

Proverbs 15:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.

Analysis

A 'wholesome tongue is a tree of life,' but 'perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.' The Hebrew 'marpe' (wholesome/healing) connects speech to restoration and life-giving power. The 'tree of life' imagery recalls Eden (Genesis 2:9) and points to Christ, the ultimate life-giver. Conversely, 'perverseness' (Hebrew 'seleph'—distortion/crookedness) breaks ('sheber'—shatters) the spirit. Our words either build up or destroy. Reformed theology emphasizes our responsibility for edifying speech (Ephesians 4:29) that ministers grace to hearers.

Historical Context

The tree of life imagery was powerful in ancient Israel, representing not just longevity but flourishing and blessing. Conversely, a broken spirit was seen as worse than physical injury (Proverbs 18:14).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Do your words bring life and healing, or do they crush and destroy?
2. How might your speech patterns be damaging the spirits of those around you?
3. What would it look like for your tongue to be a 'tree of life' in your family, church, and workplace?

Interlinear Text

מִרְפֵּא	לִשׁוֹן	עֵץ	חַיִּים	וְסֵלָה	בְּהֵ
A wholesome	tongue	is a tree	of life	but perverseness	H0
H4832	H3956	H6086	H2416	H5558	
שָׁ בֶרֶךְ	בְּרוּחַ:				
therein is a breach	in the spirit				
H7667	H7307				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 12:18 (Parallel theme): There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.

Proverbs 16:24 (Parallel theme): Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.

Proverbs 18:8 (Parallel theme): The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Proverbs 3:18 (Parallel theme): She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

Malachi 4:2 (Parallel theme): But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

Proverbs 18:14 (Spirit): The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

Revelation 2:7 (Spirit): He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Psalms 109:22 (Parallel theme): For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me.

Proverbs 26:22 (Parallel theme): The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

1 Timothy 6:3 (Parallel theme): If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

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