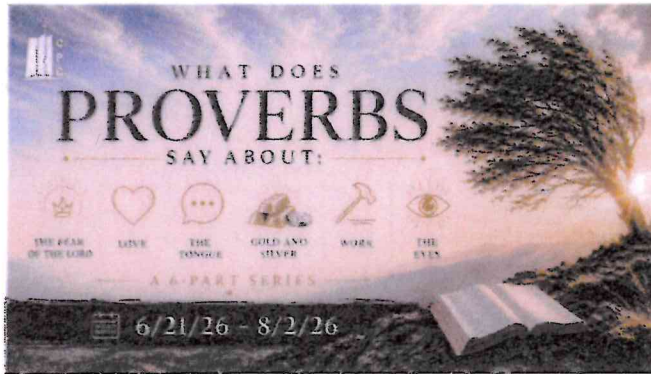




What Does Proverbs Say About: The Tongue

By Pastor Paul Hudson

July 12th, 2026

*This original sermon was not written by A.I.

We're in a sermon series for the summer called, "What Does Proverbs Say About__?" this sermon is about the tongue. So, "What does Proverbs say about the tongue?" The tongue is a very serious little instrument God has ingeniously blessed us with, and have you ever noticed it's sitting behind two gates? That's right, two gates—the first gate is your lips, which is a pretty effective gate. Keep that gate closed and... it's pretty hard to speak. The second gate is your teeth, and you can sort of talk with your teeth closed but you look like a ventriloquist with a goofy smile. God gave us two gates for the tongue the same reason he gave us two ears—he expects us to listen twice as much and to think twice before we open those two gates—especially when we post on Facebook!

Speaking of Facebook, social media has turned everyone into expert theologians, political scientists, medical researchers, and armchair world leaders. Everybody has an expert opinion that becomes God's gospel truth for the whole wide world on social media. You could have the smartest man in the world say the smartest thing anyone has ever said, people would still refute it—in fact, I asked AI just for fun, "What, according to you, oh AI, is the smartest thing anyone ever said?" and the AI gave a quote from Socrates as one of the smartest things anyone has ever said: "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." If Socrates posted that on social media today people would gaslight it instantly, "You don't know what you're talking about, Socrates!"

James said the tongue is a fire—there's no doubt about that! If James lived today, he would add: "And WiFi hath made it worse!"

The tongue is a world of fire. It has a direct connection to the soul, and that's a scary reality! It has a direct connection to the soul that brings forth life or death. The tongue is both a blessing and a curse. Let's look at Solomon's wisdom from the Proverbs about the tongue, then I'll tie that to what Jesus and the New Testament say about the tongue. In Proverbs, a surprisingly large portion is directly about the tongue. Well, maybe it's no surprise that these wisdom sayings are largely about speaking wisdom!

The key Proverb I've chosen for this message is Proverbs 18:21. Let's show that on the screen:

Prov. 18:21:

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit (NIV).

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Amen.

An Instrument of Life or Death

This is a sobering statement about the tongue. The tongue can speak life, the tongue can speak death. The Bible reveals much about the tongue's role in both life and death that should sober us all up. God has made the tongue to be an instrument of both life and death. We will see the extent of what that means and the eternal ramifications of the tongue a little later in this message.

The proverb says, "those who love it will eat its fruit." In other words, what the tongue sows is what the tongue will reap. With many words we sow seeds that will bear fruit, either the fruit of life or the fruit of death. It's a sobering picture that confirms the power of the tongue, its effect on both you and those who hear your words.

The Dangers of the Tongue

Proverbs gives us many warnings about the dangers of the tongue. I want to take a look at a sampling of these warnings.

Prov. 6:16-19 talks about seven things that are detestable to the Lord, three of those point directly at the tongue: God hates a lying tongue, a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who stirs up conflict in the community. Lies are a danger to the listener but lies are also a danger to the liar's own soul. A chronic liar builds a world inside their soul that is fake and founded upon lies. A person who has been lied to will unknowingly build perceptions, understandings, motivations upon lies and a fake world that doesn't actually exist. Both the liar and the one lied to are in tragic situations. Both are relying on a false reality.

In no time has this been more dangerous than our time, where lies are so quickly spread through the internet, alongside the devil's lie that truth is relative. How easy is it for someone to believe lies when they've been duped into believing that truth is whatever you want it to be? Further, lies are usually foundational to stirring up conflict in the community. Instigators are experts at twisting truth or making up fictional stories so they can gain more followers in the community. The tongue is a dangerous little devil.

Prov. 18:7 says, "The mouth of fools are their undoing, and their lips are a snare to their very lives." Another Proverb in 10:19 talks about the proliferation of sin through multiplying words. In other words, sin builds and spreads through unhinged and foolish speech, and those words lead to one's downfall because they're standing on a fictional foundation. Let a crooked person keep talking and in time their own words will trap them.

Prov. 11:11-13 says, "By the mouth of the wicked a city is destroyed; whoever derides their neighbor has no sense; A gossip betrays confidence." Words can tear communities apart, pierce hearts, and erode trust. They can set neighbors against each other and end all sense of a community's purpose.

Not all words need to be destructive to bring ruin, Proverbs talks about the danger of flattery in 26:28, "A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin." This proverb lumps flattery in

with the lying tongue. Flattery is a pretty way of lying to to gain an advantage or to manipulate someone. Flattery works ruin because the motivations are based on selfish gain at another's expense, and the damage has already been done when the person being flattered learns they were manipulated and taken advantage of.

The Blessings of the Tongue

That is a small sampling of what Proverbs has to say about the dangers of the tongue. Now, let's look at the blessings of the tongue. The tongue of the righteous brings lasting value, blessing, and healing. Prov. 10:20 says, "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver." Choice silver points to lasting value added to both the speaker and listener— words from the righteous bring a lasting value to the soul of the listener and speaker. Prov. 11:11 says, "Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted." The tongue of evil can destroy a city, but the tongue of righteousness can build a city up. This is why it is so important for us, as Christians, to speak blessing not cursing to our neighbors.

Prov. 12:18 says, "the tongue of the wise brings healing," as opposed to the words of the reckless that pierce like swords. Prov. 16:24 says, "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." Words can heal. "A gentle answer turns away wrath," says Prov. 15:1. With gentle words rather than harsh criticism, and with blessing rather than cursing-- this is how communities are built, sustained, healed, and lifted up by the righteous for all to see.

Prov. 10:19 says, "the prudent hold their tongues" when sinful words are flying through the air. Whether it's heated arguments, rich gossip, scathing criticisms, whether warranted or not, the wise will keep their two gates shut and excuse themselves from such tirades. Have you ever been in a group that was gossiping about someone, and you came to find out later that the gossip was all based on false assumptions or only part of the story? Holding your tongue will free you from the guilt of spreading false rumors.

Prov. 18:20 says, "From the fruit of their mouth a person's stomach is filled; with the harvest of their lips they are satisfied." Wholesome speech fills the soul. When good words come out of your mouth, the heart fills with joy. Have you ever noticed that it just feels good to speak encouraging words to or about someone? God has connected the tongue to the soul. Tongue and emotion go hand-in-hand.

The Heart-Tongue Connection

The mouth is merely a messenger of the heart. Prov. 15:28 says, "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil." In other words, the tongue of the righteous person is a tool under the control of righteousness, whereas the mouth of the unrighteous soul is like an uncontrollable geyser of evil. What comes out of the mouth is an indicator of what lies within.

Prov. 16:23 says, "The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction." The wise heart will learn to speak with good judgment. The wise heart receives instruction and uses the tongue to promote instruction.

Prov. 15:4 says, "The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit." We know from Genesis and Revelation that the tree of life is associated with eternal life. It is a metaphor

for restoration, healing, nourishment, and eternal flourishing. In this “tree of life” metaphor, the soothing tongue brings that inward restoration, healing, nourishment, and flourishing. This is unlike a perverse tongue that crushes the spirit.

These proverbs tell us that the tongue is intimately connected to the soul and will always fall in line with what lies in the heart. Not only does the tongue move under the direction of the speaker’s heart, but its words also can penetrate into the soul of the listeners. If allowed, the listener’s own soul is profoundly shaped by those words.

Theological Connections

Now, we’ll start to look at where God comes into the picture concerning the tongue. Prov. 16:1 says, “To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue.” This proverb makes a distinction between the plans of the human heart and the Lord’s will. Humans can plan all they want but unless the Lord leads the heart, those plans may fail or be without eternal value. This points to a deep theological truth that God is sovereign, and for our speech to be right, we must seek the Lord in all we do and say.

Before I tie this all to Jesus and the New Testament, I want to come back to this Proverb that I mentioned at the beginning: “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” In the power of the tongue lies life and death. The tongue has the power to condemn or to save.

The Tongue and Jesus

Let’s look at what Jesus said about the tongue. In Matt. 12:34-37, while talking to the Pharisees who were praising God in one breath and cursing Jesus in another, Jesus said, “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” Every empty word will be accounted for in the day of judgment. That tells us that words are meant to be meaningful.

We need to tie this to our being made in the image of God. With words, God created the heavens and the earth. The Word became flesh and walked among men to bring salvation to a world lost in lies. As God’s image-bearers, we are called to keep our speech aligned with God’s truth, to live and speak his Word. So, Jesus said, “By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” That’s a huge responsibility for that tiny little chunk of skin sitting in our mouths behind two gates!!

“By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” There are two things I want to say about that. First, James talks about this little beast in 3:2-10:

2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jas 3:2–10.

James said, "No human being can tame the tongue." Jesus said, "The mouth speaks what the heart is full of," and, "By your words you will be condemned." Jesus confirms that the words reveal the heart just like Proverbs has been saying. The problem of the tongue is a heart-problem. It's not the tongue's fault; it's the heart's fault! Well, actually the tongue plays a guilty role too! It's dual culpability.

Second and most importantly, Jesus said, "By your words you will be acquitted." Here's where, in God's amazing design, the tongue was given a role in redemption. Romans 10:9-10 says, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from dead, you will be saved." By your words you will be acquitted, hallelujah! And there's that tongue-heart connection— with your mouth, if you confess "Jesus is Lord" and with your heart, if you believe he is alive today, you will be saved. The tongue holds the power of life and death. The heart and the tongue are intimately connected, and this is why even empty words will show up in the day of judgment. A disconnect between the heart and the tongue is just as bad as the unrighteous spouting unrighteous words.

When it comes to belief in Jesus, there will always be a disconnect between heart belief and mouth confession without the Spirit working within, transforming us by his grace. If you want your heart and tongue to line up and become that tree of life, open your heart to the Lord Jesus and let him do his transforming work within you.

Titus 3:3-7 says:

"3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Tt 3:3–7.

Christ alone is able to transform the heart, enabling a transformed tongue. Without yielding to his work within, that frustrating, stubborn little piece of flesh will wreck a lot of lives.

So, here are three application points to take away from this sermon.

1. The tongue and the heart are intimately connected, let Jesus work on your heart, and the tongue will follow.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. It is the grace of God through Jesus that transforms our hearts so that our confession of Christ aligns with our belief in his resurrection.

2. When you sense danger on the tip of your tongue, keep the two gates shut and seek the Lord instead.

The mark of righteousness and wisdom is the ability to control the tongue. Use your tongue wisely as a tool for righteousness rather than an uncontrollable wrecking ball.

3. Like the tree of life, use your words to restore, heal, nourish, and bring flourishing to those around you.

Christ is the Tree of Life, and his life within you brings renewal to your soul. Let the words of your tongue bear the fruit of the tree of life for you and those who hear you.

Amen.

Let's pray.

Study Questions

Read Prov. 15:4

7

Observation

- 1) What does Proverbs 18:21 say about the tongue?
- 2) How does James describe the tongue in his epistle?
- 3) What are three things about the tongue that the Lord detests according to Proverbs 6:16-19?
- 4) How are flattery and a lying tongue related according to Proverbs?

Interpretation

- 1) Why might God have placed the tongue behind two gates (lips and teeth)?
- 2) What is meant by 'the power of life and death' in Proverbs 18:21?
- 3) How does the heart influence the tongue according to Jesus and Proverbs?
- 4) Why is it important for the tongue and heart to be in alignment according to the sermon?

Application

- 1) In what ways can you use your tongue as a tool for righteousness this week?
- 2) What practical steps can you take when you feel the urge to speak recklessly?
- 3) How can you let Christ transform your heart to align your words with His will?
- 4) What changes can you make in your communication style to promote healing and encouragement?