

The Wisdom Literature

Lesson #14

Wisdom In Words

Introduction

- The importance of proper speech is seen and taught throughout the scriptures. Jesus even addressed the topic in Matthew 12:36-37.
- Let us now search through the one book of the Bible that offers the most instruction regarding speech -- Proverbs.

General Characteristics Of Our Words

- Words are powerful (12:18; 18:21; 25:18). A powerful statement is made in the second passage. Death and life are in the power of the tongue! The way that we use our tongue will determine our station in life and ultimately our eternal destination. We also learn in our other two passages that the tongue is compared to a sword, a club and a sharp arrow. The tongue is indeed powerful!
- Words come from the heart (4:23; 23:7). The way we act and the way we talk shows the condition of our inward man. To have graceful speech that is seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6), one must purify their heart.
- Words bind us (6:1-2). It is necessary to think before we speak, for, as God's children, we are indebted to keep our word. We are bound to do what we say.
- Our speech can also demonstrate our zeal (22:13). The lazy man's speech obviously shows his lack of zeal. We can tell just what his character is by the words he expresses. Likewise, people can tell by our speech if we are eager, willing, determined Christians or if we are the type to fold under opposition.

The Perverse Tongue

- The perverse tongue.
 - The perverse tongue is a dangerous tongue (7:21-23, 27; 10:6, 11, 13-14; 11:9; 16:27; 17:14). We had already noticed what damage the tongue can do in the fact that it is compared to a sword, club and a sharp arrow. Notice also in the first listed passage that flattering speech is not always synonymous with good speech. The harlot uses flattering speech to deceive one into committing fornication. Not only having a perverse tongue will cause death, but heeding the perverse words of others will cause death as well.
 - The perverse tongue will be punished (6:12-19). The final outcome of one with a perverse mouth is without remedy. When one stands before God in judgment with such held against him, his fate is sealed and cannot be changed. The very fact that God hates a perverse

mouth should impress upon us that one who does such should not expect anything but punishment.

- The perverse tongue is worth little (10:20; 15:28). In contrast, the wise tongue is of great value (8:6-11; 20:15). We can tell just how worthless a perverse tongue is by noticing the fact that poverty is better than perverseness (19:1, 22).
- Examples of the perverse tongue.
 - The hypocritical tongue.
 - The hypocrite is one who says one thing and does another (11:9).
 - The damage caused by hypocrisy is often devastating and often has lasting damage.
 - The backbiting, slandering, talebearing and whispering tongue.
 - These four English words are translated from six different Hebrew words which all basically carry the same meaning:
 - *Ragal* -- "One who goes about maliciously as a slanderer, one who speaks maliciously about another" (Psalm 15:1-3).
 - *Sether* -- "A secret slanderer, or hidden gossip, one of a sly tongue" (25:23).
 - *Dibbah* -- "Whispering, defamation, evil report, to spread a rumor, to slander" (10:18).
 - *Lashan* -- "To use the tongue boldly (in an evil use); hence, to slander, to backbite" (Psalm 101:5).
 - *Nirgan* -- "Wrong speech (evil secret) hence a whisperer, a backbiter, a gossip" (18:8).
 - *Rakil* -- "A slanderer, defamer, detractor" (11:13; 20:19; Leviticus 19:16).
 - Is talking about someone or relaying a fact about someone gossip? No, not all speech about others is considered gossip in the sight of God. The following questions will help us determine whether or not it is gossip.
 - Will I help or hurt the person's character by repeating this information?
 - Would it be better left untold, even if true?
 - Will anyone be edified if I repeat this information (11:13)?
 - What is my motive for telling it?
 - Am I really seeking to build or destroy, to hurt or heal?
 - Will I cause unnecessary suspicion to surround the person by repeating the information (Psalm 101:5)? If so, I become guilty. An old saying goes, "You can never build yourself up by tearing others down."
 - Is the information true? Is there any basis for it? Is it rumor or innuendo?

- Is the information about something which has been repented of and stopped? If so, it should be left alone.
- Will I help the one who is spreading the rumors by receiving what he is telling (26:23)?
- Do I want to be an accessory in the commission of a sin against another by receiving information to which I should not be privy (1 Timothy 5:22)? Remember the saying, "There are always two sides to every controversy."
- Will I feel better towards the one being talked about by hearing the details being spread by a gossip?
- Am I assisting in strengthening the character of one whom I allow to gossip about others?
- Can I, in good conscience, say that I am a friend of one from whom I receive information about the wrong doing of another?
- When I hear about the wrongdoing of another, am I not obligated to go to that person (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1)?
- Do I not do much evil by, instead of going to the person, mentioning his wrongdoing to others?
- Am I not responsible for the unfaithfulness of others when they have been hardened through my spreading unfounded charges about them, or by listening to others who do it?
- How many people have left active service to Christ because of unfounded charges and allegations made and received by others (18:10)?
- The lying tongue.
 - How many times do you see and hear people making promises but have no intention of keeping their word? Our "Yes" must mean "Yes," and our "No" must mean "No" (Matthew 5:37). A Christian's word must be his bond! Do not say you are going to do something unless you are going to do it!
 - The importance of truth is seen in 23:23. The truth is so valuable that we are to go to great lengths to obtain it and to hold on to it at any cost.
 - Lying is a grievous sin (12:22). This passage tells us that lying lips are an abomination to the Lord (cf. 12:19; 13:5; 14:5, 25; 19:28; 30:5-9). Liars will burn in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8)! "Little white lies" are not exempt!
- The proud tongue.
 - Sometimes we speak out of pride (14:3).
 - It is human to boast about who we are and what we have done. This must be overcome (cf. 27:2).

- The angry tongue.
 - There are those who speak as they should under normal circumstances and then lash out and speak their true character in a moment of rage.
 - Some try to justify their angry tongue by saying it is an “outlet” to vent their anger or “that is just the way I am.” These excuses do not hold true to God’s word. An angry tongue is a sinful tongue (29:22)!
 - A soft answer will turn away wrath, but angry words cause anger to swell even more (15:1; cf. 14:17; Ephesians 4:31-32).
- The idle tongue.
 - The word “idle” means to be unfruitful or barren. These are words that do not edify and encourage.
 - They are words that speak lightly, frivolously, punning or jesting of holy or spiritual matters.
- Knowing these are sinful, what is my responsibility toward others with a perverse tongue?
 - Knowing God’s word will help us to keep our guard up against the sinful, deceptive words of others (6:20-24; 7:1-5).
 - It is also our responsibility to shun the companionship of one with a perverse tongue (14:7; 20:19; 24:1).
 - By intentionally listening to those with evil tongues, God considers the listener evil as well (17:4).

The Wise Tongue

- The wise tongue.
 - The wise tongue is a quiet tongue (10:19).
 - Sometimes it is best to say as little as possible. How many times do people dig holes for themselves because they just cannot be quiet (Ecclesiastes 3:7)? Some people live as if there is never a time to keep silent!
 - We should not keep silent when we have opportunity to share the truth of God’s word with others. A multitude of words is needed them. The writer here has in mind that it is good to say little when it comes to opinions, disagreements, etc.
 - The wise tongue is one accompanied by a listening ear. When one ceases to listen, one ceases to learn and grow (10:27; cf. James 1:19).
 - The wise tongue is of great value. Many of the passages concerning this topic are self-explanatory (8:6-11; 10:20; 15:4, 28; 16:21, 23; 20:15).
 - The wise tongue gains wisdom. When we incline our ear and apply our heart to godly knowledge, our words will be pure and wholesome

(5:1-2; 13:13; 22:17-21). The reason why many people, including some Christians, cannot control their tongue is because they have not applied their heart and devoted their time to studying God's holy word.

- Benefits of the wise tongue.
 - One can turn away wrath (15:1). Our words can alleviate certain painful and tense situations. A soft word has mended families, friendships and brought many to Christ.
 - A good word can bring joy and gladness to the heart of those who are depressed and worrisome (12:25).
 - Proper speech keeps our soul from troubles (21:23). This is speaking of the eternal realm. Our soul is eternal, so we know the writer is telling us that good words are necessary to being saved eternally, and not just merely keeping us from trouble in this life alone.
 - Proper speech brings about mercy (28:13). When we sin, it is proper to confess with our mouth that sin rather than hiding it. By doing so, God's mercy will blot out that sin.
 - Others can be wise by listening to what we say (10:31). We have a wonderful privilege in Christ in that we can teach others God's word, helping them and ourselves to obtain eternal salvation.
 - We can have joy in knowing that we said what was right when faced with a dilemma (15:23; 23:16).
 - We can plead for justice for others, when maybe they cannot do it for themselves (31:9).
 - We can offer words of praise, blessing and encouragement to others with our tongue (16:24; 25:11). We may never know (or perhaps years later) how much our words of praise meant to someone. We need to offer these words to young Christians, preachers, Bible teachers, elders, deacons, mothers, fathers, etc.

Conclusion

- Without doubt, our words are very powerful. They are capable of tearing down the mightiest or building up the lowliest.
- We will have to answer to God about the way we use our tongue. Our words will justify us or condemn us. Anything that can condemn us on the day of judgment is important to take heed to now. We will not be condemned because of the physical possessions that we have or did not have or because of the way we looked or the social status we have, but we will give account for every idle word.
- Let us always strive to live in such a way that our words will justify us and allow us to enjoy everlasting life with our Maker, rather than doom us to the lake of fire which is prepared for the devil, his angels and all

those who do not know God (Matthew 12:36; 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).