

Study of Proverbs:

The Wise Man and the Tongue

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Introduction:

- A. The Bible makes a strong connection between the condition of the heart and the way a person handles their tongue.
- B. The principle stated by Jesus:
Matthew 12:34---“*For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*”
[Just like the contents of a pot boil over when heated too much, so so the mouth reveals what is in the heart. Example---what does a person do when he is excited about something in his heart? He talks about it, usually a lot. Whatever is in the heart tends to come out of the mouth, according to Jesus. Thus, you can learn much about the spiritual maturity of a person by how they control their tongue and by the content of what they say.]
- C. The principle illustrated by Isaiah:
Isaiah 6:5---“*Woe is me!*” *I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”*
[After his vision of the holiness of God, Isaiah realized his own sinfulness. The way he described his sinfulness and the sinfulness of the people was to cry out that he and they had “unclean lips.” Why? He was stating that the wicked condition of their hearts was revealed by their tongues. Thus, the tongue is the gateway that reveals what is in the heart.]
- D. The implications of the principle are given by James:
James 1:26---“*If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*”
[Wow! What a statement! James is saying nothing less than that one can do all kinds of religious things and appear to be religious, but it is all meaningless and a sham if he does not control his tongue. James is taking the principle taught by Jesus and illustrated by Isaiah to its logical conclusion. If the tongue reveals what is in the heart, then a person who can’t control their tongue is a person with a wicked heart, no matter what else religiously they may do.]

WITH ALL THIS IN MIND, IT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND WHY PROVERBS WOULD SHOW THE WISE MAN TO BE ONE WHO CONTROLS HIS TONGUE

AND THE FOOL TO BE ONE WHO DOESN'T. LET'S LOOK AT SOME OF THE PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES OF TONGUE-CONTROL CONTAINED IN PROVERBS.

Prov. 10:19---“*When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.*”

[The talkative person is a foolish person. He is enamored with his own opinions and loves to hear from himself more than anyone else. Such a person is generally a very poor listener and frequently misunderstands and misinterprets others because of it. It doesn't take long for him to run out of things to say and venture into gossip or just plain nonsense.]

Prov. 10:20---“*The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.*”

[Notice the connection this verse makes between the tongue and the heart. The tongue of the righteous reveals a heart that contains things of value. The tongue of the wicked reveals a heart of little value or use to others.]

Prov. 10:32---“*The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.*”

[A the heart of a righteous person is revealed in that he knows the proper and helpful thing to say at the proper time. He lips reveal an honest heart. The fool, on the other hand, reveals a heart of deceit and fraud in the things he says.]

Prov. 11:9---“*With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous escape.*”

[The Hebrew word for godless means “soiled.” It is often translated a “hypocrite.” The person who destroys his neighbor with his mouth is not a clean or pure person. He has a soiled heart. Slander is a heinous sin. Yet it is so widely practiced and tolerated among believers. It is among those things that believers are to put out of their lives, according to Ephesians 4:30-31.]

Prov. 11:12---“*A man who lacks judgement derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue.*”

[This is the fool who gossips, slanders and destroys with words, in contrast to the silence of the wise.]

Prov. 11:13---“*A gossip betrays confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.*”

[Someone who can't be trusted with confidential information has a heart that lacks integrity. It is a sad thing that there are few people today that you can trust to keep confidential

personal details shared with them. It is a mark of how weak spiritually the Christian community is.]

Prov. 13:3---“*He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.*”

[A man of good words prospers. He is well thought of. A person who is impulsive and rash with their speech quickly garners a poor reputation. They will not be turned to or given opportunities that a person of trustworthy speech will be. A rash, impulsive talker has his words come back to haunt him on a regular basis.]

Prov. 15:23---“*A man finds joy in giving an apt reply---and how good is a timely word.*”

[Joy comes to the wise man who is able to give intelligent, reasoned responses to questions asked. This is a person who is respected and turned to by others. He has the wisdom to speak the proper words at the proper time.]

Prov. 15:28---“*The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the fool gushes evil.*”

[Again, note the linkage between the tongue and the heart. A righteous person carefully considers the things he says. A fool, on the other hand, constantly blurts out words without thinking about what he is saying. A mark of spiritual immaturity is a person who does not guard what they say.]

Conclusion:

A foundational principle that should be learned and practiced by every Christian is contained in the following verse:

Ephesians 4:29---“*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*”

[The word for “unwholesome” refers to that which is “corrupt, foul, or rotten.” It was used to refer to spoiled or putrid food. The Christian’s speech should be constructive not destructive. It should focus on building others up, not tearing them down.]

Does your tongue verify your religion or discredit it?