

Principles from Proverbs: Taming the Tongue

Introduction: As demonstrated in the last lesson, success in life and relationships requires careful use of our speech. However, such is easier said than done (pun intended!). The Proverbs give us specific parameters for the use of speech. As these parameters become habitual, speech becomes increasingly positive and productive.

I. Control of the tongue is an indication of wisdom.

A. What To Say and How To Say It

“The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.” (Proverbs 15:2)

1. Knowledge is *not* an open-ended invitation to speak. Knowing something frequently requires silence.
2. A wise individual coordinates his speech with his knowledge to bring about a desirable result. Sometimes one can not tell all he knows and must be judicious about revealing his knowledge.
3. Foolish people typically say whatever they know, conjecture, etc. Such a torrent of talk betrays their character.

“The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the mouth of the wicked speaketh forwardness.” (Proverbs 10:32)

1. If you have a righteous heart, you will have righteous lips. Remember, the core of righteousness is “meeting your obligations.” Are you obligated to speak or obligated to silence?
2. “Frowardness” means perversity. A wicked heart will pour forth in perverted speech. Sin always betrays itself. Listen closely and you will detect it.

“The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.” (Proverbs 15:28)

1. Never be quick to answer difficult, weighty questions. A righteous man understands his responsibility to answer correctly; therefore, he takes time to think matters through.
2. Don’t let anyone push you for a quick answer to difficult questions.
3. Wicked men don’t feel an obligation to answer questions accurately; they answer quickly—and in accordance with their preconceived agenda.

B. When Not To Say It at All

“He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbor: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.” (Proverbs 11:12)

1. Choose your battles wisely. Can you live with an irritation for the sake of peace?
2. Do not confront every offense that comes to you. Do not allow multiple offenses to build in your heart.
3. It is unwise to get permanently at odds with your neighbor or anyone else with whom you have regular contact. Think before you speak!

“A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.” (Proverbs 29:11)

1. Refrain from revealing too much information (“TMI”) at the height of an issue or controversy. Use your knowledge to fix problems after passions have cooled.
2. The Bible, wisdom, the Holy Spirit, and common sense should act as a sieve between what you think and what you say. If you tell all your thoughts, you’re a fool.

“Even a fool when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.” (Proverbs 17:28)

1. If you’re not sure what to say, it’s a safe bet to remain silent.
2. Silence is the best cover for foolishness. Sometimes silence advances an individual more than speech!

II. Good Results of the Controlled Tongue

“Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” (Proverbs 21:23)

1. Controlled speech would prevent some of our most grievous problems. How many times have you inwardly wished, “O, if only I had not said that...”?
2. Before you speak, always assess the risks.

“He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” (Proverbs 13:3)

“In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.” (Proverbs 14:3)