

Proverbs: God's Wisdom on Speech
Select Verses in Proverbs

For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. (James 3:2)

Foolish Speech and Sinful Hearts

- Seven categories of sinful speech.

- The lying tongue.

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight. (12:22)

Why is lying so evil? Because true, sincere, honest words bind us together in community. True words make love and trust and intimacy possible. But false words conceal us from one another, even as we might go on faking community, role-playing community outwardly while something else is really going on in our hearts. And who wants that hypocrisy? There is nothing divine in it. (Ray Ortlund, Jr.)

- The critical tongue.

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (12:18)

- The gossiping tongue.

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. (11:13)

Gossip is not necessarily a false report, just an "against report." (Tim Keller)

- The combative tongue.

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling. (20:3)

- The boastful tongue.

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips. (27:2)

- The flattering tongue.

A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin. (26:28)

- The rash tongue.

When words are many, transgression is not lacking; whoever restrains his lips is prudent. (10:19)

- Application:

- We all have room to grow... (see James 3:2 above)

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Colossians 4:6)

- And we have to grow from the inside-out.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Matthew 12:34)

The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. (16:23)

Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:19-21)

I was born mortal by the natural process, and it is only a matter of time until I die. I have also been reborn immortal by sheer miracle, and it will never end. How did that happen for me? How does it happen for anyone? Through the gospel.... And to this day, whenever I hear the good news of God's grace, I come alive all over again. That is how God renews all of us. (Ray Ortlund, Jr.)

Changed Hearts and Wise Speech

- Wise speech honors the King by speaking truth.

Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a prince. (17:7)

- We should speak honestly with those around us, regardless of the personal cost.
- We should speak honestly about ourselves by confessing our sins & our unending need for Christ.
- We should speak honestly to the world by the preaching the gospel faithfully.
- We should speak honestly to others in the church by practicing transparency, humility, & church discipline.

- Wise speech protects the vulnerable by speaking out.

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. ⁹ Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. (31:8-9)

- Wise speech brings healing by speaking grace.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. (18:21)

- Healing what I have broken.

Fools mock at the guilt offering, but the upright enjoy acceptance. (14:9)

- Healing what others have broken.

To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is! (15:23)

God has put his Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation.... The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain; his brother's is sure. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. (12:25)