

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!

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What I'd like to do, is to think about what this proverb (Proverbs 10) says about the mouth, and the mouth's capacity to either bring forth *shalom* or to do serious violence to *shalom*, based on what's coming out of the mouth, and I'd like to tie it specifically to the world of politics. Exactly, (*Laughter*) let's all groan together...talking about what's happening in Washington, D.C. We're right in the middle of all this campaign stuff and I've been doing this for a couple of weeks, and I've found it to be a very helpful grid to keep my thinking accurate. So, let me illustrate on a micro scale, and then we'll go to the macro scale.

If I have a couple sitting in my office, and let's say the wife is saying to me, "I love my husband; I want my marriage to work; I don't want my marriage to end; I really want to do this." But then for the next hour, what keeps coming out of her mouth is critical; it's venomous; it's poisonous; it's destructive. At some point, I'm going to stop her and say, "Help me understand. There seems to be a conflict with what you say you want in your marriage, and what's coming out of your mouth. Help me understand how those two go together. How do you think those words are going to heal your marriage?"

Well, it's the very same concept then at a macro level. Now to do this, here's what I'm asking you to do. I want to remove the party affiliations, so it's irrelevant if it's Republican or Democrat or anything else. I want to remove the positions—whether you agree or disagree with a particular position someone takes. Separate all that out, and just think of it through the grid of, "What are the words coming out of this person's mouth?" and that is reflective of what's in their heart. There's actually a point to this and I will get to it.

So, look, for example, at the second part of Verse 6:

But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. (*NASB, Prov. 10:6b)

Now again, wicked is not evil. We're not talking about evil people, but about those who are in it for themselves—to advantage themselves, their party, and their position. They want to win. They want to defeat the other one, and the idea of concealing violence basically carries the idea that words can sound sophisticated and convincing, but underneath the surface it's really doing damage to *shalom*. Violence doesn't necessarily mean bloodshed in the street; it's violence to *shalom*. It's breaking down the possibility of mutual flourishing. So the grid is: when someone opens up his or her mouth, do those words sound like what's in that person's heart really wants to create *shalom*, or is it, "I want to win; I want to be right; I want to crush my opponent; I want to advance my career." What is really in the heart? That's what I'm getting at.

Verse 8:

The wise of heart will receive commands,
But a babbling fool will be ruined.

The wise—they're teachable; they want to learn; they want to grow; they want to be corrected, because ultimately, they want *shalom*. "Tell me where I'm off and I need to be corrected. Let's do this together." But the second part of the verse...the babbling fool...the fool is the Hebrew word that we've seen before; it's the know-it-all fool. So, it's the fool that doesn't want to hear what Lady Wisdom has to say. "I don't need to hear; I already know everything." The babbling is the addition to the idea that this is someone who just babbles on and on. It's like the imagery of a brook and you hear a babbling brook and it's nonstop. It goes on and on and on. Now think about whatever news network you choose. It's full of people that get on these networks and they just babble on and on and on. The facts are irrelevant; the truth is irrelevant. No matter what is presented, they're not going to change their minds; they're not going to get knocked off their talking points, because ultimately, it's about winning. Ultimately, it's about advancing, about crushing the other side, and they just go on, and go a hundred miles an hour, and they don't listen, and they get described in Proverbs as babbling fools. You have to ask yourself, "Is the intent of the heart to genuinely create *shalom*, or is it to ultimately win, to crush the enemy? Is there another motive to it?"

Verse 10:

He who winks the eye causes trouble, [and again]
And a babbling fool will be ruined.

A babbling fool will be ruined, because you create a culture that cannibalizes itself and everybody ultimately loses. That's a real common theme in the book of Proverbs. The idea of *winking an eye*, is the idea of not really telling the truth. It's kind of misinformation or half-truths. It's, "I'm going to say this—kind of wink the eye—everybody knows it's not really true, but we have to win, and this is the truth as I need it to be, in order to advance my agenda."

Now think of it again on the microlevel. Is it possible for a marriage to flourish with the *winking of an eye*? In other words, if everyday Patti and I lie to each other—half truths, mistruths, misinformation, wink an eye—whatever is necessary to get what I want—it is virtually impossible for a marriage to flourish with that behavior. I think we all get that. It is no different at the macrolevel. If you can't trust one another, then you can't flourish, so you end up with this *winking of the eye* that the Proverbs says causes trouble.

Verse 12:

Hatred stirs up strife. (vs. 12a)

Hatred as defined in Proverbs is not emotional hatred, "I hate you." It's wishing ill will on someone, "I want to see you fail. I want to see you lose. I want to see you crushed. I want something bad to happen to you. I'll do whatever is necessary to win because I genuinely want ill will—bad things to happen to you in order to advance myself and my own agenda."

Verse 18:

He who conceals hatred *has* lying lips,
And he who spreads slander is a fool.

The idea of, again, concealing hatred, concealing ill will, is the idea of trying to wrap up speech, so it sounds more noble than it is. It sounds like something really good and impressive but, at the end of the day, there's an agenda to it. The idea of lying lips is, it's hypocrisy. That's not really what's in the heart. "I want to win. I want to advance myself. I want to advance my career. I want to defeat the enemy. I'll say whatever I need to, in order to win this thing." When you go through all these different verses, and The Proverbs are full of them, what is the consistent message, is to evaluate what comes out of the mouth, and that reveals what's in the heart.

So, take Verse 18 again, and think about how this relates to the media, especially the national media. Again, whatever news outlet you choose, that's up to you. People tend to think every news outlet is biased, except the one I watch, and it's very helpful to start with—they're all biased. They all have an agenda. They're all picking the information they want to give to you. They're picking the parts of the video they want to show you. They're all promoting an agenda, and they have no problem misrepresenting the truth, if it advances their agenda. The national media has a vested interest in creating conflict. Conflict is good for business. The more it stirs up anger and conflict, the more it spills into the street, the better it is for business. But what you have to stop and think about is, "What is that doing to the community? What is that doing to flourishing? And what is it doing to you?" The media plays us like puppets—gets us all wound up, gets us angry at the very people we are called to love and to reach.

So, by now, you're thinking, "*Okay, what is the point?*" That's a fine question. Here's the point: if you run what's happening in Washington, D.C., and in the campaigns and the elections, regardless of who it is, and what party it is, with few exceptions, I don't think anyone in the room would conclude, that what's in the hearts of these people is creating *shalom*. They're not seeking to create healing and a community that flourishes together. That's not what's driving them, and here's my point: at some point, we as Christians have to come to grips with the fact that the answers are not in Washington, D.C. They are not and they will not be. Hope and change don't come from the government; it comes from The Gospel.

For eighteen months, the media gets people stirred up and anxious and depressed and angry with the people they work with, or go to school with, or live next door to—playing them like puppets. But at some point, you have to say, "What are we doing?" You need to be informed; you need to vote your conscience, but other than that, you need to let that stuff go, and focus your intention on that which really matters. *Shalom* is never going to come from Washington, D.C. That's not their motive. That's not their intent. That's not what they want, nor is it the purpose of government. Government's good and it's important and we need to respect that, but government does not have *the hope of the world*.

If we are going to be serious about the mission of the church, you have to back away from that. You have to disconnect from that. You can't let it get you all worked up and lathered up, and get to the point where you're actually disliking, even hating the people that you work with, the people you go to school with, the people next door. At some point you have to disconnect from all that, and realize we're called to tend The Garden; we're called to create *shalom*. We need to rethink what matters to us day in and day out.

As a matter of fact, you look at Verse 12:

Hatred stirs up strife,
But love covers all transgressions.

Didn't Jesus say, it is how we love that will identify us as a disciple of Christ? Didn't Jesus say, "Turn the other cheek"? Didn't He say, "Love your enemy"? Didn't He say, "Do good to those who persecute you"? Didn't He say, "If somebody makes you carry their pack one mile, you carry it two"? Isn't Jesus calling us to a different vision that has the possibility of creating pockets of *shalom*? We need to stop focusing on all that other stuff that ultimately isn't going to deliver the goods and get our attention on that which really does matter.

It says in Verse 13:

On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, (vs. 13a)

The idea of discerning, is that I should be able to discern the effect of my words. That's part of skillful living. In other words, I need to know when to keep my mouth shut. Skillful living is realizing: if I open my mouth right now, I'm just going to make somebody angry. I'm going to get somebody upset. I'm going to turn somebody off. I'm going to minimize my chance to talk to them about Jesus. I should know when there's freedom to have meaningful conversation, and when I need to just be quiet—which is what the proverb says in

Verse 19:

When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,
But he who restrains his lips is wise.

You know, that should be like the introvert verse. All of us that are introverts, we circle that one: *words are overrated* - I'm just kidding; it has nothing to do with that. It does have to do with the fact that people that babble on and on and on, typically don't create *shalom*. They eventually create conflict everywhere they go. This may come as a newsflash to some of you, but everyone doesn't need to know your opinion on every subject. Newsflash: no one is listening. (*Applause*). But here's the deal: You think about what this is saying in an ancient world. And then you think about it in a world of social media, where everybody feels the need to sit down, and vent whatever it is they're feeling, and the damage that is done. At the end of the day, what have you changed? What have you accomplished? How is that advancing the cause of Christ?

As a matter of fact, look what it says in Verse 11:

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, (vs. 11a)

In the ancient Near East, water was everything. A fountain with water in it was a place where everybody gathered together, because in a dry, barren climate, water was the essence of life. It was so valuable to them. Those that are in it for *shalom* are those that want to, deep in their heart, figure out, how do we advance *shalom*; how do we do this together? How do we create a culture where we can all flourish together? What comes out of their mouths, is like that refreshing, healing water. It's that which is full of life. Isn't it possible, that in a small group, around the water cooler at work, in the coffee house, that birds of a feather flock together, and gather around, and all vent their anger and frustration at what is going on in the world? Answer this, "How is that a fountain of life and what is that accomplishing for good?" It's just riling up everybody. It's just mutual anger, and it's poison. At some point, you have to realize, "Where is that coming from, and why is that in me, and is it consistent with what God wants for me - that what comes out of my mouth at home, at work, with my neighbors, with my friends, at the coffee shop, is consistently a fountain of life?" That is really much more conducive to healing and *shalom*, than it is to division and anger and doing damage to the concept of *shalom*.

At the end of the day, we as Christians really need to think about what's happening to us, what the media's doing to us, how it affects us on a daily basis, and really rethink what changes do I need to make in my life to recalibrate my focus on a daily basis? Other than voting for the candidate of my choice, what do I need to put my energy into and pay attention to and listen to and think about? I need to realize that often I sit with people who disagree with me in many ways: they have different values; they have different ideas; they have different lots of things. And I need to realize, I don't need to always argue with them, to fix them, to correct them, to straighten them out, to give them the facts. Sometimes, I just need to keep my mouth shut. Sometimes, the wisest thing I can do is just be quiet, and rather than being angry at them, and hating them, and attacking them, and fixing them, what if my mindset is, "I really want to figure out how to serve you. I want to love you. I want to figure out what I can do to help you flourish?" And what would that mean in your world? Ultimately, create a context where I could introduce you to the One who will forgive your sin and save your soul, because ultimately that's what you're longing for. You just don't know that yet. What would it be like, if I looked at the people around me through the lens of *shalom*, constantly thinking about what would be necessary to create a context, where we could flourish together and create an environment where I could introduce you to Jesus?

If we're going to be serious about *skillful living*, you have to think about what you do with money and work, and you definitely have to think about what comes out of your mouth. Those are two significant practical marks of skillful living.

As you know, we're headed into an election season: a lot of talk about Democrats and Republicans. I think it's easy for us as Christians just to get caught up in all of that. But I think it's helpful to realize that's not how God views people. He views people through the lens of the righteous and the wicked: those who are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the greater community, contrasted with

those who will disadvantage others to advantage themselves. And I encourage you to think that way; when you look at people you're going to vote for, you really want to view them through the lens that God uses to view them. Who's in it for selfish gain, and who's in it for the flourishing of the greater community? So, one of the questions I wrestle with is, how does all this arguing and fighting and hating to advance the good of the community?

I mean, I think some Christians need to ask themselves, why are they so angry? Why do they feel like they need to argue with everyone at work, or in the neighborhood? And wrestle with the question, what is that changing? How does that create *shalom*? How does that make the world a better place? We as Christians are stewards of The Gospel. How does my behavior, whether it's in person or on social media, help people love Jesus more? One of the things we have to learn to do, is to avoid or manage the media that makes us angry. I realized years ago, that sometimes when I'm watching or listening to certain media, I find myself getting angry. I can feel it in my body and I just determined, I need to recognize that and manage what I take in, because I don't want to be angry and hate the people I'm supposed to be reaching. We need to really wrestle with what's more important, The Gospel or our politics. So, I think in today's climate, where there's so much anger, responding with kindness and respect and compassion would get people's attention, because there's so little of it. So, here's my challenge: maybe this week you could be such a person, in order to attract them to the message of Jesus.