

The Tongue Unloosed

Proverbs 18:21

In school last year David learned some tongue twisters. One was about Better Botter who wanted to make some batter, but the butter she bought was bitter which made the batter bitter so she had to buy some better butter to make her batter better not bitter.

In the 1860's tongue twisters were used in school as a means of limbering up the tongue before reading exercises?

I would dare say that many don't need their tongue loosened up any more than it already is. There was a slogan that came out of WWII that says "loose lips sink ships." Some of you probably remember that. The phrase appeared on propaganda posters created by the war advertising council and was used by the U.S. Office on war information. It was a campaign to advise servicemen and other citizens to avoid careless talk concerning secure information that might be used by the enemy. The gist of this particular slogan was that one should avoid speaking about the movement of ships because it could be overheard by someone who would inform the enemy who could then intercept and sink ships.

Today we take that slogan to mean that we should be aware of unguarded or careless talk.

Words. They are a collection of letters that when put together form a unit of language. Our English language has 26 letters. The Greek language utilizes 24 letters and the Hebrew language 22. Some alphabets like the Sanskrit have over 50 letters. Randomly placed together they make no sense unless you are the artist formerly known as Prince who said in 1993 that his new name "is an unpronounceable symbol whose meaning has not been identified." Otherwise, letters form together words of expression and thought, ideas and emotions. When combined with other words

sentences are crafted that convey meaning and messages to their hearers. Some are whimsical, others are instructive, still others express anger or criticism or emotion of all kinds. They judge, they encourage, they express, they inform, they convey truth or they deceive. They can be misconstrued, misunderstood or even be misspoken.

I can tell you that it's time to hit the road and someone who is unfamiliar with that idiom may wonder why such an action is necessary since it seems quite obvious that hitting the road would be painful. Others understand it to mean that it's time to leave.

I love the short video clip of a German officer instructing his new subordinate in a radio control room. The officer leaves and the seaman sits down before the radio transmitter. Suddenly the radio crackles to life and it's a Mayday from a ship. The captain is frantically hollering "Mayday, Mayday, we're sinking, we're sinking." Looking around the radio operator wonders what he should do next as the message is repeated. Tentatively he flips the switch to respond and says, "Dis is da German Coast Guard. Vhat are you 'sinking' about?"

How carefully we need to exercise the use of the tongue in conveying our message so that others understand. How carefully we need to exercise the tongue so that it does not injure others. The tongue is both a dangerous weapon and a wonderful tool.

A king once asked his cook to fix the best dish he could think of. Later that day he was served a delicious meal of tongue. The next day the king asked him to fix the worst dish on the menu and again the cook fixed tongue. Perplexed, the king asked why the best and the worst meals were both made of tongue to which the cook replied that the tongue is the best of things when used wisely and lovingly, but it is the worst of things when used carelessly and unkindly.

When we say that a person has a sharp tongue it doesn't mean that they can cut steak with it or carve a piece of wood, but rather that the person has a critical, condescending or bitter way in which they speak. It is an important muscle that makes it capable for us to communicate with words. It not only helps to taste, chew and swallow food, it also helps us talk. When you visit the doctor and he asks you to stick out your tongue, he isn't telling you to do so in an act of defiance. When the doctor looks at the tongue, it reveals a lot about the physical condition of the body.

A smooth tongue indicates a B-12 deficiency.

A tongue with canker sores can be a sign of stress or fatigue.

An enlarged tongue may be due to a strep infection, leukemia or other type of cancer or hypothyroidism.

A red tongue may be a nutritional deficiency.

A white tongue shows thrush or dehydration.

Just as the physical tongue can reveal much about the physical state of the body, so metaphorically the tongue through what we say can reveal a lot about the spiritual state of the heart.

Jesus stated in **Matthew 15:18** that what comes out of the mouth comes from what is in the heart. How important it is then as we have seen in recent weeks that we should guard our hearts, from it we speak.

You may hear a person make a comment and then say something like "I'm not sure why I said that," or "I didn't mean to say it that way." The truth of the matter is yes, they did. What's in the heart is what will come out the mouth and according to **Matthew 12:36**, we will give account for our words. How true is the song "oh be careful little mouth what you say."

The Bible has a lot to say about many topics, but none perhaps as close to home as what it has to say about the tongue. Let's turn our attention to what Scripture has to say on this issue. **Proverbs 18:21**.

This passage reveals two fundamental truths related to the tongue that are explicitly evident in Scripture and worthy of our consideration.

The first is that a careless tongue loosened is destructive.

The second is that a careful tongue loosened is constructive.

I. A CARELESS TONGUE LOOSENED IS DESTRUCTIVE

Our verse tells us that the tongue has **"the power of death."**

I believe that it can mean several different things.

I believe that it can bring physical, emotional and spiritual death to a person. When a person spews a venomous verbal assault on someone, I believe something inside the person begins to die.

Emotionally they begin to die and the use of such words becomes easier and if I could dare say, even a bit more fluent. The person on whom it was intended also begins to die emotionally, physically and spiritually if they take to heart what was said.

This last week we were at the park and David was playing on the gym scape and some older boys called him a baby because he wouldn't do something they were challenging him to do. We had to comfort him by telling him that there will always be people who will call him names. The important thing to remember is what God thinks about him. The tongue can be so cruel.

When rock music was getting louder and wilder in the 1970's the soft musical tones of Richard and Karen Carpenter swept them into one of the best loved duets of all time. Their career had been well established when a reviewer called Karen "Richard's chubby sister." Those remarks led to an obsession with weight that developed into an eating disorder from which she died in 1993 from emetine cardio toxicity. The tongue has the power of death.

Emotional, spiritual and physical death can occur to an individual because of the tongue. Think for a

moment how the tongue was used to bring death when Judas conspired with the Pharisees to hand over Jesus to them. The words he used to identify Jesus to the guards were deceptive. In **Matthew 26:49**, just two words betrayed the Lord – **“Greetings, Rabbi.”** The word greeting is meant to be a term of welcome, but his intentions were far from honorable or looking forward to their meeting. His words had ulterior motives behind them and with his kiss it sealed the deal and Jesus was arrested. Judas later realized his error and went and hanged himself. The tongue brought death both to the Savior and to Judas.

False accusations condemned Joseph to prison. Peter’s words denied the Lord. In the last days before His return, Jesus said family members will betray one another. Pharaoh’s words destroyed his army when they were sent into the Red Sea and drowned. King Rehoboam accepted bad advice and the nation of Israel fell.

The tongue can bring death to individuals.
The tongue can bring death to families.
The tongue can bring death to businesses.
The tongue can bring death to a nation.

The tongue is destructive.

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

If you talk too much, it will eventually lead you to saying something that is wrong and will get you into trouble. On the other hand, the ability to keep silent shows wisdom.

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

The profane neighbor doesn’t care what he says about his neighbor. His intent is to harm you.

Proverbs 18:6-7 “A fool’s lips bring him strife,

and his mouth invites a beating. A fool’s mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul.”

A fool will speak thoughtlessly and what he says will always get him in trouble. The tongue will be our own undoing when the heart is not right with the Lord.

Let’s consider some verses that convey how the tongue can be destructive.

A. Lying Brings Destruction

1. Lying is an abomination to God

Proverbs 6:16-19 – among the seven character traits that God hates a lying tongue is among them. In **John 8:44** Jesus tells us the source of lying. It comes from the devil.

Proverbs 12:22 “The Lord detests lying lips.”

Proverbs 19:5 “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free.”

God hates lying and it will incur his judgment. The ninth commandment given was that we are not to bear false witness (**Exodus 20:16**) and in **Leviticus 19:11** we are told not to lie.

God hates it when we don’t tell the truth. It hurts our testimony, and the testimony of the church. It can be detrimental to others, even convict someone who is not guilty. **We always tell David to be honest with us and let him know that there may still be consequences for actions or words, but they won’t be as severe as if he had lied to us.**

2. Lying is fostered by hatred for others

Proverbs 10:18 “He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.” Some people inwardly dislike someone else and to cover up their feelings, they lie and say nice things when really in heart they hate them.

Haman is a great example. He was told to march Mordecai up and down the streets near the palace on the king's horse wearing royal robes and tell the onlookers that this is what the king delights to do for those he wishes to honor. Inside he hated Mordecai. He had to lie about his feelings.

Proverbs 26:24-26, 28 “Your enemy shakes hands and greets you like an old friend, all the while conniving against you. When he speaks warmly to you, don't believe him for a minute; he's just waiting for the chance to rip you off. No matter how cunningly he conceals his malice, eventually his evil will be exposed in public. Liars hate their victims; flatterers sabotage trust.” (The Message)

Lying is always associated in some way with the person who hates someone else.

3. Lying is short lived

Proverbs 12:19 “Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”

Proverbs 21:6 “A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.”

The truth of these verses is best seen in what may be one of the greatest lies in recent history. The scam perpetrated by Bernie Madoff is considered the largest financial fraud in U.S. history. Some \$65 billion dollars are estimated to have been lost to clients beginning as far back as the 1970's. He lived high on the hog but his lies were revealed and he was sentenced to 150 years in prison. A lying tongue truly is a deadly snare.

When we lie to a parent or to a boss or to a spouse or to a friend, we are lying to God and He hates it. It's destructive. It will be judged.

B. Flattery Brings Destruction

Flattery is a word that means to praise too much; to be insincere to win favor; to make someone appear

to be better or more attractive; to ingratiate oneself by praise and attention.

1. Guileful flattery

This is flatter that is deceptive.

Proverbs 26:28 “A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”

Proverbs 29:5 “Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.”

Their flattering words are selfishly motivated and bring ruin to themselves or their victims or both. Delilah's flattering words brought ruin to Samson. Satan's flattering words brought ruin to Eve.

2. Flattery is used effectively by an adulteress

Proverbs 6:24 “...The smooth tongue of the wayward wife.”

Proverbs 7:21 “With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk.”

Proverbs 7:27 reveals the end result of listening to her voice and following her path. **“Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.”**

The wisdom of Solomon is clear that there is a way that seems right to man, but its end is death. An adulterous woman isn't the only one who flatters, it could be the flattery of a commercial, or a friend or anything else that sweet talks you into something you shouldn't do.

Maybe lying and flattery aren't an issue for you, but how about this next one?

C. Tale-bearer (Gossip, Slanderer, Whisperer)

1. Tale-bearers betray and destroy friendships

This is a person who spreads gossip or rumors. They may be true. They may be fabricated. In

either case or in both cases, the intent is to harm the reputation of someone else. It's always malicious.

Proverbs 11:13 "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret."

Proverbs 16:28 "A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends."

Gossip divides spouses.

Gossip divides families.

Gossip divides businesses.

Gossip divides churches.

Gossip often times irreversibly damages the reputation of the individual about whom the rumor is being spread and the individual who began it.

Don't trust secrets to a person with that reputation.

2. Tale-bearers create strife

(Proverbs 16:27-30)

Proverbs 26:20-22 "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down. As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts."

Their intent is to stir up trouble.

3. Tale-bearers destroy character and integrity

Proverbs 11:9 "With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor."

Proverbs 26:9-10 "If you argue your case with a neighbor, do not betray another man's confidence, or he who hears it may shame you and you will never lose your bad reputation."

Message – "Word is sure to get around, and no one will trust you."

You can destroy your own character and the character of the one you are gossiping about.

D. Swearing

Proverbs 20:20 "If a man curses his father or mother, his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness."

The Old Testament law was very specific about this particular sin and brought the strictest of punishments on the child who cursed his parents. It was to bring the death penalty.

Just from a general observation and maybe you have noticed it as well, there is way too much disrespect by kids today toward their parents. They talk back and even curse them. It's wrong.

But swearing is wrong in any situation – at work, at home, in the car, on the ball field, with friends.

Ephesians 4:29 "Do not let any unwholesome (corrupt – KJV) 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 Message – "Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps.")

Where did Jesus say the things that come out of our mouth come from? They come from the heart.

In junior high I invited a friend from school to come out to camp for a day of sledding on the hill. We were walking to the hill talking and he swore and then said, "Oh, you'll have to pardon my French." Folks, there wasn't anything French about what he said.

It doesn't matter if you feel justifiably mad about something, it does not warrant swearing.

It doesn't matter if everyone else around talks that way, it is out of character for the Christian.

Unwholesome means something that is rotten or foul smelling. **If you have ever kept potatoes too long in a drawer, you know what rotten is. You have to throw it out.** That kind of language is totally out of character for the Christian.

Colossians 3:5a, 8 "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature...But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." (Emphasis added)

Ephesians 4:31 “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and *evil speaking*, be put away from you with all malice.”(Emphasis added)

A woman was told by her doctor that she had a serious throat condition which would require complete rest of the vocal chords for 6 months. She was told she could not talk during that entire time. (Some of you men might be saying amen to that.) With a husband and 6 children it seemed impossible, but she would do what she was told. When she needed the kids she would blow a whistle and then she would write things on a pad of paper.

After six months, her voice came back. When asked what it was like to communicate only in writing, she said: “You’d be surprised how many notes I crumpled up and threw into the trash before I gave them to anyone. Seeing my words before anyone heard them had an effect that I don’t think I can ever forget.”

A careless tongue is destructive. It can be wicked and sharp. It has the potential to do irreparable damage to the emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of an individual, both through what is said and how it is said. That’s why Scripture has so much to say about the tongue. Yet, it also has the capacity to be constructive.

II. A CAREFUL TONGUE LOOSENED IS CONSTRUCTIVE

Our verse not only reveals that the tongue can bring death but it also can bring life.

18:21 “The tongue has the power of life...”

A. A Constructive Tongue Edifies Others

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.*”

(Emphasis added)

The thought is for us to speak to others what will encourage them and build them up, words that will help them mature in their faith, words that will be beneficial, words that will build up not tear down. The verse also suggests that our words should be appropriate for the moment – “*according to their needs.*” They should always be fitting for the situation.

Proverbs 25:11 “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.”

Proverbs 15:23 “A man finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word!”

This past week I received a card that many of you signed expressing your love and prayers as I await decisions about treatment for my back. They were just what I needed at just the right time.

Colossians 4:5-6 “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

In whatever conversations you find yourself, whether on the phone, in person, texting, on facebook, consider your words to act like salt. Salt preserves and brings out flavor in foods. Let your words be a preservative. Let them be wholesome. That you belong to Christ should be evident in what you say.

Our words of grace should not only be spoken in truth but also spoken with love. Think for a moment about your conversations this past week. Were your words truthful and were they spoken in love? Remember, the idea is that our words should build others up not tear them down. A powerful motivation not to speak unwholesome words is so that we don’t grieve the Holy Spirit.

B. A Constructive Tongue Evangelizes Others

Our verse states that the tongue brings life. What we say lifts the spirits of others. **Mark Twain once said that he could live two months on one compliment.** Words are like water to a thirsty person. They refresh our spirit.

But the greater life that can be given through the tongue is eternal life. Paul encourages the Philippians to hold out to others the word of life. The message of eternal hope and salvation has been given to us to proclaim to others. The command came from Christ Himself to His followers that we carry the light of the gospel to everyone everywhere.

Acts 1:8 tells us that the empowering Holy Spirit will help us be His witnesses, His voices to a lost world to teach of His saving grace. Our tongue proclaims the truth of the gospel. And it is through our life example in our walk and in our word that we validate its truth. People will not believe what we say if other things we say aren't wholesome.

But the tongue not only tells, it also testifies that we received this gift of salvation.

Romans 10:9-10 “**That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.**”

Through our tongue we edify.
Through our tongue we evangelize.
Through our tongue we elicit praise.

C. A Constructive Tongue Elicits Praise to God

Romans 15:5-6 “**may the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” (Emphasis added)

Revelation 5:13 “**Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise an honor and glory and power, forever and ever!’”**

Jesus was right when He said that out of the same mouth we praise God and curse man. On one occasion when asked who the disciples thought He was Peter said He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. In this statement he gave praise to God. On another occasion when given the same opportunity, he denied that he even knew Christ.

Let us loose our tongue to give God praise.

Our tongue can be critical, condescending, and careless. It can also be caring, comforting and compassionate. It begins in the heart. Loosen up your tongue, but not to be destructive. Let it be constructive to build others up, tells others about Christ, confess your own faith in Him, and praise the very God who created your mouth. **James 3** tells us we can tame every kind of animal there is but we cannot tame the tongue. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit can we reign it in.

David's simple prayer in **Psalms 141:3** is perhaps the best one we can pray this week for our tongue. **“Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”**

Here's a good acronym I got from another Pastor. Use the word “THINK” before you speak.

Is what I'm about to say true?
Is what I'm about to say helpful?
Is what I'm about to say inspiring?
Is what I'm about to say necessary?
Is what I'm about to say kind?

How will you use your tongue to speak this week?
“Oh be careful little mouth what you say.”

THIS TONGUE OF MINE

Oh! Spirit of the living God
Control this tongue of mine
No knife is quite so sharp as words,
Yet words can be divine
A tongue not yielded to God's will
Can stir up awful strife.
Lord use this tongue of mine today
To speak Thy words of life.
I want my tongue to sing God's praise
To tell His love for me,
To speak God's Holy name in prayer
And thanks for Calvary.
Lord help me that this tongue of mine
Shall speak Thy word in love,
That what I say will be Thy will
Directed from above
Oh! Holy Spirit, faithful guide
This tongue of mine inspire
That only words that please the Lord
Shall be my heart's desire
So may I lead some soul to Christ
By spoken words or songs,
Then as God leads, do not forget
My tongue to Him belongs.

-- Edward L. Crane