

The Mouths of Fools and the Word of God

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[0 : 00] Proverbs chapter 18, verses 1 to 21. Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire.

He breaks out against all sound judgment. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion. When wickedness comes, contempt comes also, and with dishonor comes disgrace.

The words of a man's mouth are deep waters. The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook. It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the righteous of justice.

A fool's lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating. A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul.

The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels. They go down into the inner parts of the body. Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.

[1 : 07] The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous man runs into it and is safe. A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination.

Before destruction, a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit, who can bear? An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the year of the wise seeks knowledge.

A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before the great. The one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him.

The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders. A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle.

[2 : 12] From the fruit of a man's mouth, his stomach is satisfied. He is satisfied by the yield of his lips. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. The previous chapter we looked at last week closed with the commendation of a cool spirit and closed lips, representing self-control and restrained speech. And that chapter taught us that such restraint and self-control come from knowledge and understanding of God, that it begins with the fear of the Lord. So chapter 18 is continuing that theme, and it teaches us that the Lord lifts up the humble listener, but brings down the prideful talker.

So first we're going to look at the prideful talker in verses 1 to 9, and then the humble listener in verses 10 to 21. Verses 1 to 2 give us an introductory portrait of this prideful talker.

It says, Whoever isolates himself, seeks his own desire, he breaks out against all sound judgment. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

[3 : 27] So first it tells us that the fool isolates himself. Why? Because he seeks his own desire, it says. When you are in a community with other people, you can't get everything you want.

You can't have everything your way. So the person who seeks his own desire isolates himself. And in doing so, he breaks out against all sound judgment.

It says, Such a person is a fool who takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his own opinion. Because he has removed himself from the accountability and correction of other people.

There's a survey entitled The State of Theology, I think it was some years ago now, that was conducted by Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research. It polled Christians throughout the country on their views on various theological issues, asking whether or not they agree, disagree, or are unsure about 47 statements of religious belief.

The survey found that an alarming percentage of professing Christians held many unbiblical theological positions. But it found that Christians who attend church once a month or more were the

most likely of any demographic group surveyed to provide biblical responses to the questions. [4 : 54] In other words, when you isolate yourself, when you remove yourself from the church community, you're more likely to hold heretical beliefs. This is true in other areas as well.

Alan Jacobs is an English professor in Baylor University and a celebrated cultural critic. He writes for The Atlantic, The New Atlantis, First Things, a lot of articles you can find from him in those publications.

A few years ago, he wrote a book entitled How to Think, A Survival Guide for a World at Odds. And in the book, he writes that all of us, quote, all of us at various times in our lives believe true things for poor reasons and false things for good reasons.

And that whatever we think we know, whether we're right or wrong, arises from our interactions with other human beings. Thinking independently, solitarily, for ourselves is not an option.

End quote. He's articulating the truth of Proverbs 18, verses 1 to 2. Thinking for oneself is an illusion. We should give up such futile endeavors and instead engage with people and groups that challenge our prideful desire to have all of our opinions validated.

[6 : 18] Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire. He breaks out against all sound judgment. The fool is preoccupied solely with expressing his opinion and for that reason, he doesn't take the time to listen and therefore is incapable of reevaluating his opinions.

And that person takes no pleasure in understanding. He has a closed mind but an open mouth. Words like lip, mouth, tongue are repeated eight times in this passage indicating the main theme of this passage.

And in verses 1 to 3 depict a downward spiral of this sinful pride. First, it begins with isolation that leads to ignorance, which then leads to wickedness and dishonorable deeds, which then leads to contempt and disgrace.

This chain reaction of sin begins with pride, but it ends in humiliation because the Lord lifts up the humble listener but brings down the prideful talker.

Then verses 4 to 8 tell us more specifically what kind of talk this prideful talker engages in. And this subunit is enclosed by verse 4 and verse 8, which both begin with the phrase, the words of.

[7 : 35] Verse 4 says, the words of a man's mouth are deep waters. The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook. It's not immediately clear what it means that the words of a man's mouth are deep waters.

Is deep waters a good thing? Is it like something deep, profound, and wise? Or is it a bad thing? So all the references to a person's mouth or lip or words in this subsection are negative, which suggests that the words of a man's mouth might be being contrasted from the fountain of wisdom, which is a bubbling brook.

The metaphor of deep waters does not represent profundity, depth, wisdom, but rather it represents inaccessibility. We know this from a similar verse in Proverbs chapter 20, verse 5, which says, the purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.

So the purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, meaning it's hard to discern. It's out of reach. The expression deep water is used poetically throughout Scripture to represent something that is mysterious and or ominous.

For example, Psalm 69, 14 says, deliver me from sinking in the mire. Let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. With this in mind, verse 4 likely means that the words of a man's mouth are concealing in their nature and therefore mysterious and even ominous.

[9 : 06] In contrast, the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook. The words of the wise are often called a fountain of life throughout Proverbs. It is like a bubbling brook or a rushing stream.

It's not hiding something, but it's out in the open. It's not mysterious and ominous, rather it's transparent and clear. And interpreted in this way, Proverbs 18, 4 is very similar to Proverbs 10, verse 11, which says, The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

The words of the wise are an inexhaustible source of life-giving wisdom, but the words of the fool are inaccessible, mysterious, and ominous. It has hidden intentions.

Along the same line, verse 5 says, It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the righteous of justice. Whoever is a judge in court should not let the words of his mouth be like deep water, concealing his true intentions and showing partiality to the wicked.

Instead, he should let his words be true and transparent like the flowing stream and give the righteous justice. And then, verse 6 and 7 tell us about the rashness and quarrelsomeness of the fool's speech.

[10:23] A fool's lips walk into a fight and his mouth invites a beating. A fool's mouth is his ruin and his lips are a snare to his soul. So verse 6 and verse 7, they mirror each other.

Verse 6 begins by saying that a fool's lips get him entangled in fights. And then verse 8 ends by saying that a fool's lip ensnares his soul. And in the middle, it repeats the idea that the fool's mouth brings him beating and ruin.

Proverbs repeatedly speaks of how the wise person avoids unnecessary conflict and seeks to resolve conflict as soon as possible. For example, Proverbs chapter 17, 14, we looked at last week, warned us, The beginning of strife is like the letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out. The fool, however, walks headlong into quarrels. He is incapable of speaking graciously and prudently, and his own words with which he intends to inflict damage on others actually ends up inflicting the severest damage on himself.

The word soul represents his life. So it's escalating the consequence of the fool's quarrelsome speech. It goes from a beating to death. So the fool's speech is not only concealed, covert, it's not only quarrelsome, but it's also idle.

[11:44] He engages in idle speech, gossip and slander. He says in verse 8, The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels. They go down into the inner parts of the body. Just as dinner guests devour a delicious meal that is served to them, the words of a whisperer get greedily consumed like delicious morsels.

And like poison that spreads throughout the entire body, they go down into the inner parts of the body. This proverb highlights the insidious, danger of gossip. The quarrelsome speech of the fool antagonizes the hearer, but idle speech it lures the hearer in and makes them partake in the sin of gossip.

But just as contaminated food causes food poisoning, gossip goes down into the inner parts of the body and poisons our mind, our thoughts, our attitudes toward others.

So whether it's concealed speech, controversial, quarrelsome speech, the fool's speech has the effect of dividing and destroying the community he is in.

And then, in verse 9, Solomon throws in one more category of the foolish talker who destroys his community. Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys. The slacker is connected to the idle talker because if you're busy talking, you're not busy working.

[13:11] Proverbs chapter 14, 23, 24 made this explicit connection. In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty. The slacker, like the unjust judge, like the quarreller, like the gossip, destroys both himself and his community.

And that's the first section dealing with the prideful talker. Now, as a contrast to this grim portrait, let's look at the humble listener in verses 20 to 21. Who, instead of trusting in his own mouth, trusts in the Lord and listens to his word.

It says in verse 10 and 11, The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous man runs into it and is safe. A rich man's wealth is a strong city and like a high wall in his imagination.

The two verses form a memorable contrast. The righteous man runs to the name of the Lord, which is a strong tower for him and keeps him safe. Now, this doesn't mean, you know, superstitiously invoking God's name for some kind of magical protection.

The name of someone represents the identity and character of that person. And to trust in the name of the Lord is to trust in Him, to believe in what He has said, to trust and rely on what He has promised.

[14:33] And this imagery of a defensive fortification is particularly appropriate after verse 9, which spoke of the foolish talker with a brother to him who destroys.

When injustice, quarrels, gossip, and slander seek to destroy him, the righteous person runs to the Lord for defense and vindication, trusting that God's righteous judgment will prevail.

That's what God's calling us to do. I'm sure you've all been subjects of a malicious gossip or slander.

Been part of arguments, quarrels, victims of injustice. You can run to God for protection because His promises, His word is true.

In a striking contrast, a rich man's wealth is his strong city and like a high wall in his imagination. It's quite the dig.

[15:44] The rich man thinks that his wealth will protect him from destruction and get him out of trouble. But this is ultimately an illusion, a figment of his imagination.

In the end, the rich man will die and face God's impartial judgment like every other man. And this is ironic. The rich man's visible wealth is but an imaginary defense, but the righteous man's invisible Lord is a real stalwart defense.

brothers and sisters, rich people might hire bodyguards, flee dangerous situations in private jets, pay for world-class medical treatment and access, pay for access to vaccines that are not available to common folk.

They might build walled mansions with security cameras, hire the best lawyers to protect their reputation and destroy other people's, but don't ever think that they have it better than you do.

That they are more protected than you are because that is not true. The fortification that they buy with their wealth is only imaginary.

[17:03] But the Lord our God is a real, invincible fortress. If we run to him, he will deliver us. If we are faithful to him, his justice will vindicate us in the end.

So we have nothing to fear. Those who trust in God are not the ones who will be destroyed in the end. As verse 12 says, before destruction, a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

It's the haughty, those who elevate themselves before God, the prideful talker, the self-sufficient rich, those who trust in themselves and not in God, they will be destroyed because God exalts those who humble themselves and humbles those who exalt themselves.

The Lord lifts up the humble listener but brings down the prideful talker. In the preceding verses, words like mouth, lip, tongue, you know, they predominated but highlighted the folly of the talker. But here, in the following verses, we see words like hear and ear and the concept of listening and learning predominate. It says in verses 13 to 15, if one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

[18:17] A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear. An intelligent heart acquires knowledge and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

Because, as we saw in verse 2, a fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in expressing his own opinion, he also tends to give an answer before he hears. He jumps to conclusions, presumes to know other people's thoughts, what they are talking about before really hearing them out, considering their points of view.

They prematurely form judgments and in doing so, they expose themselves to be a fool, to be fools who bring shame upon themselves. And the consequence of such folly, it says, is a crushed spirit. Verse 14 says, A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear. Humanity has known for thousands of years that there is a relationship between the mind and the body and in one's health, overall health.

But recently, there has been a recovery of this neglected wisdom, which was written in the book of Proverbs nearly 3,000 years ago. In an article entitled, The Will to Live, published by the Stanford Center for Integrative Medicine, The Authors Ernest and Isadora Rosenbaum write about how sometimes two patients of similar ages and same diagnosis, same degree of illness, and same treatment program will nonetheless experience vastly different outcomes.

[19:52] And often, one of the few apparent differences is that one patient has a stronger will to live than the other. They write about, in that article, the rise of the field of psychoneuroimmunology, where researchers experiment with the effect that mental and emotional activity have on physical well-being.

This is what verse 14 is talking about already almost 3,000 years ago. A man with a robust spirit can endure sickness, but there is no hope for a crushed spirit.

spirit. The word spirit and heart are often used interchangeably in poetic literature. We can see this in Proverbs 17, verse 22. A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Now, knowing this, we can make out what the connection is between verse 13, 14, and 15.

Because verse 15 says, an intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

So there's a connection between the intelligent heart, the heart of understanding, and the spirit that endures its sickness. The fool who answers before he hears has a crushed spirit, but the person of understanding who seeks God's knowledge, who is eager to learn, who has a strong spirit, he can endure sickness.

[21 : 16] That's the paradox that runs through the entire book of Proverbs. The fool who has much to learn is impervious to learning. The sage, on the other hand, who has humbled himself before God, is open to learning, quick to hear.

So the key then to a robust spirit is a humble trust in God, which produces joy, hope, thanksgiving, peace.

The Lord lifts up the humble listener, but brings down the prideful talker. Humble listening is important in the courtroom as well. Verse 16 says, A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before the great.

What's in view here is a bribe. As we saw in chapter 17, verse 23, a bribe grants the giver an audience before judges and princes so that he gets the first hearing and has an opportunity to curry their favor.

A gift, however, should not be a prerequisite for a fair hearing in court. So verse 17 warns against that. The one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him.

[22 : 32] This is why a judge should never take bribes or give priority hearing to one party. If you only hear one side of the argument, that side always sounds right.

This is why in courts we have the practice of cross-examination. People always present themselves in their own arguments in the most favorable light.

It's only when they are cross-examined that misrepresentations, exaggerations, and flat-out lies are exposed. This is a helpful practice outside of the courtroom as well.

When you hear an argument or an accusation made by one side, whether it's among your family and friends in your lives or whether it's in the news, make sure you listen to the opposing side also. And make sure you give each side a fair hearing instead of prejudging the case. Parents experience this all the time. They're not listening.

[23 : 39] One child comes up and says, she said this, did this to me. And then, you grab the other child and ask her, and then you learn very quickly that the first child didn't tell you the full story.

Adults do the same thing. Okay. So we must remember that the one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him.

Verses 18 to 19 then look beyond this to cases that may not be resolved in the courtroom. And the two verses qualify one another. The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders.

A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle. The quarrel, the word occurs in both verses, is the topic of despair.

And verse 18 teaches us that in some situations when there's a stalemate in a conflict and a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, a lot can end the quarrel.

[25 : 01] The lot because it is impartial. And as Proverbs chapter 16 verse 33 said, the lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord. So in submitting to the lot, one learns humility before God, self-denial, and faith.

But there is one particular type of quarrel that is especially difficult to resolve. And that is the case of an offended brother. When an intimate friend or brother is offended in a way that betrays his confidence, that brother will be more unyielding than a strong city and quarreling will be like the bars of a castle.

And then verses 20 to 21 conclude this section by returning to the imagery of the mouth and lip. It says, from the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied. He is satisfied by the yield of his lips. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, but those who love it will eat its fruit. The book of Proverbs often depicts one's words as something that people eat, that can influence people. And here, Solomon takes that imagery one step further to make the point that we ourselves also eat the fruit of what we say. It's an intentionally paradoxical image.

[26 : 22] By what we dish out to others in our words, we will also be served. We will eat the consequence of our words. We reap what we sow and we eat what we speak.

We will bear the consequences and so that for that reason we should take all the more care in what we say. As verse 21 says, death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will

eat its fruits.

The phrase death and life is a rhetorical device called the merism where the two extremes are mentioned in order to include everything in between. So when you say both young and old are invited to the party, that means everyone is invited of all ages, not just old people and young people.

So likewise here, when it says death and life are in the power of the tongue, it means that the tongue has the power to kill or to save and everything in between. It has the power to affect all the highs and lows of life.

And those who love it will eat its fruits. Those who love words, those who love language, those who love to use words, they will eat the fruit of what they say whether it's toward life or toward death.

[27 : 34] And there are words that this Proverbs 18 is pointing to, words that we must above all things speak and eat. The words that bring blessing in this life and ultimately eternal life and that word is God's word.

Deuteronomy chapter 8 verses 1 to 3 say this, the whole commandment that I commanded today you shall be careful to do that you may live and multiply and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers.

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

God's people live not only by bread but by the word of God. It's this word that prophet Jeremiah ate and proclaimed. He says in Jeremiah chapter 15 verse 16, your words were found and I ate them and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart for I am called by your name O Lord God of hosts.

[29 : 05] And this word of God that delighted and gave life to the saints of old is brought to ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ who is called in John 1 the word of God made flesh.

the word of God become man and though we had pridefully rejected God's word and lived by our own mouth and by our own wills, Jesus emptied Himself.

Jesus became a man. He humbled Himself. He became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And it's by His death that He made satisfaction for our sins and by His resurrection that He gives us abundant life and life forevermore in the presence of God.

Brothers and sisters, we must listen to this word. We must believe this word. We must speak this word. We must cherish this word because it is a matter of eternal life or eternal death because our salvation depends on it.

This is why we take pains every Sunday to gather, to sing God's word, to profess God's word, to read God's word, to hear God's word preached.

[30 : 21] Lest we forget, lest the word of God become less and less real to us and we find that one day we no longer believe it. So it says in Colossians chapter 3 verse 16, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

That's what the church is all about. That's why we're here, to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. And I pray that as you, as we continue our worship and as we leave from this place, that you will be enriched and fed with God's word as you go from here.

Please think about that for a moment and think about how God's calling you to respond, what he's calling you to change, how he's comforting you and convicting you.

And after you've done that, we will pray out loud together as a church. tie it together as you go from here.