

Wisdom and Words

By [Mike Glodo](#)

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I'd ask you to turn in your Bibles this morning to Proverbs, Chapter 10, verses six through 14. And today, we continue what was a series for most of the fall semester.

In the fall, we were hearing different words on the series wise up, and most of it was with big brush strokes. And so while we'll conclude the series with Dr Swain later in the semester on Proverbs 1, it's important that we also look at the details to descend into the nap of the carpet, so to speak, so that we might see the value of Proverbs on a very practical as well as on a grand theological scale. So hear God's word this morning from Proverbs chapter 10, begin reading at verse 6:

Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.

The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.

Whoever winks the eye causes trouble, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.

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

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

On the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense, the wise lay up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool brings ruin near.

This is God's word. Let's ask God, the Spirit, to add his blessing to this reading of His Word. Will you pray with me?

O Lord, open our eyes that we may behold wonderful things in your law. Quicken our hearts that these dry bones might live and help us to be hearers, not as but more than hearers. Doers of this word of yours by your spirit we ask in Christ's name, Amen.

So if you're new to Central Florida, you'll learn that there's such a thing as Central Florida on a budget, including Gatorland and a lot of different parks. But one of my favorite sites for Central Florida on a budget is the Reptile World Serpentarium on US 192 east of Kissimmee and Suburban Holopaw.

Thursday through Sunday each week, you can go to the venom extraction show. And since 1972 venom extraction has been done both undoubtedly for the entertainment of middle schoolers everywhere as well as their parents, but also for a host of pharmacological purposes. You see, snake venom is used pharmacologically to help in research and even cures for things ranging from thrombosis to arthritis and even cancer research.

As you walk into the serpentarium, it feels like the Old Curiosity Shop, and you actually do want to start looking around you to see if there are any residents that are uncaged.

But through the dimness of the light, you'll see herpetologist George Van Horn, who is a Central Florida legend. In 1972 he went on a school field trip to the Miami serpentarium, and the rest is history.

But if you get closer to Mr. Van Horn, you'll see something curious. You'll see random knots raised on his forearms, and then if you look even closer, you'll see the tips of a select few fingers are missing.

After 45 years of handling venomous snakes, his hands and his forearms testify to the power of what he handles, the power both for good, but also for ill.

And by contrast, you might remember last year a Florida man who tried to kiss a rattlesnake with predictable results. Mr. Van Horn has learned to skillfully handle what is potentially deadly, but for great good.

Now that's not unlike the subject of today's text, which is the use of words.

Words.

Except in rare cases of disability, words are a universal human endowment. Even when an infant cries, it's the first step on a path towards speech, to be able to act upon his or her social environment. Words are the constantly social capacity of human beings.

Words are fundamental to the way we move in the world. It's a way we project ourselves in the world. It's a way to know and to be known by others. It's a way to defend, to attack, it's a way to name (which, by the way, was Adam's first act as God's vice regent).

But when it comes to words, we can have the same responses that we do to venomous snakes, realizing that all snakes are potentially venomous and assumed to be, until proven otherwise.

When it comes to words, we're vulnerable to either folly that is like Florida Man kissing the rattlesnake, using words foolishly, or fear that results in avoiding their purpose and use altogether.

But the sage here in Proverbs says that words have the capacity to do great good for ourselves and for others, and so what we want to learn from these words in Proverbs is how to use words skillfully, so that we use them neither in folly, nor in fear. And like Mr. Van Horn - that we use what is a very powerful gift for the good of us, and others. So I want us to look at these verses that we've read and to understand the message of them - that God has given us words so that we can give life, and what that means is that we have to learn to use words wisely.

Let's first look at how we must use words wisely from the school of words, or the school of wisdom. And the first thing I want us to see is that words are covenantal stewardship.

Words are covenantal stewardship, and that's why we must be trained in wise use of words. And that is really found explicitly in verse 1, which I did not read, but which stands over not only this, but also next week's text, which will be about wealth.

"A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother."

This invokes the notion that wisdom is a school, and we would be remiss to think it's just home schooling, because the whole of Proverbs is couched in the Solomonic cloak, if you will. In fact, chapter 10 begins the first explicit collection of the proverbs of Solomon. Chapters one through nine are an extended introduction about the value and the nature and the preciousness of wisdom and the disastrous consequences of folly. Now we get to the actual teaching of wisdom itself.

"A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother."

We're reminded that wisdom is something conveyed in a bonded social unit. But beyond simply the family, it is the instruction of the King, training his princes so that they might have the wisdom which God has given the king to rule over the people of God.

This actually is the Old Testament version of Second Timothy 2:2.

“What you have heard in the presence of many witnesses, teach faithfully others so that they might teach as well.”

Wisdom is a School, but it is a covenant school, and it means that what is given in that school is a stewardship. It is an entrustment.

Wisdom is masterful understanding. Wisdom is skill. It's not just knowing things, but it's knowing how to use things and which things to use, whether it's in a clinic or in a pulpit or writing on a page. Skillful understanding, masterful understanding, and skillful understanding and masterful understanding equips us to deal with the limitless life situations which we encounter.

Wisdom's offerings come to us and comes to others. So wisdom is also inherently social. You can see that in the parental child metaphor here in verse 1, but it is true throughout the book, and you'll see, especially in verses 11 through 14 here, that wisdom is inherently social. Sometimes we just feel like being alone, but God has given us words so that we might be present with others and be in relationship. It's a masterful understanding for proper social relationships, as our former colleague, Bruce Waltke, has said.

And furthermore, this covenantal school, this school of bonded relationships, is a school of words. That's what verses 6 through 14 are about. And here again, I have to credit Dr. Waltke, but Dr. Futato advances this notion, as well as do many others.

We've tended to think of the proverbs as perhaps a random collection, and people have written commentaries that say it's a random collection, but it's like one of those digital posters of the 1990's. You looked at the poster and you couldn't see anything but dots. How many of you got a headache looking at one of those? But you were told there was a picture there, and you believed what the person told you. So you had to stare at it for a while, and you had to get your focal distance right, but once you did, you'd see the whale or the submarine or whatever it was in there.

We're not without aid here. The sage has invited us to see the system of wisdom that he has laid out for us. If we start to look at verses 6 through 14, (which we will), we'll see it's all about words.

It's all about words because it refers to the body parts that contain words, lips and mouths.

It refers to words themselves that are spoken, and it refers to the use of words. Verses 6 through 14 are about words, and so in the context of verse 1, it's about the wise use of words, or covenantal use of words, meaning that speech is a fundamental stewardship of every human being.

We've been given words by God, not just to speak according to our own will and wishes, We are given words by God so that we might speak in the way that He wishes, so that we might speak wisely.

I've never worked as a parking valet, driving somebody else's Maserati or Mercedes Benz. I did get to drive a Volvo, house sitting one time for a week.

A couple of kids had seat heaters, which in the Midwest, was just phenomenal.

But I was mindful as I drove this Volvo station wagon that didn't belong to me, that it belonged to somebody else. I wasn't always such a good steward when I drove my parents' cars as a teenager. After all, since dad doesn't take her out on the highway to see what she can do as does a 16-year-old, you got to do that. I remember the day my brothers and I ran dad's car into a ditch seeing what she could do on the highway.

You see contrasting approaches to stewardship. But have you ever thought of words as something God has given you to use according to His wish? Your words don't belong to you, and this is why the sage wants us to use words wisely. Wisdom is words that are a covenantal stewardship, and that's why we have to learn to use them skillfully.

Secondly, I want you to see how words used wisely will preserve our own lives, and that's a reason we must use words wisely. This is in verses 6 through 9:

"Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence."

Violence. Now the better translation of that second phrase in verse 6 is that "the mouth of the wicked will be covered by violence," and the ESV in the latest version, as well as the NIV in its present version will give you that alternative.

In other words, the mouth of the wicked are ultimately going to bring violence upon them.

If you've ever had a mouthy friend and you've been out on a weekend and they decide to get mouthy with somebody, there is the risk of the mouth of the wicked bringing violence upon them - and you have in verse 6 a typical contrast here of what happens to the righteous who speak wise words, versus the fool who speaks wicked words.

Blessings are on the head of the righteous, because the righteous, through the wise use of words, will receive words of blessing from others. In other words, they'll be of good reputation. People will be grateful for them. People will speak well of them.

Now, of course, we're also warned to "beware when all kinds of men speak well of you," because there is such a thing as playing to the crowd or being men pleasers and saying only what people want to hear. But by and large, wise use of words will gain a good reputation for you.

Verses 7 through 9, *"the memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot the memory of the righteous."*

It's what people say about us when we've gone, either temporarily or eternally, that people will, when they reflect and remember us, regard our reputation - and the memory of that person is a blessing because they used words wisely.

Contrary to this, the name of the wicked will rot the longer they're in the grave - and the longer their corpse rots, the more their reputation will rot and become a stench to others. People will think he wasn't a good person, she wasn't a good person. All in respect to how they used words.

And so the wise use of words blesses us and it preserves us, according to the sage.

Verse 8:, *"the wise of heart will receive commandments."*

That is, wise people will listen to good words.

I heard someone say a long time ago, for most people, the opposite of talking isn't listening, it's inhaling.

I do that a lot. I don't know if you do, but somebody's talking, and it's an animated conversation. They're saying something. You've got the next thing you want to say all queued up. You're ready to hit the ball but they won't stop. They've got a lot of wind, and they're not stopping. But you're sitting, you're inhaling, so that you can speak whenever they pause to take a breath.

That's not the wise user of words. That's not the skillful person in words, because they're speaking before they've listened.

And we are to be listeners first if we wish to make wise use of words, *"but a babbling fool will come to ruin."* His mouth is just like a broken water pipe. It's gushing out, but it's not gushing out anything. It's gushing out things that don't mean anything. A babbling fool is somebody who says a lot of things, but they don't say anything.

And perhaps it's because they love to hear the sound of their own voice. Perhaps it's through the belief that through many words, they can control the situation or gain approval, but doesn't chapter 15 of Proverbs tell us *"Where words are many, transgression is not lacking?"*

Now that sounds like a Britishism there. Notice the grand understatement of that verse in chapter 15, *"where words are many, transgression is not lacking,"* you see that contains, embodies the very kind of wisdom we're talking about here. When we're talking a lot, we're not listening.

But the sage uses understatement in order to illustrate that point in chapter 15, verse 9: *"Whoever walks in integrity walks securely."*

What is integrity? Remember your junior high math lessons? An integer is what?

If you're taking the GRS, you'd better brush up. An integer is a whole number with a "w", a whole number. It's not a fraction. It's not a divided number.

And a person of security is a person for whom all the parts fit.

They're not one person with some people and a different person with other people.

You don't get the impression they're saying things to play to whoever they're with, that their deeds match up with their words, that their words are consistent with not only other words they say, but their actions.

And so it is with the person who walks in integrity, whose words match their life.

They walk securely. They are on firm footing. If our words match our life wisely, then we are on firm footing.

There is this connection between the heart, as we'll see later, and our speech. Jesus said in Matthew 13 and Matthew 15, that it's not what goes into us, but what comes out of us. And he's not talking there about a bad plate of sushi. He's talking about words that come out because they come out of the heart. And that's not "heart" in this sense of just the emotions, not in the Disney sense of "follow your heart," but heart in the sense of the seat of the person, where a person's moral and ethical and intellectual and all dimensions of their life comes together and proceeds from.

Conversely, "He who makes his ways crooked will be found out." That's when somebody's speech is misdirection.

It's good in the Super Bowl to fake people out. It's good on a basketball court where Dr. Allen is for the semester. It's good in intelligence and counterintelligence and times of state conflict to fake people out, but it's not good for our words habitually to be misdirection.

And so, the fool or the wicked person will be discovered.

The sage teaches us that wise words preserve our own lives, and we are to use words wisely by using them with integrity, by listening, by not babbling without content. And if we do that, we'll be secure, and we will have a good reputation, and people remember that as well.

And then we come to verse 10, which is sort of like an interlocking verse. If you've ever locked fingers like this, verse 10 binds these two parts together. There's a lot that could be said here about the intricacy of the syntax here, but it moves us from the wise words that preserve our own lives to the social realm, where wise words will also bless others and preserve others.

Now verse 10 says, *"Whoever winks the eye causes trouble."*

He's anticipating the social impact of words, because when you are deceptive in speech, when you're crooked in speech, you're going to cause problems with other people, right?

But the second half of verse 10 harkens back to what has previously said, and that way, it is a transition verse, or some might call a Janus verse, where it connects the two sections together.

But then we come to verses 11 through 14, where we see that wise words bless and preserve the community. We've gone from wise words bless and preserve us individually. Now wise words bless and preserve the community. That is, wise words and foolish words have effects on others, and that's why we have to learn to use words wisely.

Look at verse 11. *"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life."* That is, the mouth of the righteous gives life to others. It spews out goodness, so that others benefit.

"But the mouth of the wicked is covered by violence." As I said earlier, that is the mouth of the wicked is going to cause violence. It's going to cause tumult.

Verse 12, *"hatred stirs up strife,"* but hatred doesn't stir up strife until it is enacted. This is not just some inner steaming rage or anger, but it's one that's acting out now, in words – *"but love covers all offenses."*

Now, it's not "covers" in the sense of "to atone for" here, but it's "covers" in the sense that it compensates in that it makes peace, that it calms the situation. Of course, this is quoted by Peter and James about wise use of words. There's no book in the New Testament that is more about wisdom than the book of James, and he has that magnificent section on the tongue, and it's adverse, as well as its positive consequences.

So that wise use of words doesn't mean making people angry and tumultuous but rather compensating for people's conflict. I mean, I've been a parent. My wife is the consummate schoolteacher.

I remember the wife of one of our grads. She was a counseling graduate of RTS. He spoke at commencement last spring, and some of you have met them, I remember him telling me, "Well, it's great to have a counselor as a wife." He said, "Whenever my kids start arguing, my wife says, 'Tell me, how are you feeling? What is, what's bothering you?' She's this balm on the situation. She's sorting out. She's soliciting what the inner life of the children are at that given point in order to make peace." And Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers.*"

That's what verse 12 is telling us, "*on the lips of him.*" Verse 13, "*who has understanding, wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense.*"

There's a very clever interlocking there of these verses, which you can look at sometime in your Hebrew or proverbs class.

"But the one who has perception is the one who possesses wise words."

Now, understanding here is that word "perception," and it's the ability to see into something, to understand how it works.

So much of the time when we encounter conflict, we want to play tennis, but wise use of words says we should use a microscope instead.

That is, to see into what's going on, to use a spiritual X ray. Another way of thinking about it, rather than responding back. This is why Jesus encourages us that we're to return a blessing for an insult. Because once you have returned an insult for an insult, it's game on right?

And now: "*Only the rod will put fools to rest.*" The fool stirs up the social situation. He creates strife, and the only thing that's going to help is when the state comes and punishes him.

External means are the only cure for "*the back of him who lacks heart.*"

And again, it's not in the Disney sense, but it's the one who lacks a centered life, a life that has integrity, a life that fits together, a life that is self-conscious about its' use of words.

So, what do the wise do? Well, the wise lay-up knowledge. They lay up awareness of life. They look across the created order like Psalm 19 does, and they see the inventory of options before them to live and move and serve and

work in the created order that's in harmony with the way God made the world to be.

"Where the mouth of a fool brings ruin."

Near disaster is always lurking around the person who uses words foolishly, as they continue to sow foolish and empty words to keep running from disaster. So says the sage in the totality of these verses 11 through 14. They tell us something very profound about we who are training to spend our lives using words. It tells us that words, wise words, will bless the community - that our wise use of words will bring life, it'll bring prosperity, it'll bring abundance, it'll bring peace, and all the kinds of fruit of God's reign, because wise words are a stewardship, and when we use wise words wisely, we accomplish God's purposes through the use of words.

There is both a negative and a positive responsibility here, isn't there? Just as there are with the individual, there's a negative responsibility not to use words to disrupt, to create conflict, to battle.

Unfortunately, we live in a time where so many public words, at least are negative words.

James says, *"We bless God with our mouth, but we curse man who is made in His image."*

We live in a time of word inflation. Venezuela will have had 1,000,000% inflation last year in 2018 and it's a terrible situation. We should pray for the church to have a vital witness there.

But when there are inflation pressures, the temptation is to just keep making more money, which accelerates the inflation. Wise use of words resists the temptation of foolish and wicked speech. Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing.

I'm involved in helping in a church conflict situation right now, and I was getting email after email after email last week. What are we going to say? Sometimes you don't know what's going on until you've waited a moment. If you don't hashtag something within an hour of it happening in the Twitter sphere, you're out of touch. You're seen as irrelevant. And that's one temptation in the foolish use of words, because there is the fear of being deemed irrelevant, and perhaps you have felt that way.

Because we care about a lot of things measured by our stress, our anxiety and sometimes our happiness, we care about a lot of things that don't make a difference. They're just babbling words.

So there's this negative responsibility we have to say "no" to foolish words.

I'm acquainted with a very well-known figure in the church I noticed every time I saw him, he would trash somebody else and then say something very complimentary to me.

I began to ask others who knew him, "have you noticed this?" And they said, "Yes." there's a reputation that's developed here that there's this word of endearment, but there's also this word of harsh, harsh criticism.

Well, this is not a person of integrity, and that has come out in certain ways in this person's life. I know this pastor was tempted in this way because it's perceived by the world that you have to be saying a lot of stuff if you're relevant.

You have to be able to criticize something if you're perceptive or wise. But you see, the wise use of words means not saying things as much, and sometimes even more than saying things. There's this negative example, and we're training to use words, whether it's in the clinic or in the pulpit or everywhere in between.

And we're tempted, because people always listen in the room we're in. There's nothing more obnoxious than a gathering of Pastors because they're used to talking and everybody else listening. Talk about a conversation where everybody's inhaling while everybody else is talking.

And it's true on social media as well. Sometimes we must resist life-taking use of words, but positively speaking, we have been given this great gift of words to bless others, to create a prosperous social order in the church, and as we are able even beyond it, to bring order and harmony in social relationships. It's why it is a stewardship. Because the life which Proverbs holds forth as life from God, the masterful creator, that life has potential for us to impart to others through the wise use of words, not only to preserve ourselves, but to prosper our social relationships.

And of course, the master sage in all of this is the Lord Jesus Himself. When others were abandoning him, Peter said, *"To whom else shall we go? You only have the words of eternal life."* And Peter is not simply talking about getting your ticket punched to heaven. He's talking about the abundant life, the life that Proverbs tells us all about.

Faith is required of us to make wise use of words, but Jesus is our example. He's also the one who compensates for us when we are foolish and wicked in our speech.

My wife noticed something years ago.

My mother's been dead for going on five years now, but whenever I'd get off the phone with her, or when I'd get off the phone with one of my two brothers, she would say, "I can always tell when you're talking to your family." I said, "Why?" She replied: "Because you sound like you're from Kentucky."

My people came from the part of Illinois that didn't vote for Lincoln. It's way down there and that's how they talk. And if you heard some of my relatives talk, you would think it a very strange connection I had with them. My wife said: "I can always tell who you've been talking to by your accent." And I didn't take that to mean I was double minded or double tongued or anything like that.

But what she detected was an accent of a different country. And this is what the sage is calling us to have here. He's calling us to have the accent of a better country.

He's asking that our speech reflect the citizenship of a better world and the rule of a greater king. And the reason is this, to put it in Pauline terms, that our words are not our own, but they have been bought with a price and therefore, let us glorify God with wise speech.

Let's pray:

Oh Lord, may the words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable and pleasing in your sight, in Jesus' name, amen.

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