

The Division Tongue

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Date: 26 July 2020

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[0 : 00] And we're glad that you're here, not because we're filling seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we're convinced that there's no one so good.

They don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it. And so God has something to say to everyone in his word, which is why we come back week after week to open up the Bible and hear what God has to say to us.

We're continuing our series in the book of Proverbs. And you'll remember that Proverbs is a book about wisdom. And wisdom is skill in the art of living. Wisdom helps us to navigate the path of life that God's given us.

And wisdom helps us to stay on the path. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. That's the foundation of wisdom, the place that it starts. And wisdom continues.

It grows with humility. Unless we're humble, we can never expect to become wise. Because it's only the humble person who knows they have more to learn. And it's only by learning more that we become wise.

[1 : 02] We've been looking at a variety of practical topics. We looked the last couple weeks at the idea of work and our money. And this week we are turning to our words.

Now this passage, we're in Proverbs chapter 6. We're going to look at verses 12 through 19. This passage speaks about a little bit more than words. But there's a special focus on words. And so that's going to be our focus as well.

And as we do that, then I invite you to turn with me either in your Bible or near the end of your worship guide or in your phone to Proverbs chapter 6. And remember as we come to this passage that this is God's word.

And Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5 tells us that every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 12.

A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord.

[2 : 11] Verse 15. Therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly. In a moment he will be broken beyond healing. There are six things that the Lord hates.

Seven that are an abomination to him. Halty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil.

A false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we just thank you again that you speak to us. And we ask that you would do that again this morning.

Just through these words in this chapter of the Bible, you'd remind us that this is your word that brings life. And you'd do that for us. That you'd use your word to encourage us.

[3 : 17] And you'd use it to challenge us. We thank you most of all that you are flesh in your son, Jesus Christ. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. If you've been in Colorado for any length of time, you know that people in Colorado love their guns.

Now, whether you like that fact or don't like that fact, not the point. You know that if you have a weapon, if you're going to use lethal force, there are only a few situations where you're actually allowed to do that.

And primarily, it's when your life is actually in danger. If your life is in danger, then there's self-defense at play. And there's almost no exceptions to that rule. So if your life is not in danger, you use lethal force, you're going to be in danger.

In the state of Colorado, with one exception. Do you all know what that exception is? If you have good reason to suspect someone is committing first-degree arson.

Now, I'm not encouraging you to do that. I'm not a legal expert. Okay, don't go and use lethal force against someone who's committing first-degree arson. And then come back and talk to me about it. But the point is this, right?

[4 : 37] That there are some things that are so destructive that they require that level of force. And in most situations, it's only if your life is threatened except when someone is looking to destroy by fire.

Which raises the question, why? Why would that be the exception to the rule? Well, there's a lot of different reasons, right? One, fire is so incredibly destructive. Even if they're not threatening your life right now, it could ultimately end up threatening a life.

Another reason I would imagine is we're in the state of Colorado. Wildfires can happen like that, right? And so someone's, they're looking to burn something down. They could end up destroying not just someone's home.

They could end up destroying many, many lives. And so this is something that's incredibly serious and dangerous. And that's why it's the exception to the rule.

That's why it's the portion of the law that falls outside of the general principle. The author of the book of James in the New Testament, in fact, compares our tongues, our words, to fire.

[5 : 42] And that's the kind of situation that we see in this passage. We learn in verse 12 that this is something that's about words. It's a worthless person who goes around with crooked speech.

And then in verse 17, we see the same thing. It's a lying tongue. Now, what makes first-degree arson different from other types of arson, that to be first-degree, it has to be intentional.

You have to want to be burning something down. You have to want to destroy someone's property. And it's that same intention that we see of this man, this worthless person. Verse 14, he's devising evil.

Okay, this isn't an accident that he's causing trouble. He is sowing discord. There's a process here, just like you'd sow seeds in the ground. He's sowing these words, knowing he's going to get the result he wants.

And then we see in verse 18, there's a plan that's being executed. He devises wicked plans. And so as much as he can, in whatever he does, this person stirs up trouble.

[6 : 44] It is first-degree destruction. It's intentional. He wants to cause trouble. He wants to destroy something. And then we find out that it's not just that it's intentional, but just like arson, this is destructive.

It's deceptive. Verse 13, he's doing all these strange things with his body language. Now, it's not entirely clear what's going on here since we've been separated by so many years from the original audience of Proverbs, but most likely he's trying to signal here.

He's doing something that's underhanded. He's operating in a way that's maybe a back channel.

And his plan, as we saw before in verse 18, is meant to lead to evil.

And so this person is using his words to destroy. He's using his words in a way, rather than building up the community, he's burning it down.

Our world has not changed that much since the book of Proverbs. We're still humans. And so the same things happen today. It happens in a variety of ways. This could be someone who's just absolutely lying, right?

[7 : 51] They're telling something that's not true. It could also be someone who's telling half-truths, right? They're telling part of the truth, but not the whole truth. And the part of the truth they're telling is just enough to make you believe something that's not true.

It's meant to lead you along the path. It could be someone who's repeating things that are very true, and they don't need to be repeated. People don't need to know.

You don't want people knowing about the mistake that you made 10 years ago and that you've reconciled with people for, right? But there's a temptation to keep repeating these mistakes over and over in the community, that there's a half-life to someone's failures that they're never able to overcome.

One way this happens in the church, there will be people who stir up division, claiming to be concerned about the purity of the church. They believe something's wrong in terms of a doctrine.

Or a practice. And that's a right thing to be concerned about. But they're concerned about the purity of the church in a way that destroys the peace of the church. Rather than beginning, as Jesus talks about in Matthew 18, in small conversations, one-on-one with leaders, instead they go around, they have a whisper campaign in the congregation.

[9 : 04] They share their complaints with everyone else. They tell the whole congregation, their whole friend group, their whole small group, their life group, about the things that are making them upset and how they think what's happening is wrong.

And so while they think that their cause is right and righteous, and maybe it is, they pursue it in a way that this passage tells us is an abomination.

It's possible to be concerned about the purity of the church, but not the peace of the church. And in fact, God is passionate about both of those things.

God loves the purity of his church. He died for it. God also loves the peace of his church. God loves the peace of the church. We see people like this also on Facebook.

Many passive-aggressive posts, right? People share their experiences with a friend that they haven't spoken to, and they say, oh, this is just anonymous, right? But they put enough details in there that everyone knows who they're talking about.

[10 : 07] Instead of going and speaking with that person one-on-one, they're airing it for the entire internet to see. Facebook is filled with people who wink with their eyes, signal with their feet, and point with their fingers.

In fact, we could add just social media in general. This person repeats things in private that maybe need to remain secret, right? They may need to remain between two people.

You and someone else have a disagreement. You reconcile. You resolved it. It doesn't need to be discussed anymore. And yet this divisive person goes around, and they share those things. Maybe there's things in private that a group knows that doesn't need to be shared outside of the group, and yet this person goes and shares them in public.

They make sure everyone knows. They are family members like this. Perhaps you have someone in your family who calls everyone. They stay connected because they want to know the news, and then they redistribute it to all the other family members.

And there's a special focus, though. There's sort of a tabloid news distributor. There's a special focus on the negative news, and they'll share it with you in a way that looks like they're trying to be concerned, but really they're making sure that you know about all the tension, you know, in your brother and sister-in-law's marriage that you didn't need to know about.

[11 : 21] And they're making sure that you know about all the ways that your grandchild is misbehaving. This person is the divisive person that stirs up division. Then there's the person who pretends to be a trusted confidant, right?

They come to you. They tell you, I'm not gonna share this with anyone, but I'm here for you, and I wanna make sure you have a place. And I, you know, this is just between you and me. And the next thing you know, that thing that you only shared with that one person, everyone's aware of it.

And if you've lived in this world for any length of time, I'm confident this has happened to you at some point, perhaps continues to happen to you. Kids, this is what we talk about is the difference between telling and tattling.

If you are telling, if you're reporting, you're sharing something that an adult needs to know. It's a problem that you can't solve on your own, and someone's actually in danger.

Someone's not in danger, and maybe you can resolve the problem on your own. These are principles we would go over when I was a teacher. You are not telling, you are tattling.

[12 : 37] What's the goal of tattling? It's to stir up division. One who tattles, verse 19, sows discord among brothers. And that's often the goal of the tattler.

They wanna get someone else in trouble. They wanna stir things up because something, it's boring right now, right? The one who tells is looking to maintain peace, to preserve peace.

The one who tattles is looking to destroy peace, to break it down. And so no matter what our age or our stage, we need to be careful with our words.

Now I'll mention, sometimes rules like these that I've outlined for you are abused to protect people in power. Someone powerful will do something wrong or abusive, they'll use their power differential to get advantages they shouldn't, and it's covered up under the guise of maintaining peace.

That is also an abomination. There are, as always in Proverbs, there are exceptions to things, but even then, there's a right way to go about confronting abusive power. So if someone is using these verses to cover up abuse, especially a heinous form of abuse, a high-handed form of abuse, that itself is an abuse of these verses.

[13:53] But in general, those are the exceptions, not the rule. In general, we're looking with our words to preserve the community rather than to tear it down. And as we've seen with the last couple passages in Proverbs 6, there's an underlying principle.

There's something underneath all of this that helps us understand why it matters. And the principle is this, divisiveness is a very serious sin. We're told it's an abomination, verse 16, and it's a very serious sin because God loves the community.

It's a serious sin because God loves the community. We live in an individualistic culture and age where the rights of the individual, the privileges of the individual are put above everything else. It is hard for us, even as Christians, to wrap our minds around how much God cares about the good and the unity of the community.

It is hard for us to wrap our minds as Western Americans around how much God cares about the unity of the church. There are not many things in the Bible that are referred to as an abomination.

[15:11] This is one of them. God takes very seriously the unity of the church. God takes groups and communities more seriously than we do.

God is not as individualistic as we are. And just like someone committing first degree arson, it does not take a lot to burn a community down.

Just like someone committing first degree arson, it does not take much to burn the community down. And so we see here that judgment is very serious.

God is not afraid to use lethal force for those who destroy the community with their words. That's what we see in verse 15.

Calamity will come upon him suddenly. In a moment, he will be broken beyond healing. In other words, your words ultimately will catch up with you.

[16:19] They will probably catch up with you in this life, and they will ultimately catch up with you at the end of your life. Of course, we know this more and more as people living in an age of technology.

You'll hear more frequently news articles about court cases where the private text messages became public, right? Where the private emails became public.

I shared with one new member's class. I grew up in a church right outside Washington, D.C., and there were folks there who worked on Capitol Hill, and one of them told us that the rule was that you would never type something in an email that you would be unwilling to see on the front page of the Washington Post the next day.

That was the rule you were meant to follow, because it was very likely, right, that what is private is going to be made public? Well, the Bible tells us something even more frightening. Jesus, our great wisdom teacher, remember Matthew chapter 12, he's an even greater teacher than Solomon.

He's our great and greater wisdom teacher, tells us that every word is going to be made public one day. Every text message is going to be made public one day. Every email is going to be on the front page of the Washington Post.

[17:34] In Luke chapter 8, Jesus says this, for nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be made known and come to light.

And then Jesus, talking to the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 12, tells them this, you brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak.

For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. So Jesus is reminding them there of the reality of judgment, that he is going to come back to this world to return for his people and his church.

And at that time, no matter what has been secret, all things will be revealed, and everyone will answer for their speech.

[18 : 41] And so it underscores for us here the importance, the urgency of faith in Jesus Christ, right? Because that is our one and only hope. All of us, if we examine our words, would have words that we don't want repeated.

We might have text messages we don't want published, emails we don't want distributed. And yet, those are the things that if we are apart from Jesus Christ, we will stand before God one day and face his judgment.

That day could be many days in the future. That day could be today. And so there's a tremendous urgency for us to embrace the offer of forgiveness that God offers to us through Jesus Christ. This should cause us tremendous fear. And yet, we also learn from these passages we need much more than just fear, right?

You'll remember from Proverbs chapter 2 that we can only be protected by wisdom if we love wisdom. We can only be protected by wisdom if we love wisdom.

[19 : 46] In other words, fear is not enough. It's not that we need more fear, but that fear is driving us to what we actually need. We need a greater love.

And that's what Jesus and the Proverbs, as wisdom teachers, both tell us. Here in this passage, we see that it's the heart that matters. Verse 14, it's a perverted heart that devises evil.

And so it's verse 18 as well. It's a heart that devises wicked plans. And so fear ultimately isn't going to help us or save us. It's the heart that's the problem for this worthless man.

And Jesus tells us the same thing in Matthew chapter 12, what I just read. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. So it's out of the goodness of the heart that the good man brings out good treasure.

In other words, the mouth is not the cause. The mouth is the symptom. It's not that we need new mouths. It's that we need new hearts.

[20 : 52] it's not that we need new mouths, but that we need new hearts. And of course, when we come up against that, we realize our powerlessness, right?

Jesus is the only way to change hearts. Jesus is the only one who can transform evil treasure to good treasure.

We have to obey, right? There's a call to obedience here in Proverbs. We cannot obey unless we're transformed. We have to obey.

There's a call to obedience here. We cannot obey unless we're transformed. The basic logic of the gospel is this. I know that I must change.

I know that my words must be different. And I cannot change myself. Logic of the gospel is this. I know that I must change.

[21 : 49] I cannot change myself. And so it's a greater power that has to change our hearts. It has to be the power that comes through Jesus Christ as he offers us peace and reconciliation with him.

We are able to live at peace with others. As he changes our hearts by his Holy Spirit, we are able to then bring forth good treasure. It's that that transforms us and motivates us.

Remember, it's not just that we want to avoid the floor of the law. It's not just that we're not lying.

We're looking to head for the ceiling, to head for the stars. We're promoting goodness and truth.

And so to do that, we have to look to Jesus who transforms and changes our hearts. We look to Jesus and we realize he doesn't repeat our sins, right? He removes them as far as the east is from the west.

love. And so we don't have to repeat other people's sins. Love covers over a multitude of sins.

[22 : 50] Jesus' love has covered over our sins. We're able to cover over other people's sins. Our acceptance is not based on our performance.

acceptance. And so we don't have to tear other people down. We don't have to destroy the community in order to be accepted. We don't have to convince other people that there's someone who performs worse than us in order to belong.

God, in Jesus Christ, promises to never leave us or forsake us. And because of that, we can trust him rather than destroying other people in order to get ahead.

Jesus is the one who gives us greater promises and greater provision. He is the one who actually gives us the power and the ability to have not evil words but good words.

He's the one who transforms our heart from hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. God has restored his relationship with us. And so we're able to risk hard conversations with other people knowing that if we lose our relationships with them, we still have our relationship with God.

[24 : 12] We don't have to fear the nakedness that will come from having every word exposed because Jesus has already been exposed for us.

and so we don't have to live in fear or be motivated by fear. Instead, we are motivated and transformed and propelled by Jesus and his work on our behalf.

He is the one who empowers us and enables us to do what the ninth commandment points us to, to speak words that are good and loving rather than words that are bad and tear down.

That is the power that God gives us. He empowers us to speak good and uplifting words. Proverbs chapter 15 says this, to make an apt answer is a joy to a man and a word in season how good it is. Of course, we want to be those kinds of people, right? Word in season kind of people. People whose words lift other people up and build them up, who encourage them and sustain them. In her book, *Pride and Prejudice*, we are told about two different characters who have different relationships with their words.

[25 : 37] We have Wickham, right? Wickham's a man who appears to be very gracious in his words. He wins people over very quickly. He tells them what they want to hear.

His manners are wonderful. And yet it actually turns out that he is someone who winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, and points with his finger, right?

He openly slanders Mr. Darcy. He's not just saying things that are partially true. He's saying things that aren't true. He's twisting the truth. He's destroying him as part of the community.

And he stabs him in the back. Why is he doing that? Well, he's devouring people, right? He's looking to gain something, to earn something. He's taking advantage of young women who are too naive to stay far away from him.

He's looking to get the money that he needs to pay off his debts. He is stirring up, he's creating discord, enmity between brothers. Mr. Darcy, on the other hand, now he gets some flack, right, for his words at the beginning.

[26 : 42] He says some things about Elizabeth that are unflattering. And yet, ultimately, he's someone who uses his words to build up the community rather than tear it down. He does not go around sharing the truth about Wickham.

He does in a letter, right, ultimately to defend himself against the slander. But he's not going around trying to destroy. Instead, he's protecting. There's many things he could share that are 100% true that he doesn't.

And it continues to the end. We learn, of course, that he ends up coming out and protecting the community, not just in his words, but in his actions.

He saves the day out of his love for the community, and he pays off Wickham's debts so that Wickham will marry Lydia because he's willing to sacrifice, he's willing to lose, right, to love this community and protect the honor of this family.

He covers up, he lets love cover a multitude of sins rather than going out and revealing it and disgracing people. He does not advertise that he's done this, and he doesn't do it out of fear, right, but out of love.

[27 : 52] He does it because he loves the community, and most importantly, he loves Elizabeth. Wickham, on the other hand, escapes for a time.

He does not escape forever. He faces the consequences of his words. Ultimately, everything that is secret is made public.

And so, brothers and sisters, God warns us of the danger of our words. We can burn down our communities. God also points us to something better.

He points us to words of love. words of love that come to us and through us because of Jesus' love for us first. And so, he points us to our need for a new heart, and he provides that new heart through Jesus so we can express our love for others and the community in the way that Jesus has given it to us.

And so, that is our hope and our confidence. And we can say, the good person out of good treasure brings forth good, but the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

[29 : 10] I invite you to pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you don't just warn us of judgment, you don't just present us with the fear that we need, but you also give us the escape and the provision that we need in Jesus Christ.

You transform our hearts, you give us new hearts, you cover over our sins and forgive them, and you build up and give us a community to be a part of.

We thank you that we don't have to earn these things or deserve them, but that you give them to us through Jesus Christ, and so we ask all of them in his name. Amen.