

May 21

Proverbs

Hi I'm Reid Brown and welcome to the May 21st edition of Project 4:4. We are continuing the journey through Proverbs Today.

If you have your Bible open (and you're not driving a car right now) it would be interesting to stop and count the number of references to "the tongue", "lips" or to "words" that you find in today's reading. Almost all of those references related to the effects - positive or negative - that come as a result of our use of our tongues. I'd like to highlight how Solomon mentions positive things that result from the proper use of words and language. They are so critically important that I want to quickly summarize them for you. Here are some positive possibilities for your tongue.

10:20 says, *"The tongue of the righteous is choice silver."* Our words - our tongues and the way we use them - are a way of establishing our value in and importance to the body of Christ. Think about it - how valuable to the church are the people who always have an encouraging word - who know God's Word so well that they can tell you how it 'fits' with the experiences we are having, who always have a blessing to give, or a prayer to offer. They truly are choice silver to us!

10:21 says, *"The lips of the righteous nourish many."* God can use our words to feed other followers of Jesus, to nourish and strengthen them. Every single one of us has some people, or at least a person, for whom before God we are responsible. We need to be speaking words that 'nourish' them. The New Testament injunction is to *"build one another up in our most holy faith."* Jesus said to Peter, *"Feed my sheep."* Who are the ones for whom you bear responsibility before God? Is it your spouse, your children, a neighbor - a new Christian who looks to you for a model of how to live the Christian life? I do not know who it is, but you do! Do your words *"nourish"* the ones who are looking to you?

Verse 32 of chapter 10 says, *"The lips of the righteous know what is fitting."* Ever say the right word at the wrong time? I have! But the right word at the right time - oh, what a difference that will make!! It can make the difference between a momentary hurt and lifetime of bitterness; it can make the difference between a crushed spirit and a temporary setback; between utter confusion and peaceful trust; between fear and faith; between quiet contempt and genuine love. A word "fitly spoken" is a rare treasure. This verse suggests that we as God's people ought to be known for our ability to say just this right thing at just the right time.

Chapter 12:14 says, *"From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things."* Our previous references so far have had to do with using our tongues and our words to bless others, but what the Bible is saying here is that as we reach out to bless others, our words will rebound and bring blessing back to us. As we instruct and bless our children with the Word of God and they prosper, it produces a harvest that brings great satisfaction and fulfillment back to us as well. Just as much as we can be blessed

by the fruit of our labor, so we can receive blessing from the fruit of our lips, because, after all, our words are a very real and a very important part of our work.

Solomon also points out the negative consequences of our speech in today's reading. Look at what was shared concerning untruthful words. Chapter 10 also tells us that, "*Lying lips conceal hatred*" and chapter 12 says simply, "*The Lord hates lying lips.*" It's very strongly communicated that God hates them and they mask hatred.

Solomon says in 10:18, "*Our words can spread slander.*" How many Christians and churches have been laid to ruin by slander, gossip and backbiting - the sins of the tongue? How difficult would it be to make a covenant right now to never pass along unsubstantiated rumors and to refuse to listen to gossip? I know that's hard and I know how many times I have failed in this, but when someone comes to you with that juicy "tidbit" of information, here are some pretty useful questions: "Do you know for certain this is true?" "Have you lovingly confronted the individual involved with this information about them?" "Why are you telling me about this matter?" Gossip, backbiting, and slander are not little sins. In Romans 1, Paul mentions gossip in a list of sins including murder!

Solomon gives us more negative consequences in Chapter 12:13 when he says, "*The evil man is trapped by his own sinful talk.*" One lie always leads to another one! How does that old proverb go? "Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." Well, that is an English proverb, not a Biblical one, but it certainly reflects the intent of what Solomon is saying.

Lastly, we hurt others 12:18, "*Reckless words pierce like arrows.*" You've felt those arrows, right? We need to be very sure that we aren't launching them!

Well, we've briefly looked at some of the many Proverbs concerning the way we use our words. I trust that this knowledge will translate into a wisdom that affects our speech to be shaped by godliness. This is Reid Brown with our May 21 edition of Project 4:4.