

Guard Your Speech
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Various Texts from Proverbs

“You have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be used against you.” That’s not just a good “right” for the ACCUSED to exercise. It’s a good OPTION for all of us!

Opening question: What problems plague those who talk too much?

Here’s the BIG IDEA: How can I display Godly wisdom in the words I use...or do NOT use?

It’s Wise to Think Before You Speak

Proverbs 17:27–28 (ESV)

27 Whoever restrains his words has knowledge,
and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

28 Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;
when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

Proverbs 21:23 (ESV)

23 Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue
keeps himself out of trouble.

- Verse 27: **Why does one who “restrains” their words have knowledge?**
- **When you DON’T jump in and fill up the silence in a conversation what happens?**
- **Verse 28: Why are quiet people deemed to be smarter?**

Mark Twain wrote:

“It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.”

Verse 21:23: We COULD interpret that verse to mean if you never say anything you won’t get into trouble. **Is that what it means? What does it REALLY say? Note: “keeps” or “guards.”**

James Merritt writes:

“We should consider exercising that right to remain silent more often in everyday circumstances. Many times it is wisest to say nothing at all. Someone has said, “A wise man is one who thinks twice before saying nothing.” People who are always putting in their two-cent’s worth often only say things that are worth about two cents! Someone else has said, “He who thinks by the inches and speaks by the yard should be kicked by the foot.” My Daily Devotional Prayer Book: Living The Life. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It’s Wise to Recognize that Words have POWER for both Good and Evil

Proverbs 18:19–21 (ESV)

19 A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city,
and quarreling is like the bars of a castle.

- **What do you think that means?**

John MacArthur writes:

“There are no feud as difficult to resolve as those with relatives; no barriers are so hard to bring down. Hence, great care should be taken to avoid such conflicts.”

Allen Power translation: “Putting down your family and friends, puts UP walls! THICK walls!

20 From the fruit of a man’s mouth his stomach is satisfied;
he is satisfied by the yield of his lips.

- Verse 20: What do we say at the end of a great meal? We should on “serve” words that allow us to say: “Ah, that was good; that was satisfying; that was good for everyone who heard it.”

21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
and those who love it will eat its fruits.

- Verse 21: **How can words bring LIFE to someone? How can words bring “death” to someone?**

Chuck Swindoll wrote:

Who can accurately measure the benefits gleaned from the tongue of a godly teacher well versed in the Scriptures? How can we gauge the depth of comfort received from the words of a close friend during a period of grief or affliction? And what about those who told you about Christ? Remember the encouragement you received from the glorious, good news of the Lord Jesus Christ? Where would we be without caring, thoughtful people using the gift of speech wisely? - Swindoll, C. R. (2012). Living The Proverbs: Insights For The Daily Grind.

On the other hand, this verse says words can bring DEATH.

Death to family relationships; death to friendships; even death to the UNITY and FELLOWSHIP of a church or a Sunday School class.

John Ortlund wrote:

“Do you know how many people it takes to split a church? Not half the congregation. Just two. One to start spreading the fiery negativity, and another not to confront that behavior as the sin that it is”. — Ortlund, R. C., Jr. (2012). Preaching the Word: Proverbs—Wisdom that Works.

The Wise Person Guards Against Gossip

You know the old joke among church people don’t you? *We aren’t gossiping, we’re just “fellowshipping!” Or, sharing “prayer requests.”*

Proverbs 11:13 (ESV)

13 Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets,
but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.

Proverbs 26:20–24 (ESV)

20 For lack of wood the fire goes out,
and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.

21 As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire,
so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

- **How is gossiping like dropping a match on a dry forest?**

- **What makes gossip gossip? What is the difference between gossip and any other conversation where a friend is discussed?**
- Here is a test: would I say this any differently if they were in the room?
- **Suppose you hear someone gossiping. What should you do?**

David Jeremiah writes:

Gossip is rejoicing in evil, and it should have no part in the life of a loving Christian. Ask yourself: Do you rejoice in the truth, or do you rejoice in evil? — Jeremiah, D. (2004). *The Power Of Love: Study Guide* (pp. 94–95)

- **If Gossip is so harmful, why are we tempted to do it? Verse 22:**

22 The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the body.

Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the daughter of Teddy Roosevelt was a “fixture” in Washington. In her older years she had a pillow embroidered with the words:

“If you don’t have anything nice to say about anybody, come sit next to me.”

23 Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel
are fervent lips with an evil heart.

24 Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips
and harbors deceit in his heart;

Gossiping people may look like one kind of person on the outside. But they are DECEIVERS. My rule is: If they will spread stuff WITH YOU about others; they will spread things ABOUT YOU with others!

John Maxwell wrote:

“It’s been said that great people talk about ideas, average people talk about themselves, and small people talk about others. That’s what gossip does. It makes people small. There really is no upside to gossip. It diminishes the person being talked about. It diminishes the person who is saying unkind things about others, and it even diminishes the listener.”

Look at Proverbs 10:18–19 (ESV)

18 The one who conceals hatred has lying lips,
and whoever utters slander is a fool.

19 When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

Proverbs 12:17–19 (ESV)

17 Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence,
but a false witness utters deceit.

18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

19 Truthful lips endure forever,
but a lying tongue is but for a moment.

- SHORT commentary on those verses: The wise person speaks TRUTH and NOT FALSEHOOD
- SHORTER commentary on those verses: DON’T LIE

The flip side is, the wise person USES words to HELP and to HEAL
Proverbs 25:11–13 (ESV)

11 A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

12 Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold
is a wise reprover to a listening ear.

13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest
is a faithful messenger to those who send him;
he refreshes the soul of his masters.

- Verse 11: Doesn't it make you smile when you remember a time that someone said JUST THE RIGHT THING when you needed it? It was like they had given you a million dollars!
- Verse 12: A true friend will tell you what you need to know IF it will help you.
- Be careful, it could be tempting to claim that REBUKE is FOR THEIR GOOD when it's really FOR YOUR ENJOYMENT. Before you REBUKE someone, CHECK YOUR MOTIVES.
- Verse 13: Do our words REFRESH others?
- Want some examples of SPEAKING for a good cause? Here are some...

Proverbs 31:8–9 (ESV)

8 Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are destitute.

9 Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Earlier we asked: "How can I display Godly wisdom in the words I use...or do NOT use?"
- Here is what the book of Proverbs told us:
- It's wise to THINK before we SPEAK!
- It's wise to recognize that Words have POWER for both Good and Evil
- A wise person GUARDS against engaging in GOSSIP and SLANDER
- The wise person speaks TRUTH and NOT FALSEHOOD
- The wise person USES words to HELP and to HEAL