

THE TONGUE

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

INTRODUCTION—It is a fire, a world of iniquity, an unruly evil, full of deadly poison, set on fire by hell—the power and influence of the human tongue is awesome (18:21; 11:11; cf. James 3:1-12). It is one of the most volatile things in existence and remains generally untamed—but when controlled can be of great benefit (15:4).

I. THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

A. It Can Be Destructive. Both to itself and others (10:19; 11:9; 18:6-7; 12:13).

1. Lying.
 - a. Abomination to God (12:22; 6:16-19; 19:5,9).
 - b. Fostered by Hatred for Another (10:18; 26:24-26,28).
 - c. Is Short-Lived (12:19; 21:6; 20:17). Whereas lying may appear to be beneficial for present circumstances, in the end it is still destructive.
2. Flattery.
 - a. Guileful Flattery (26:28; 29:5; 28:23). Not the kind of flattery which compliments, but which deceitfully wins another's favor and manipulates others.
 - b. Used Effectively by the Adulteress (6:24; 7:21).
3. Tale-Bearer (Gossip, Slanderer, Whisperer)
 - a. Betrays and Destroys Friendships (16:28; 17:9; cf. 11:13).
 - b. Creates Strife (16:27-30; 26:20-22).
 - c. Destroys Character and Integrity (11:9; 25:9-10). Whether the tales are true or not is incidental. Spreading those tales—being ‘truthful’ or ‘blunt’—is not always in the other’s best interest.
4. Cursing.
 - a. Self-destructive (20:20; 30:10-11).

B. It Can Be Constructive. The tongue has power for good too (15:4).

1. Good Words.
 - a. Pleasing to Those Who Hear (10:11,20-21; 16:24; 25:11). Such words are precious because they are refreshing, life-giving, encouraging, and edifying.
 - b. Timely Words (15:23; 12:25; cf. 15:28). Sometimes **when** you say something is just as important as **what** you say.
2. Control.
 - a. Benefit to Guarding Our Mouths (13:2-3; 21:23; cf. 16:23; 17:27-28). The untamable tongue must be checked.
 - b. Where There is no Wood the Fire Burns Out (26:20-28).

II. THE POWER OF THE EAR

- A. People are Hungry for Gossip (18:8; 26:22). Such is a sad commentary on humanity. Men like to hear, and are always ready to believe the worst.
- B. Listener and Tale-Bearer Alike are Corrupt (17:4; cf. 20:19). He may never spread the story, but he allowed it to be spread, and his attitude toward the person is forever changed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why is the tongue emphasized so much in Proverbs?*
- 2) *How powerful is the tongue? Is it inherently evil?*
- 3) *Why do some people sometimes lie about others (10:18; 26:24-26,28)?*
- 4) *Distinguish between honest praise and the kind of flattery emphasized in Proverbs.*
- 5) *Can one sometimes do as much damage with the truth as he can with a lie? How?*
- 6) *If gossip is not necessarily lying, what makes it so bad?*
- 7) *Why should we refuse to listen to gossip, rumors, and innuendoes?*
- 8) *Why is it as wrong to listen to the whisperer as it is to be one?*
- 9) *Why is it such a sad commentary on human nature that we love to hear gossip (18:8)?*
- 10) *What are some other sins of the tongue not mentioned in the outline?*
- 11) *How can the tongue be used positively?*

Related Passages—10:31-32; 12:14,17-19; 14:3; 15:1-2; 17:7; 18:4,13; 19:22; 25:15,18,23; 26:18-19; 29:20
