. We need to bridle our tongue. But guarding our mouth is the same thing.

Whoever guards his mouth, makes sure he weighs his thoughts before they become words and assesses whether words need to be spoken or not before he speaks will save himself many troubles. It's a habit we don't generally have by nature. Some people are reticent by nature.

Some people are shy and don't speak much. But most of us in the right setting will pour it all out, whatever is on our mind. We're full of the matter.

We want to ventilate. But we have to be careful about ventilation because it can be unrestrained and it can be ill-advised and it is something that can become a sin of the mouth. So we will end our studies in Proverbs.