

Part 14: What Does a Soul Sound Like?

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In this room I imagine there are two groups of people who grew up with two different views on our own words.

There is a crowd that grew up with the cultural proverbs of: "I'm rubber, your glue, whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you." Or "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt men."

The point was that words are just that: words. They have no real weight behind them. They don't shape you.

But there's another group of people who grew up, or are growing up, under that mindset that words have an immense effect on your life. If you can speak positive, you will live positive. If you use the wrong words around the wrong people you can cause traumatic harm.

You can see this play out with the debates surrounding which words are culturally acceptable and the constant desire to legislate the way we talk about and to other people.

Our passage today predates both of these cultural examples but is speaking on the same topic: our words.

Contrary to the "words are just words" camp, Solomon's proverbs today are going to show us that words indeed do matter to God and do have a shaping force on you and others. But in regards to the "words are the most defining part of our lives" group, Solomon is going to help us understand "whose words are the most defining words in our lives?"

The book of Proverbs deals with the topic of our mouths a lot but behind this theme is something bigger than just our words.

If you were listening to the passage we just read you heard lots of pictures which we generally attach to words: "a babbling fool comes to ruin (vs. 8,10)," "the mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom (vs. 31)," "on the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found (13)," "whoever utters slander is a fool (vs. 18)," and "the tongue of the righteous is choice silver (vs. 20)."

Mouths, lips, utterances, tongues, all of these portray the simple function of communication. But what Solomon is actually doing through these comparing and contrasting proverbs is making a bigger point than mere communication.

Maybe you noticed, but in verse 6 words are being contrasted with the head, which in Hebrew literature was representative of the whole person. Also in verse 20 the tongue is being contrasted with the heart.

The point is that our words actually communicate something about the whole of us. The tongue actually represents the whole person.

Jesus himself makes this point when he is correcting the Pharisees and he says to them in Matthew 15: It's not what goes into the body that defiles but what comes out of it. Matthew 15:18 then says, "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart."

This here is Jesus expounding on the very framework which Solomon is setting up for us in Proverbs 10. In fact what we can see is that our tongues are often placeholders for three things in Proverbs: our words are connected to our hearts, our habits, and our hopes.

We are going to see this in three parts today: First in verses 6-10 we are going to see **Our Words and God's Words**, then in verses 11-21 we are going to look at **Our Words and the Lives of Others**, and lastly in verses 22-32 we are going to look at **Our Words and Our Own Lives**.

So let's begin by looking at our first point today: **Our Words and God's Words**. Read with me **Proverbs 10:6-10**.

Did you notice the contrasts built up in here? What are the wicked doing? The wicked mouth is concealing judgment, the babbling fool comes to ruin in verse 8, and the babbling fool (which is literally to say the never ending lips of a fool) again brings ruin in verse 9. The wicked cannot keep his mouth shut and no one is better off for it.

But did you notice what Solomon didn't say in this opening section? We would expect him to say (as he will in a moment), the mouth of the wicked conceals violence but the words of the wise bring healing. Or a babbling fool brings ruin, but the mouth of the wise earns safety.

As we move on Solomon will say those things, but here in his opening section on words he actually talks a lot about the words of the wicked, but he never talks about the mouth or the words of the wise.

Isn't that interesting? Whereas the wicked are running off at the mouth talking about whatever, wherever, what is the mouth of the wise doing? Instead of Solomon's opening contrast being about the words of the wicked and the words of the wise, his opening contrast is about the words the wicked speak and the words the wise hear.

Look back at **Proverbs 10:8**.

Where the fool starts with his own words, the wise in heart starts with God's words. He receives the words of another.

How counter intuitive is this! Because here we get this sense that the foolish mouth is running amuck destroying the community but instead of matching the words of the wicked with his own words, the wise first go to God's word.

Specifically his commands which were in God's law given to Israel at the time. And we've discussed this before but the Israelites didn't just view the commands of God's law as boring legal literature, the law and its commands stood as a reminder of God's faithfulness to watch over, provide for and deliver his people.

The law stood as a reminder of God's faithfulness to them.

We are surrounded by words on every side of us in this world.

There are 1.7 billion webpages on the internet filled with words, 1.7 million podcasts speaking to our ears, on top of the thousands of social media posts we read a day, radio ads we hear, billboards we take in and commercials we see.

Our world is filled with words, but without receiving God's words we too will babble ourselves into our own ruin. Our world calls us to listen to it, and to respond with fervent immediacy to it, but the wise know whose words matter.

This is important for us to understand because if we are not careful we can read God's words in the same way we read culture's words. Many of us can read excellent books on God, and spend much time reading the Bible, but we can forget the person who stands behind it and the difference that brings.

Charles Bridges wrote of the dangers Christians themselves might fall into all the way back in 1865 when he said this: **"We find him a man of creeds and doctrines, not of prayer; asking curious questions, rather than listening to plain truths; waiting to know events rather than duties; occupied with other men's business to the neglect of his own. In this vagrant spirit, with all his thoughts outward-bound, he wanders from church to church, and from house to house, a prating fool upon religion; bold in his own conceit, while his life and temper fearfully contradict his fluent tongue. Too blind to respect himself, too proud to listen to counsel, he will surely fall into disgrace, beaten with the rod of his own foolishness. Let me look at this picture as a beacon against the folly of my own heart. Young Christian! Beware of a religion—without humility, consistency, love; because [you are] separated from close walking with God."**

In other words it's possible to know all the words and have all the words but at the same time neglect God's word to you. When you hear the constant banter of our world, or when your own tongue begins to itch have you stopped to consider: "How does God's word help me think about this and how does seeing God's faithfulness in Jesus shape the way I act?"

Look at how Jesus himself modeled this in **1 Peter 2:21-23**.

You see when Jesus faced the council he didn't speak, but he also didn't do nothing, he entrusted himself to his father who judges justly. Reliance upon God loosed Jesus to say the very things which riled up his opposition but also restrained his mouth among the council which would condemn him.

Dear Christian, we have the wonderful privilege of the most defining words about us being Jesus words about us. To put our trust in Jesus Christ and to lay down our own supremacy is to take up the world's greatest advocate. Jesus didn't take up his own words in his own trial because it was his mission to pay the penalty for your sins so that he might actually use his own words before God in defense of all who believe in him.

There is no rest from the criticism of the world except in the commendation of Jesus Christ! To be found in him is to be called by name a child of God. It is to have Jesus take up the defense for you before God and say, "Though his sins were as scarlet I have washed them whiter than snow."

There is supreme and ultimate joy in letting Christ speak for you, but there is an enduring joy in letting Christ speak to you in his word.

How do we change our speech? We become familiar with God's speech both in the gospel and in his word. I have a really weird quirk and that is when I'm around some of my southern friends, I start lengthening my vowels and speaking slower.

What's happening? As I hear them speak, I am actually starting to speak like them. What is weird in the social context is wonderful in the Christian one. To become familiar with God's faithfulness to you in his word is to actually have our own words shaped by his.

And then what happens? Look at **Proverbs 10:11a**.

When we are shaped by God's word, God's salvation for us in Jesus Christ we are transformed not into a babbling brook with little to offer. But into a fountain of life for others to see and enjoy.

This is our second point today: **Our Words and the Lives of Others**

Not only does the wise person start first with God's words instead of his own, he secondly ensures that what words he does have is of benefit to those who are around him.

Look at the corporate nature of words in **Proverbs 10:11-21**.

Our words matter. I know we just read this, but did you notice the contrasts which show how our words and our habits affect those around us?

The one with understanding of God's word on his lips brings wisdom into his community. The fool forces those around him to constantly discipline him with the rod.

The wise store up knowledge like a distribution warehouse to give to those who have need. The mouth of a fool is like a piggy bank with the bottom cut out, it is only quick to bring ruin to those around him.

The wise man contributes to the wealth of his city, he takes pride in the corporate good that he actively participates in. The fool sits back in sinful poverty and ruin by not laboring for the good of others.

The wise man leads others on the way of life, but the fool, even without words, speaks a message which leads others astray.

The fool might think himself to be holy because he doesn't let the person whom he hates know that he hates him! But when the fool then gossips about that person behind his back, he is just as guilty as hating him to his face.

The fool knows only endless speaking, but the wise know restraint. The wise provides a monetary blessing to a community with their tongue, but the heart of a fool adds no value.

The righteous use their lips to nourish many people, but the fool dies because he himself has no food to eat, let alone give.

Here's the beauty of this book, you get to take it home with you. And you need to! Some of these passages show the wise speaking, some show the wise remaining silent. Which one should you listen to right now? You need to take the time to consider and discern yourself.

But what we can glean as common to all of this is the way in which the wise bless their community with what they communicate and participate in and the fool adds only ruin, want and pain.

Look how James puts this in **James 3:9-12**.

So here is both a challenge and an encouragement in the gospel. James on one hand points out that our tongues need to not labor for wickedness but instead for blessing. But then he points out obvious contrasts: olive trees don't produce figs. Salt water doesn't produce fresh water.

What's his point? First is the out of place-ness of this kind of conduct, but secondly the blessing of conversion. If by grace Jesus has made you a new creation, you really can produce fruit in accordance with your new identity. Grace doesn't say: You fig tree, produce olives! That wouldn't be possible. But grace instead grafts us into Jesus where we can produce the fruit we were made to produce.

The word of God turns our words outward to consider others. This other oriented building up isn't shaped by what the world says builds up. It's shaped by what God's word says builds up.

This means that when we encourage those around us it sounds different than cultural platitudes, we encourage one another with the realities of the word of God which saves us. It also means that sometimes, for the benefit of those around us, we say hard things to each other, helping them come back to the right path, calling them to repentance.

Here's why we need this passage today more than ever. When Solomon is talking about the wise man contributing to his strong city, the greatest analogy in our world is not our broader city, but the church.

In Solomon's day the people of the city were predominantly Jews whose belief and social functions mirrored God's law. It was a community built on a reliance upon God. So when Solomon speaks of contributing with words to his city, we should think of how our words help in Missoula, but we should first of all be challenged at how we are contributing to the good of our church.

We live in a world which is becoming increasingly post-Christian which means our churches must be increasingly pro-Christian. We must learn to use our words in a distinctly Christian way so that we might encourage and care for each other in a world which will may increasingly find Christians offensive.

That's what members at Sovereign Hope covenant to do with each other. Members make three commitments to each other, we believe God's word together, we belong together as a Christian community, and we become more Christlike together as we grow in holiness.

You see there has been a creep of how we interact with our world that has happened in the Western mind over the last several hundred years. It used to be that people only viewed themselves through their own participation in religion. Then after the enlightenment we viewed ourselves through the lens of how we belong to a society. In this the moral commands for our lives and our lips weren't based on something divine, but on simply belonging to what is culturally appropriate. But now we have made the turn into our own lives.

Now we interact with the world not by thinking of God, or of others, but by taking the cultural creed that this whole world is ultimately about your own quest for pleasure.

Now there is something really profound here both culturally and in scripture. Because the Bible actually offers you deep personal satisfaction. We will see that in a moment. But it doesn't come from considering yourself as the center of your own life.

Instead it models what we have already seen: It starts with your responsibility to the God who created us, then it looks at the responsibility you have to your fellow image bearers, then it looks at your own life.

Solomon actually says that this is the way to the pleasure you've been looking for. Look at **Proverbs 10:22-24**.

The world says live for yourself and there you will have the greatest pleasure. Solomon here says that the wicked think doing wrong is what brings them the happiness and pleasure they want in this world, but the wise find their pleasure and their happiness in understanding God's wisdom.

This is our last point: **Our Words and Our Own Lives**

Read with me: **Proverbs 10:25-32**.

Doesn't Solomon make a wonderful point here that we need to hear today! The world says look into your heart, use your words for your own ends, and then you'll find happiness. The Bible says, crucify yourself, consider God's words, fear the Lord, and you will receive the desires of your heart.

If you want to make it in this world, here we see how you can, by fearing the Lord. That is by realizing that he is king and you are not. Yet, by grace Jesus brings us into the good blessing of the King. Now if we are found in Christ we will not be uprooted from the promise of God.

This life is like a storm and it will blow and boom but at the end the righteous will find their joy! They will get what it was they were looking for. They find their delight in the God who endures us in a world filled with wicked words and violent tongues.

Here's the wonderful inversion of the culture of the day. Where our world says: "Whoever wants to keep his life must take control of it for his own good!" God's word says, "Whoever wishes to keep his life must lose it."

Now, this is so incredibly counterintuitive that we cannot do this on our own. Unless we see the beauty of what Jesus has done, we will never be able to actually find pleasure in turning away from the world and towards God.

Why? Because it seems foolish! But when we, like the wise man, receive God's word in the gospel, we see that God is trustworthy to bring this joy and to bring this life. Because we've seen it in Jesus. We see that God has already provided good on his promise, in Jesus we have life through death, through Jesus we are restored to the satisfying presence of God himself.

When we see God as trustworthy in sending Jesus to pay the price for our sins and to win us back to God, we have the difficult but delightful privilege of walking in obedience to him. But look at this hope: **Proverbs 10:28**. This life is the life of joy. To miss this is to reap destruction.

Now here's the kicker here. It almost seems like we've left the realm of words behind. It's like he's moved on to something more important: matters of life and death, delight and destruction, permanence and passing glory.

But look how he finishes this: **Proverbs 10:31-32**.

Even though Solomon drifts into these ultimate categories of life and death, our words are still in his view.

Why such a hard pivot? Because Solomon knows that no man can see his soul, but in Proverbs 10 we are taught how to hear our soul in our own words. Our mouths show our heart towards God, our habits towards others, and our own hope in salvation.

Have you ever heard your own voice on a recording? Most people hear that and think: "Is that really what I sound like?" This text is meant to have you consider everything that stands behind your words and say: "Do I really sound like that?"

The righteous know what is acceptable according to God's words and they bring forth wisdom. They show a reliance upon God's word given to them in the gospel and they are given over to helping others see this in their own lives as well.

If we don't sound like this, if our habits and hopes are out of line with this text, then we have the privilege of repenting and going back to God asking for more grace.