

Principles from Proverbs: Taming the Tongue, Part II

Introduction: The third chapter of the book of James warns us, “the tongue can no man tame.” While perfection in our speech will not be obtained in this life, believers can and should, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, discipline their speech. Proverbs instructs us as to the particulars of disciplined speech.

I. Disciplining the Tongue: Key Areas of Vigilance

A. Do not speak prematurely

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” (Proverbs 18:13)

“Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him.” (Proverbs 29:20)

1. Be careful about jumping to conclusions when presented with an issue or problem. Frequently diligent inquiry into the nature of an issue prompts solutions that would not have been reached with only a surface perusal of the problem.
2. Avoid taking sides on an issue without adequate firsthand knowledge of the facts. Remember, you must base your answer on the facts—not someone’s interpretation of the facts.
3. Weighty matters always require painstaking, detailed research. Do not speak unless you can back up your assertions with your homework.

B. Do not speak too much

“He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.” (Proverbs 17:27)

“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.” (Proverbs 10:19)

“In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.” (Proverbs 14:23)

1. Knowledgeable men conserve their speech. Too much talk becomes white noise—ineffective and unnoticed. (“When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen.” Why? Because he didn’t talk too much!)
2. Too much talk always degenerates into sin. The more one says, the easier it becomes to cross the line into unacceptable speech. Wisdom chooses silence as the better option.

3. Someone said, "Talk is cheap." It is also generally unproductive. It is better to do something than to talk about doing it!

C. Do not engage in speech the Bible forbids.

1. Boasting

"Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips." (Proverbs 27:2)

"Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6)

2. Offensive Speech

"Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee and thou be found guilty." (Proverbs 30:10)

The warning here is that the employer ("master") may view the critic as a busybody and meddler and rebuke him for it.

3. Public Arguing and Breaking Confidences

"Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away." (Proverbs 25:9, 10)

Do not bring outsiders into your personal conflicts. Do not discuss the details of personal conflicts with parties who are neither part of the problem nor part of the solution.

4. Lying and Deception

"A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame." (Proverbs 13:5)

"A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow." (Proverbs 25:18)"

"He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool." (Proverbs 10:18)