

REFLECTIONS ON FAITH AND WORK

Self-Control

❖ **Controlling Our Tongues**

The Book of Proverbs offers many insights about human relations and the damage that can be done by words spoken in anger or frustration. The sayings of the “wise men,” recorded in Proverbs, repeatedly warn people about tongues that are out of control. One way to learn this truth is to read a chapter of Proverbs each day before we go to work, reminding ourselves that the “wisdom literature” in the Bible is full of insights about carefully watching what we say.

❖ **Insights from Proverbs**

Listen to this practical wisdom about the words we speak:

- * “When words are many, sin is not absent; but he who holds his tongue is wise” (10:19).
 - * “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (12:18).
 - * “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (15:1).
 - * “A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends” (16:28).
 - * “A man of knowledge uses word with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered” (17:27).
 - * “A fool’s lips bring him strife, and his mouth invites a beating. A fool’s mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul” (18:6-7).
 - * “A gossip betrays confidence, so avoid a man who talks too much” (20:19).
 - * “He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity” (21:23).
 - * “Like a city whose walls are broken down, is a man who lacks self-control” (25:28).
 - * “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control” (29:11).
 - * “Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (29:20).
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❖ **Taming the Tongue**

This theme of self-control, particularly as it relates to controlling our tongues, is a subject also discussed extensively in the New Testament. James, the brother of Jesus, who later became a leader in the Christian community in Jerusalem, directly addressed this subject with these memorable words:

“Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

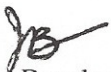
All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be” (James 5b-9).

❖ **Using Words to Heal, Not to Divide**

The practical guidance from Scripture is to be very careful about the words we speak. Thoughtful words, spoken with care, can bring healing. They can inspire and encourage our co-workers; they can bring comfort to colleagues who are struggling through tough times. But words spoken in anger or cynicism can hurt and sow discontent. And gossip - which we often engage in just to pass time -- can be terribly destructive.

Our challenge is to be truth-tellers, but to do so allowing grace to proceed truth and speaking truth in love. Using our words to build up others is what God desires.


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