

Proverbs of Solomon – Proverbs 25:11

You have every right to disagree with me, but I am of the opinion that, linguistically, this is one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. It is poetic; vivid and colorful; it sets the imagination on fire. Everyone has a different perspective when it comes to beauty – even to the beauty of gold and silver. Some people prefer the gold of a sunset and others like the gold of a necklace or pendent.

Solomon says, *“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”* Theologically, this is not even close to the most important statement in the Bible, so the beauty isn’t there. And there are greater scriptures when it comes to practical Christian living. But this is a beautifully worded statement – which also carries an important message. I hope I won’t tarnish these Holy Spirit inspired words with my humanly devised comments.

Let’s start with the apples and pictures.

I don’t always do this in these **Proverbs**, but for this verse I spent an hour doing some research. I found commentaries which say that these are literal apples from literal trees. Those men point to several different varieties of apples which are yellow or golden rather than red. But I wonder how many varieties there were 3,000 years ago. There are others who say that these are the golden apples which **we** call *“oranges.”* One pointed to an orange tree in the morning sun with its bright yellow fruit accentuated by the remaining white flowers of the tree. A beautiful image. But I’m not sure how accurate that is. For example, I’m not sure that the flower and the fruit can be found on the tree at the same time. And isn’t there a cliché somewhere about comparing apples and oranges? Aren’t they two separate things? Without doubt, the Hebrew word is translated 6 times with either *“apple”* or *“apple tree”* – never anything else. This is talking about *“apples”* not *“oranges.”*

But besides that I’m not sure that Solomon is talking about actual fruit. He’s certainly not talking about eating it – he’s looking at it. And in that light, there are those who say these are imitation apples made, or covered, with gold. And this *“picture”* sounds like a frame of some sort to set off these decorative apples. Some say these gold-covered apples are framed or displayed in a silver basket of ornate filagree. And to be honest, the word *“picture”* has always encouraged me to think of the work of a human craftsman. This to me is a work of fine art. If you want to think of actual apples, be my guest, but I look at this as ornamental. *“A word fitly spoken”* might be considered as a work of art. Either way, we should come to the same application.

I picture Solomon in his large throne room with tables here and there covered with documents, gifts and mementos. On one of them is a silver basket with gold covered apples peeking through the wicker work and over the top. It is stunningly beautiful in my mind’s eye. Are these solid gold apples or are they gilded? Does it matter? I suppose to kings it might. Who can afford to own such an ornament? Only the king of kings. And who gave this gift to him? Who did he know who was wealthy enough to craft such a thing? Whatever and whoever, it apparently caught Solomon’s eye from time to time. And on this occasion he incorporated it into a pithy proverb.

Solomon used this ornament as a simile for any well-spoken statement.

I noticed that a couple commentators said that the word *“fitly”* refers to running on some sort of wheels. Looking that up in Strong’s and then Young’s Concordances I couldn’t find the source of that idea. Whenever I find a definition which is not corroborated by my concordances, I have to wonder about it.

But for the sake of making a point, let’s run down that track. *“An (orderly and well-spoken) word is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”* The wheels of a train run on top of well-designed – and often-tested – paths. Those wheels run accurately, because of the tracks, towards a certain intended destination. And if we chase that rabbit far enough – trains arrive on time; they meet the need of their passengers. Simply put, some suggest that Solomon is saying, *“A properly running sentence is a beautiful thing.”*

In 1934 the first official *“Soap Box Derby”* took place, and it is still running – down hill. The Soap Box Derby Championships take place every June in Akron, Ohio. And from what I have seen, even if there is still a children’s division, there are high-tech adult cars as well. But the only power behind a Soap Box car comes directly from the Lord – gravity. Each car is held back by a barrier on a specially designed hill; the barrier drops and the cars begin to roll. All the cars have wheels, but some of those wheels run on simple wooden spindles while other have highly machined ball-bearings of various materials rolling over very special axles. It may not be true of all words, but a word fitly spoken, is never alone, it runs on an axle of wisdom and scripture – it is ultimately from the Lord.

A word fitly spoken might be either positive or negative. On one occasion it might be a quotation from the Word of God. It could be some sort of rebuke or a kindly worded exhortation. It might be really good advice which is apropos to the immediate situation. Maybe it is a word of comfort – and in that regard it might be a single word. *“A WORD fitly*

spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

In my research I read a mushy illustration coming from the biography of the Baptist preacher – J. B. Jeter. In 1835 Jeter became pastor of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia. In the story, the business of a wealthy church member fell into hard times, and the man lost everything. The Sunday after he closed his doors for the last time, he was in church as usual. But he was dejected and did not know what to do next. He may have even been a little angry at God. As the preacher came in, he saw the man, grabbed his hand and said, *“How are you brother? I have heard fine news about you.”* The despondent man was confused and asked, *“What good news have you heard. I need to hear it too.”* The preacher said, *“I heard that you failed in business, and failed honestly. It is nothing to lose your money if you have been able to retain your integrity.”* Those words encouraged the man to be reconciled to his loss. He *did* *“fail honestly,”* and not long after that he started a new business, which eventually prospered.

Solomon’s words *“fitly spoken”* whatever the message, suggest **the WAY** in which they are spoken. In the case of Bro. Jeter and his church member, **timing** was important. That man needed those words that first Sunday after his bankruptcy. How often should we say something, but we are too timid, or we are moved by circumstances or by the attitude of the other person, and we wait for a better time to speak. But then we find that the moment is passed and the effectiveness of our words is diminished.

Perhaps Brother Jeter’s words remind us that fit words are **spoken wisely** – in a wise fashion. It is not enough to blurt out the truth – even if they are appropriate to the circumstances. The method by which they are spoken must be as wise as words themselves. For example, I have seen and heard, and probably been guilty, of witnessing to a lost person harshly enough to hinder the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit. I know that the Lord is omnipotent, and that He can overcome our inappropriate attitude. But the truth is, He intends to use us, and if we blow it, the situation is blown. *“Fitly spoken,”* can involve discretion and tact, things which are often in short supply among know-it-all Baptists. There is the necessity of kindness in fitly spoken words, even when a rebuke is in order. *“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”*

I notice that Solomon doesn’t try to limit the **source** of these fitly spoken words. This is not a part of Paul’s letter to **Timothy** or **Titus**; this is not confined to the Apostles. *“A word fitly spoken”* might come from the lips of a child, an invalid, a preacher or even a dying man. There was a story along with a picture which *“went viral”* a few weeks ago on the internet. It was about a boy with Autism or Asbergers, I don’t remember which. The boy was about to start school. For weeks, he had been really excited about it, looking forward to it. But then when the day came, he was terrified, and almost didn’t make it, until a little black boy came up. They didn’t know each other, but the second kid simply said *“hi,”* then took his hand and lead him into the school building. That was all it took to make the little Asberger boy’s day. And the picture with one terrified little boy and another confident little fellow holding his hand went around the world a hundred times. We need to train our lips, prepare our hearts, and look for the opportunity to speak a good, fitting word now and then. Anyone can do it.

Something else Solomon doesn’t address is the **recipient** of the fitting word. Someone might look at the king’s expensive table display and say, *“Why was not this (ornament) sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?”* Some people just don’t appreciate fine art. And some would prefer diamonds over precious metals like silver and gold. Similarly, people often react negatively to a kind word whether it is positive or negative. But there is nothing that the speaker can do about that; it is beyond his purview. Like our presentation of the gospel, we can only tell the truth in as kind and appropriate way possible, and then leave the results to the Lord.

Nevertheless the proverb is true – *“A word fitly spoken IS like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”*