

## Wise Speech and Foolish Speech

### I. Proverbs that deal with speech

#### A. From Prov 1-9

1. 2:11-12 - Discretion guards from those who speak perverse things
2. 1:8; 2:1; 4:3-4, 20; 5:1; etc. - A Father has wise words
3. 4:23-24 - Watch over your heart, but away a deceitful mouth
4. 5:3; 6:24 - Adulterous has smooth, sweet speech
5. 6:2 - If your words snared you into a debt, get out of it quickly
6. 6:12-15 - Calamity comes to those with a perverse mouth
7. 6:16-19 - God hates a lying tongue, and one that spreads strife
8. 8:4ff - Wisdom speaks truth, good, and brings life

#### B. From Prov 10:1ff

- 10:6 Blessings are on the head of the righteous,  
But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.<sup>50</sup>
- 10:8 The wise of heart will receive commands,  
But a babbling fool will be ruined.<sup>51</sup>
- 10:10 He who winks the eye causes trouble,  
And a babbling fool will be ruined.<sup>52</sup>
- 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,  
But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.<sup>53</sup>
- 10:13 On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found,  
But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.
- 10:14 Wise men store up knowledge,  
But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.
- 10:18 He who conceals hatred has lying lips,<sup>54</sup>  
And he who spreads slander is a fool.
- 10:19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,  
But he who restrains his lips is wise.
- 10:20 The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver,  
The heart of the wicked is worth little.
- 10:21 The lips of the righteous feed many,  
But fools die for lack of understanding.

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<sup>50</sup> Some translations read "but violence overwhelms/conceals the mouth of the wicked." The Hebrew reads, וּפִי רָשָׁעִים יְכַסֶּה חֶמֶס "but the mouth of wicked ones covers up violence." or it could read "but the mouth of wicked ones violence covers up." It depends on whether you take חֶמֶס "violence" to be the subject or פִּי רָשָׁעִים "the mouth of wicked ones" to be the subject. Both translations fit.

<sup>51</sup> The second line is, וְאִוִּיל שְׂפָתָיו יִלְבַּט "but the foolish of lips is cast down." Some translations have apparently preferred the Septuagint which reads, ὁ δὲ ἐλέγχων μετὰ παρρησίας εἰρηνοποιεῖ "But the one who reproves with confidence makes peace." At this point, I have no theory as to how the Septuagint came up with this reading.

<sup>52</sup> See footnote for 10:8. Identical phrase

<sup>53</sup> See footnote for 10:6. Identical phrase

<sup>54</sup> The first line is מְכַסֶּה שִׁנְאָה שְׂפָתַיִם שָׁקֶר "A concealer of hatred, lips of deception"

- 10:31 The mouth of the righteous flows<sup>55</sup> with wisdom,  
But the perverted tongue will be cut out.
- 10:32 The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable,  
But the mouth of the wicked what is perverted.
- 11:9 With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor,  
But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.
- 11:11 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,  
But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.
- 11:13 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets,  
But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.
- 12:6 The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood,  
But the mouth of the upright will deliver them.
- 12:13 An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,  
But the righteous will escape from trouble.
- 12:14 A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words,  
And the deeds of a man's hands will return to him.
- 12:16 A fool's anger is known at once,  
But a prudent man conceals dishonor.
- 12:17 He who speaks truth tells what is right,  
But a false witness, deceit.
- 12:18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,  
But the tongue of the wise brings healing.
- 12:19 Truthful lips will be established forever,  
But a lying tongue is only for a moment.
- 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,  
But those who deal faithfully are His delight.
- 12:23 A prudent man conceals knowledge,  
But the heart of fools proclaims folly.
- 12:25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down,  
But a good word makes it glad.
- 13:2 From the fruit of a man's mouth he enjoys good,  
But the desire of the treacherous is violence.
- 13:3 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life;  
The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
- 13:13 The one who despises the word will be in debt<sup>56</sup> to it,  
But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded.
- 14:3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his back,<sup>57</sup>  
But the lips of the wise will protect them.
- 14:5 A trustworthy witness will not lie, But a false witness utters lies.
- 14:7 Leave the presence of a fool,  
Or you will not discern words of knowledge.
- 14:23 In all labor there is profit, But mere talk leads only to poverty.
- 14:25 A truthful witness saves lives,

<sup>55</sup> נִזְבַּח *nûḥ* - To bear fruit. This line is literally, "The mouth of the righteous bears the fruit of wisdom"

<sup>56</sup> חָבַל *ḥābal* - To bind, or pledge. Could be rendered, "will be bound to it."

<sup>57</sup> חֶטֶר גִּאווָה - "rod of pride." The line in Hebrew is, "In the mouth of the foolish a rod of pride"

But he who utters lies is treacherous.  
 14:33 Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding,  
 But in the hearts of fools it is made known.<sup>58</sup>  
 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath,  
 But a harsh word stirs up anger.  
 15:2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable<sup>59</sup>,  
 But the mouth of fools spouts folly.  
 15:4 A soothing tongue is a tree of life,  
 But perversion<sup>60</sup> in it crushes the spirit.  
 15:7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge,  
 But the hearts of fools are not so.  
 15:23 A man has joy in an apt answer,  
 And how delightful is a timely word!  
 15:26 Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD,  
 But pleasant words are pure<sup>61</sup>.  
 15:28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer,  
 But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.  
 16:1 The plans of the heart belong to man,  
 But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.<sup>62</sup>  
 16:10 A divine decision is in the lips of the king;  
 His mouth should not err in judgment.  
 16:13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings,  
 And he who speaks right is loved.<sup>63</sup>  
 16:23 The heart of the wise instructs his mouth  
 And adds persuasiveness<sup>64</sup> to his lips.  
 16:24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb,  
 Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.  
 16:27 A worthless man digs<sup>65</sup> up evil,  
 While his words are like scorching fire.  
 16:28 A perverse man spreads strife,  
 And a slanderer separates intimate friends.  
 16:30 He who winks his eyes does so to devise perverse things;  
 He who compresses his lips brings evil to pass.  
 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,  
 And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.  
 17:4 An evildoer listens to wicked lips;  
 A liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.

<sup>58</sup> The Hebrew does not have a negative particle, so it is "it will be known." The Septuagint has the negative, so it reads, "it is not known."

<sup>59</sup> יָטַב *yāṭab* - Hiphil form, means "to cause to be good"

<sup>60</sup> סֵלֶף *seleṭ* - crookedness

<sup>61</sup> Some translations have "to Him," which is lacking in the Hebrew.

<sup>62</sup> The Hebrew word order is, "But from Yahweh is the answer of the tongue." The context will help to grasp the meaning of this saying.

<sup>63</sup> Hebrew reads אֱהָב *ehav* "he loves" rather than "is loved"

<sup>64</sup> לִקְחָהּ *leqah* - Learning, teaching

<sup>65</sup> כָּרַח *kārāḥ* - To dig (as in digging a well)

- 17:7 Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool,  
Much less are lying lips to a prince.
- 17:9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love,  
But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.
- 17:10 A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding  
Than a hundred blows into a fool.
- 17:14 The beginning of strife is like letting out water,  
So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.
- 17:20 He who has a crooked mind finds no good<sup>66</sup>,  
And he who is perverted in his language falls into evil.
- 17:27 He who restrains his words has knowledge,  
And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.
- 17:28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise;  
When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.
- 18:2 A fool does not delight in understanding,  
But only in revealing his own mind.
- 18:4 The words of a man's mouth are deep waters;  
The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.
- 18:6 A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows.
- 18:7 A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul.
- 18:8 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels,  
And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.
- 18:17 The first to plead his case seems right,  
Until another comes and examines him.
- 18:19 A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city,  
And contentions are like the bars of a citadel.
- 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.
- 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,  
And those who love it will eat its fruit.
- 19:1 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity  
Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.
- 20:6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,  
But who can find a trustworthy man?
- 20:15 There is gold, and an abundance of jewels;  
But the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing.<sup>67</sup>
- 20:19 He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets,  
Therefore do not associate with a gossip.
- 20:20 He who curses his father or his mother,  
His lamp will go out in time of darkness.
- 21:6 The acquisition of treasures by a lying tongue Is a fleeting vapor,  
the pursuit of death.

<sup>66</sup> Some translations read, "does not prosper." The Hebrew reads, **לֹא יִמְצָא טוֹב** "finds no good."

<sup>67</sup> The second line is, **וְכָלִי יִקָּר שְׂכָתִי-דָעַת**, "and a 'thing' of preciousness/honor are lips of knowledge." "Thing" is from **כָּלִי** which has a wide range of meaning. It refers to a weapon, implement, vessel, equipment, utensil.

- 21:23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue,  
Guards his soul from troubles.
- 22:10 Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out,  
Even strife and dishonor will cease.
- 22:11 He who loves purity of heart  
And whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.
- 23:9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,  
For he will despise the wisdom of your words.
- 25:8-10  
Do not go out hastily to argue your case;  
Otherwise, what will you do in the end,  
When your neighbor humiliates you?  
Argue your case with your neighbor,  
And do not reveal the secret of another,  
Or he who hears it will reproach you,  
And the evil report about you will not pass away.
- 25:11 Like apples of gold in settings of silver  
Is a word spoken in right circumstances.
- 25:12 Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold  
Is a wise reprover to a listening ear.
- 25:13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest  
Is a faithful messenger to those who send him,  
For he refreshes the soul of his masters.
- 25:14 Like clouds and wind without rain  
Is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely.
- 25:15 By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded,  
And a soft tongue breaks the bone.
- 25:18 Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow  
Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.
- 26:2 Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,  
So a curse without cause does not alight.
- 26:4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
Or you will also be like him.
- 26:5 Answer a fool as his folly deserves,  
That he not be wise in his own eyes.
- 26:7 Like the legs which are useless to the lame,  
So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.
- 26:9 Like a thorn which falls into the hand of a drunkard,  
So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.
- 26:24-26  
He who hates disguises it with his lips,  
But he lays up deceit in his heart.  
When he speaks graciously, do not believe him,  
For there are seven abominations in his heart.  
Though his hatred covers itself with guile,  
His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

26:28 A lying tongue hates those it crushes,  
 And a flattering mouth works ruin.  
 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow,  
 For you do not know what a day may bring forth.  
 27:2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;  
 A stranger, and not your own lips.  
 27:5 Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.  
 27:14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning,  
 It will be reckoned a curse to him.  
 28:13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,  
 But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.  
 28:23 He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor  
 Than he who flatters with the tongue.  
 29:5 A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps.  
 29:20 Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?  
 There is more hope for a fool than for him.  
 30:5-6  
 Every word of God is tested;  
 He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.  
 Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you,  
 and you will be proved a liar.  
 30:10 Do not slander a slave to his master,  
 Or he will curse you and you will be found guilty.  
 30:11 There is a kind of man who curses his father  
 And does not bless his mother.

## II. Principles related to speech

### A. Speech can bring life and wholeness

1. 10:11; 10:21; 12:14; 16:13; 17:10; 20:15
2. Other passages
  - a. 1 Thess 2:5-7
  - b. 1 Cor 2:13ff
  - c. 1 Cor 14:24

### B. Speech can destroy

1. 10:14; 11:9; 11:11; 12:13; 14:23; 16:27; 16:28; 20:20; 21:6
2. Other passages
  - a. Jas 3:1-12
  - b. 1 Tim 5:13

### C. Speech should be guarded with humility

1. 10:8; 10:19; 11:13; 12:16; 12:23; 13:3; 14:3; 14:33; 18:2; 18:7;  
 17:14; 18:17; 18:19; 25:8-10; 25:14; 27:2; 29:20
2. 21:23

3. Other passages
  - a. Jas 1:19, 26
  - b. Matt 12:36-37
  - c. Titus 1:10-13
- D. Speech should be honest
  1. 12:17; 12:19; 12:22; 14:5; 27:5; 28:13
  2. Other passages
    - a. Matt 5:33-37
    - b. Eph 4:24-25
- E. Speech should be righteous and gentle
  1. 12:17; 12:18; 15:1; 15:2; 15:4; 15:7; 16:24; 22:11; 25:15
  2. Other passages
    - a. 1 Pet 3:8-10
    - b. Jas 4:11
    - c. 1 Pet 3:15
    - d. Titus 2:1-8
- F. Speech can reveal a man's heart
  1. 10:20; 12:23; 16:23
  2. Luke 6:41-45
- G. Speech can conceal a man's heart
  1. 10:18; 20:6; 26:24-26
  2. Matt 5:8
- H. The appropriateness of words should be weighed
  1. 12:23; 15:23; 15:28; 16:30; 17:10; 17:28; 18:21; 25:11; 26:4-5; 27:14; 28:23 & 29:5
  2. Other passages
    - a. Jas 4:13-16
    - b. Col 4:6
    - c. 1 Tim 6:3-5
    - d. 1 John 3:18
- I. Foolish words should be avoided
  1. 14:7; 16:32; 17:4; 18:8; 26:7, 9;
  2. 2 Tim 2:14
- J. Speech is a good guide in choosing companions
  1. 14:7; 17:9; 20:19; 22:10; 23:9
  2. 1 Cor 5:11 - Note the word "reviler"

### III. Some other material related to speech

#### A. Some choice thoughts about the Tongue:

##### About Abrasive Speech

Many a blunt word has a sharp edge.

Keep your words soft and sweet; you never know when you may have to eat them.

##### About Gossip

Gossip is like soap -- mostly lye!

A gossip is just a fool with a keen sense of rumor.

##### About Profanity

Profanity is a public announcement of stupidity.

Swearing is a lax man's way of trying to be emphatic.

##### About telling the Truth

A lie is a coward's way of getting out of trouble.

Truth is as clear as a bell, but it isn't always tolled.

##### About Boasting

When you sing your own praise, you always get the tune too high.

Don't brag; it isn't the whistle that pulls the train.

For in many things we stumble. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. James 3:2  
- Our Daily Bread.

#### B. Some More Thoughts About Speech

It would be better to leave people wondering why you didn't talk than why you did.

First law of public speaking: Nice guys finish fast.

When all is said and done, there's a lot more said than done.

Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

#### C. A Story:

Mary had grown up knowing that she was different from the other kids, and she hated it. She was born with a cleft palate and had to bear the jokes and stares of cruel children who teased her non-stop about her misshaped lip, crooked nose, and garbled speech.

With all the teasing, Mary grew up hating the fact that she was "different". She was convinced that no one, outside her family, could ever love her ... until she entered Mrs. Leonard's class. Mrs. Leonard had a warm smile, a round face, and shiny brown hair. While everyone in her class liked her, Mary came to love Mrs. Leonard.

In the 1950's, it was common for teachers to give their children an annual hearing test. However, in Mary's case, in addition to her cleft palate, she was barely able to hear out of one ear. Determined not to let the other children have another "difference" to point out, she would cheat on the test each year. The "whisper test" was given by having a child walk to the classroom door, turn sideways, close one ear with a finger, and then repeat something which the teacher whispered.



Mary turned her bad ear towards her teacher and pretended to cover her good ear. She knew that teachers would often say things like, "The sky is blue," or "What color are your shoes?" But not on that day. Surely, God put seven words in Mrs. Leonard's mouth that changed Mary's life forever. When the "Whisper test" came, Mary heard the words: "I wish you were my little girl."

Dads, I wish there was some way that I could communicate to you the incredible blessing which affirming words impart to children. I wish, too, that you could sit in my office, when I counsel, and hear the terrible damage that individuals received from not hearing affirming words -- particularly affirming words from a father. While words from a godly teacher can melt a heart, words from a father can powerfully set the course of a life.

If affirming words were something rarely spoken in your home growing up, let me give you some tips on words and phrases that can brighten your own child's eyes and life. These words are easy to say to any child who comes into your life.

I'm proud of you, Way to go, Bingo ... you did it, Magnificent, I knew you could do it, What a good helper, You're very special to me, I trust you, What a treasure, Hurray for you, Beautiful work, You're a real trooper, Well done, That's so creative, You make my day, You're a joy, Give me a big hug, You're such a good listener, You figured it out, I love you, You're so responsible, You remembered, You're the best, You sure tried hard, I've got to hand it to you, I couldn't be prouder of you, You light up my day, I'm praying for you, You're wonderful, I'm behind you, You're so kind to your (brother/sister), You're God's special gift, I'm here for you.

John Trent, Ph.D., Vice President of Today's Family, Men of Action, Winter 1993, p. 5