

The Discipline of Keeping Silent

When it comes to communication, all of us struggle with the ability to say the right thing at the right time to the right person(s) in the right spirit. James 3:1-2 teaches that if we master our tongues, we can master ourselves. One of the most difficult disciplines where communication is concerned is to be wise and discerning enough to remain silent. Consider several passages from the book of Proverbs that instruct every believer to practice the discipline of keeping silent.

Prov. 10:19 – “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking; but he who restrains his lips is wise.”

Prov. 11:12 – “He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his peace.”

Prov. 13:3 – “He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.”

Prov. 15:28 – “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.”

Prov. 17:9 – “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.”

Prov. 17:27-28 – “He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.”

Prov. 18:2 – “A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.”

Prov. 20:19 – “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.”

Prov. 21:23 – “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.”

Prov. 25:11 – “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”

Prov. 26:20-21 – “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out, and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.”

Prov. 29:20 – “Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

There is a time to speak, and a time to refrain from speaking (Eccl. 3:7). Christians are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), to be ready to give an answer (1 Pet. 3:15) and to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3). At the same time, our speech is to be with grace (Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6), and sometimes the most gracious and loving thing we can do is to remain silent.

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