

Proverbs 12 • The Battle for the Tongue

Introduction

Biblical discernment is the recognition of something's true source as coming either from God, from Satan, or the flesh. Nowhere is this source betrayed by human behavior quicker than by one's speech. This is a reliable spiritual barometer when measured against the standard of God's Word so as to not simply evaluate the content of what is being said, but the true intent behind it. As we shall see, there is much more connected to speech than simply words or facts, but a symbiotic relationship with our true attitudes not just toward God and others, but even to our self. The world recognizes this by the term "Freudian slip" so that even non-believers know how the tongue is betraying one's true thoughts and intentions. But before we look at the "bad" tongue, let's first examine what God's Word associates with a godly tongue.

²⁰The tongue of the righteous is as
choice silver,
The heart of the wicked is worth little.

¹¹The mouth of the righteous is a
fountain of life,
But the mouth of the wicked conceals
violence.

[Read 10:20]

Q: What is the main contrast in this proverb?

A: "The tongue of the righteous" and "the heart of the wicked".

Q: What might this indicate as to what it takes to have a "tongue...as choice as silver"?

A: That it is the result of someone living a biblically obedient lifestyle.

[Read 10:11]

Q: What is the main contrast in this proverb?

A: The "mouth of the righteous" and "the mouth of the wicked".

Q: How do the results compare with each other?

A: A "fountain of life" is something which is actively producing something beneficial for others as opposed to a suppressed agenda to work against others.

"Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. — Matthew 15:17–18

Application: When Scripture addresses the issue of the tongue, it is really an issue of the spiritual condition of the heart. Speech is a direct reflection of the condition of our heart.

¹A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger.

¹²Like an earring of gold and an
ornament of fine gold Is a wise
reprover to a listening ear.

⁶The words of the wicked lie in wait for
blood,
But the mouth of the upright will
deliver them.

[Read 15:1]

Q: What should we be taking into consideration where others are concerned?

A: Whether our own approach and attitude "turns wrath away" or "stirs up anger".

Q: On whom is the greater responsibility being placed?

A: On us as to whether we deliver a "gentle answer" or "harsh words". We are making the determination how to say what we have to say.

Q: Will this always guarantee a right outcome?

A: No, but it assures that we have not sinned in the course of our own response.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. — Romans 12:18

[Read 25:12]

Q: What part of this is our responsibility?

A: To be a “wise reprovener”.

Q: What is required from those whom we reprove in a biblical manner?

A: That they have “a listening ear”.

“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. — Matthew 7:6

[Read 12:6]

Q: What is the greater issue that this proverb is addressing? Is this strictly speaking about a trap to do bodily harm?

A: The contrast of blood and deliverance is the greater issue of salvation. The ultimate help is providing direction there, the ultimate harm to lead to the Lake of Fire.

Q: How might we know this for sure?

A: Because of what it means to be “wicked” vs. “upright”. One is working and living in contradiction to God’s Word and ways, the other in a lifestyle of compliance.

Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! — James 3:4–5

Application: While there may be no guarantee that a right biblical response will always have the desired effect, it is the only possible way of obtaining such a response. Regardless of the response, we must be consistent in the sensitivity of our presentation.

¹⁷He who speaks truth tells what is right,

But a false witness, deceit.

¹⁸There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,

But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

¹⁹Truthful lips will be established forever

But a lying tongue is only for a moment.

²⁰Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,

But counselors of peace have joy.

²¹No harm befalls the righteous, But the wicked are filled with trouble.

²²Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,

[Read 12:17-22]

Q: What is listed in these verses which commonly describe the biggest problem associated with the tongue?

- “false witness” (v.17)
- “speaks rashly” (v.18)
- “lying” (v.19)
- “deceit” (v.20)
- “lying lips” (v.22)

Q: How was God’s position on these behaviors stated previously in Proverbs?

*There are six things which the LORD hates,
Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:
Haughty eyes, **a lying tongue**,
And hands that shed innocent blood,
A heart that devises wicked plans,
Feet that run rapidly to evil,*

But those who deal faithfully are His delight.

A false witness who utters lies,

And one who spreads strife among brothers. — Proverbs 6:16–19

Q: What does Scripture say is often the real working of a lying tongue?

A: It is often only really concealing the sin of one's heart.

He who conceals hatred has lying lips,

And he who spreads slander is a fool. — Proverbs 10:18

Q: How does v. 17 reveal why God qualifies both a liar and a false witness as “an abomination”?

A: Because instead of speaking “truth”, it is speaking “deceit”

(v.17) Application #1: *Lying isn't simply covering up the spoken truth, but the true spiritual condition of one's heart.*

Q: In this list of related ill behaviors, which one might we not have automatically assumed would be present?

A: In v.18, “one who speaks rashly”.

Q: How does Solomon describe its effect on others?

A: “...like the thrusts of a sword”.

Q: So how is it possible that the “tongue of the wise brings healing”?

A: This is someone who consciously takes the other person into consideration, making their relationship the priority.

(v. 18) Application #2: *Speaking rashly is what happens when we react without due consideration of the other person, seeking only to either justify our self or put them in their place.*

Q: In v.19, what are the contrasting results of “truthful lips” vs. “a lying tongue”?

A: The difference between “established forever” and “only for a moment”.

Q: What is the greater issue this is addressing?

A: The long-term spiritual consequences.

(v.19) Application #3: *The issue of our having “truthful lips” vs. “a lying tongue” does not just have consequences where others are concerned, but for our own soul.*

Q: How does v.20 reveal the true source of deceit? Does it occur by accident?

A: It comes from the intentions of the heart. It cannot be accidental or happenstance because to “devise evil” is a something which takes place consciously.

Q: Why might this obliquely provide a justification to speak in ignorance something which is not true?

A: We would not be acting from evil intentions. This is the difference between a lie and an error.

Q: Is there as test for which would decide the difference?

*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
— Hebrews 4:12*

(v.20) Application #4: *The biblical definition of “deceit” is something which cannot be disassociated from a heart engaged in devising evil.*

Q: Is v.21 making a case that if you do not sin and are biblically righteous, you will never have any problems?

A: In the greater context of biblical teaching, it is always looking at the very end of things as they will stand in eternity. The ultimate destination of Heaven vs. the Lake of Fire is in view here.

Q: How is v. 21 a sort of commentary sandwiched in to address the specific issue of a “good” tongue vs. a “bad” one?

A: Those who do not speak lies, deceit, rashly or bear false witness do not have to live with the inevitable consequences which those who do must constantly navigate.

Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. — James 3:3–4

(v.21) Application #5: *Speech coming from righteousness does not have to deal with the consequences of that coming from wickedness. If one doesn’t lie, they don’t have to remember the lie so as to keep covering up the true deceitful intentions of one’s heart.*

Q: What does Scripture mean when it employs the term “abomination”?

A: The Hebrew word is deeply attached to “abhor”, “loathe” and “detest” so as to automatically deem it as something to be excluded. It is often describing “a thing of horror”, something which is so repugnant to God that it automatically falls under His judgment and can never be allowed to enter into His presence.

Q: What are examples of other things in the Torah God has declared to be an abomination by His standards?

- Homosexuality and other sexual perversions (Lev. 18:22-30; 20:13)
- Idolatry (Dt. 7:25)
- Human sacrifice (Dt. 12:31)
- Eating ritually unclean animals (Dt. 14:3-6)
- Sacrificing defective animals (Dt. 17:1)
- Conducting dishonest business (Dt. 25:13-16)

All of these things have in common that they are specifically stipulated as being unlawful in God’s written Word but are largely focused on man’s relationship with God.

Q: What are the things within the book of Proverbs which are likewise identified as an abomination?

A: The phrases “an abomination to the LORD” occurs ten times:

1. For **the devious** are an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright. — Proverbs 3:32
2. **A false balance** is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight. — Proverbs 11:1
3. **The perverse in heart** are an abomination to the LORD, But the blameless in their walk are His delight. — Proverbs 11:20
4. **Lying lips** are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight. — Proverbs 12:22
5. **The sacrifice of the wicked** is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight. — Proverbs 15:8
6. **The way of the wicked** is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves one who pursues righteousness. — Proverbs 15:9
7. **Evil plans** are an abomination to the LORD, But pleasant words are pure. — Proverbs 15:26
8. **Everyone who is proud in heart** is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished. — Proverbs 16:5
9. **He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous**, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD. — Proverbs 17:15
10. **Differing weights** are an abomination to the LORD, And a false scale is not good. — Proverbs 20:23

Point: Notice that in Proverbs, the overwhelming emphasis is on our relationships with others.

Q: How do we know that the “lying lips” referred to in v.22 is not limited to what one says to God, but emphasizing our treatment of others?

A: Because of the contrast of “those who deal faithfully”.

Application #6: As far as God is concerned, the tongue is such a serious issue that its misuse qualifies as a biblical abomination.