

“The Most Powerful Part of Our Body”
Proverbs 12:18,25; 15:4; 18:8,21; Romans 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION

Today, I’m going to preach about the most powerful part of our body. It’s obvious, with me at least, that it isn’t our arms. It is instead the two-ounce slab of mucous membrane that encloses a complex array of muscles and nerves and that resides in our mouth. I’m talking of course about our tongue. The tongue is without doubt the most powerful part of our body. That’s what the wise man tells us in the verses I read in Proverbs. Let’s examine what he says about that.

THE POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Look first of all at 18:21a. The wise man writes that *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”* Our tongue is powerful, in other words, in two ways.

First, it has the power of death. 12:18a explains that. It says, *“There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword.”* Rash words are those spoken in the heat of the moment, when we’re angry, agitated, or upset. “The thrusts of a sword” refers to a sword being plunged into a person’s body over and over again. Imagine the damage that would do. This verse teaches that words can be just as damaging in their own way as that.

Two psychologists, Cliff Mortarius and Howard Markman, conducted a study of newly weds over the first decade of their marriages. They calculated with each couple how many of the comments they made to each other were put downs, what they called “verbal wounds.” They found that couples who inflicted five or fewer verbal wounds for every one hundred comments stayed together. But those who inflicted ten or more for every one hundred comments divorced within the decade.

Commenting on the results of that study, psychologist James Dobson concludes: *“Watch out what you say! Little nit-picking comments are like cancer in marriage, slowly draining the life out of a committed relationship.”*

Notice the revealing terminology that Mortarius, Markman, and Dobson used – “inflict,” “verbal wounds,” “cancer,” and “draining the life out of.” Those aren’t overstatements. They’re consistent with 18:21a. Our tongue can wound and kill in its own way just like weapons can.

Our tongue is powerful in a second way. According to 18:21a, it not only has the power of death but of life as well. 12:18b explains it this way, ***“But the tongue of the wise brings healing.”*** Note the word “healing.” A man with a thyroid problem once told me that taking a medication changed his life. He was listless and weak before taking it but is vigorous and strong now. The tongue isn’t just like weapons that wound and kill. It can also be like medicines that give life and heal.

I mentioned married couples who wounded each other verbally. In contrast to them, consider what an elderly couple who had been married for over 50 years said. Someone asked them what the secret to their successful marriage was. The old husband quickly replied and his wife agreed, ***“Balance every complaint with two complements.”***

You can see that it’s true. Our tongue is the most powerful part of our body. It can wound and kill or give life and heal. It has the power of both life and death in it.

THE POWER OF PENETRATION

But what is the nature of that power? 18:8 tells us. That verse declares that words ***“go down into the innermost parts of the body.”*** They possess the power of penetration in other words.

There’s an old saying that all of us have used, ***“Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me.”*** The first part of that old saying is true. Sticks and stones can break our bones. But the second part is false. The fact is that words can hurt us.

That’s because they possess the power of penetration. Sticks and stones and other weapons can do **to** people. They can cut, puncture, bruise, scrape, or break their body. But words can do **in** people, to their spirit or inner dimensions. They can damage or even destroy their

beliefs, attitudes, feelings, moods, self-esteem, morale, and will. And according to 18:14, *"The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, but as for a broken spirit who can bear it?"* That means that hurt to their spirit or inner dimensions is much more difficult for people to deal with than to their body. That verse teaches that what is done **to** people is of little account beside what is done **in** them.

I played baseball for four years at Malone College. I was so small my first year there (5'2" tall, 118 pounds) that other teams were always calling me "little leaguer." Those words made me embarrassed and mad and the only thing I could do about it was play well. They worked death **in** me, to my feelings.

But thankfully, words can also work life **in** people. Look at 12:25, for instance, *"Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad."* Notice here what a simple good word can do. It can make a person's heart glad. Words can nourish or heal people's beliefs, attitudes, feelings, moods, self-esteem, morale, and will.

Several months ago, I told a waitress at a local restaurant, *"Your service to us was outstanding."* She smiled and replied, *"Thanks, you've made my day."* That simple good word did just what 12:25 says. It worked life in her. It made her heart glad.

You get the point. Our tongue possesses the power of penetration. The words we speak work life or death **in** people.

AN INSTRUMENT OF LIFE

Now, the implication of what I've just shared is profound. That implication is that the tongue of each of us is one of two things. It's either a weapon of death or an instrument of life.

For many people, it's a weapon of death. I heard a newscaster say that some escaped prisoners were *"armed and dangerous."* So many people are just like that. They're armed and dangerous. They're constantly assaulting people with a deadly weapon, their tongue, everywhere they go. Let me ask you a question in that regard. When

was the last time that you committed assault with a deadly weapon? The weapon I'm talking about isn't a gun, knife, or hatchet but the deadliest weapon of all – the tongue.

The fact is that many people consistently assault others with it. Not long ago, my wife waited in the foyer of the Gabriel's Store for me to pick her up. She came out quite upset when I did because of the horribly destructive things that she heard parents saying to their children. Their tongues were weapons of assault.

But they shouldn't be. The book of Proverbs calls us to make our tongue an instrument of life. That's the gist of 15:4, "***A soothing tongue is a tree of life.***" Genesis 2:9 mentions the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. Revelation 2:7 mentions the tree of life in Paradise. This verse probably alludes to those. The wise man calls us to make our tongue an instrument of life like those trees were - to make it a soothing one that works life **in** the people that we know and meet everyday?

Let me ask you a personal question that I've already asked myself. Is your tongue that? Is it consistently an instrument of life to the people that you know and meet everyday?

PRESENTING OUR TONGUE TO GOD

If it isn't, it can be and Romans 12:1 tells us how. It's by presenting it "***a living and holy sacrifice***" to God. That's what each of us needs to do this very day. We need to present our tongue as a living and holy sacrifice to God.

We need to do that, I believe, formally. We need to do it by a definite action in a definite moment of time, almost a ceremony.

You can create your own ceremony but here's a suggestion in that regard. Find verses about the tongue and words. You can use the ones I've read today. You can also add two significant passages to those – Matthew 12:33-37 and James 3:1-12. I've listed all of those on the power point. Get alone and slowly and prayerfully read these verses. Let the truths that they teach sink in to your mind and heart as you do.

After doing that, kneel down before God and explicitly surrender your tongue to Him. Actually tell Him that you're devoting it to Him. Then pray and ask Him specifically to take charge of it, to fill it with His life, and to use it for His purposes. Give plenty of time to this ceremony and renew it as often as you need to – yearly, monthly, or if you have a major problem with your tongue, even weekly. Also periodically review it in thought and prayer to keep it before you. That kind of ceremony is a vital thing that all of us need to do.

But it isn't enough. We've formally presented our tongue as a living sacrifice to God. We now need to go out into the everyday places and activities of our life and make it that. Doing that requires three things.

First, we must learn the truth about the tongue and words. The tongue and words is one of the Bible's main subjects. The Bible in fact gives us the best possible information about that. Learn that information. You'll be surprised at the effect it will have in and on you.

I learned Proverbs 18:21, for instance, at a Full Gospel Businessmen's meeting 35 years ago. The speaker discussed that verse and it struck me like a slap in the face as he did. Words actually have the power of life and death, he said, and I've never forgotten it. That truth alone made me much more cognizant and careful of what I say.

So, when you read the Bible and come across a verse or passage about the tongue or words, write down the reference. Build an index of verses and passage about that and make the commitment to learn them. Doing that will significantly impact how you use your tongue.

There's a second thing that making our tongue a living sacrifice to God requires of us. We must examine it. Knowing how important words are to God, we examine ours. We reflect on our patterns of speech. We reflect on the things that we say and how we say them. Examining ourselves enables us to know ourselves, which is essential to taming and transforming our tongue. We need to know the evil that that we do with it. We then need to surrender that evil to God and ask His help in correcting it.

Let me confess an evil I did with my tongue. If one of our dogs did something that annoyed me, I made sure to tell my wife Jill about it. That was an evil because there wasn't any constructive reason for telling her. All it did was upset her. Examining my tongue made me realize that. So, I surrendered that evil to God and asked His help in correcting it, which He gave me. I don't do that anymore. Examine our tongue.

The third thing that making our tongue a living sacrifice to God requires is intention. We intend to use it for good, not evil. Suppose that everyone in our homes and church did that. They decide to use their tongue for good, not evil and do the best they can in carrying out that decision. Even if they did that imperfectly, life in our homes and church would dramatically improve. So, let's do that. Let's make and purposely carry out the decision to use our tongue for good and not evil.

So, those are the three things that we need to do. #1 – learn the truth about our tongue. #2 – examine our tongue. And #3 – intend to use our tongue for good, not evil.

CONCLUSION

If you and I do those three things, in the context of discipleship to Jesus, something supernatural will happen. The Holy Spirit will honor our efforts and transform our tongue. He will make it like the tongue of Jesus. I close with a poem that I've read before but that bears repeating. It goes like this: *"Oh, that my tongue might so possess, the accent of His tenderness – for those who mourn, a word of cheer; a word of hope for those who fear – Oh, that it might be said of me, 'Surely thy speech betrayeth thee, as a friend of Jesus of Galilee.'*" That is our call today, to have a tongue that is like the tongue of Jesus. That kind of tongue is without doubt the most powerful part of our body.

