

**WISDOM: LIVING SUCCESSFULLY IN A TREACHEROUS WORLD**  
**Speaking Truth**

**“There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven . . . .  
A time to be silent, and a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7).**

**The Tongue Is Not Neutral**

Consistent with the Apostle Paul’s “put off/put on” view of sanctification in the New Testament (see Col 3:5-17), Solomon taught in the Old Testament that walking according to *the fear of the LORD* included both negative and positive aspects—the mortification of sin and the pursuit of virtue (Prov 1:7; 8:13; 9:10; see “Fearing God,” taught on 9/9/2020). This is especially the case with *speech*.

Speech has immeasurable power. It can be used either as a weapon of iniquity or a tool of righteousness. Solomon summarized this reality when he stated, **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov 18:21)**. He did not leave this death-producing speech undefined. He described it in at least nine ways (see “Keeping Silent,” taught on 11/11/2020):

PUT OFF SPEECH WHICH IS . . .		
False	Misleading	Harsh
Degrading	Flattering	Argumentative
Impulsive	Boastful	Excessive

Solomon taught that the God-fearer will exchange those kinds of sinful speech with their righteous alternatives. He lists at least **six kinds of speech that must be “put on.”**

**1. Put on speech that is truthful.**

First and foremost, speech that must be “put on” is speech that is *truthful*. This quality of truthfulness is foundational to wisdom, for there can be no true wisdom apart from truth.

- **12:17** – “He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit.”
- **12:19** – “Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment.”
- **14:5** – “A trustworthy witness will not lie, but a false witness utters lies.”
- 14:25; 16:13; 24:26

Truth and wisdom are *equally essential* for successful living in a treacherous world. Both are *priceless*, meaning that the God-fearer must be willing to do whatever it takes to acquire and grow in them.

- **3:3** – “Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.”
- **23:23** – “Buy truth, and do not sell it, *get* wisdom and instruction and understanding.”

**The basis for God’s demand for truth is His own character.** He is the God *of truth*.

- **Exodus 34:6** – “Then the LORD passed by in front of him [Moses] and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.’”
- **John 14:6** – “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’”

What, then, is *true speech*? True speech is *not* that which is “true to one’s heart,” or “true to one’s feelings.” Rather, true speech is that which conforms to reality as God has determined it to be.

**“If you are of the truth, if you have learned the truth, if you see the sanctity of the truth, then speak truth. We are not called to be deceivers or liars. God is a God of truth, and His people are called to have an enormously high standard of truth.” —R. C. Sproul, *Exposition of Ephesians*, 114**

The one who fears God must have the relentless commitment to watch over his speech to ensure that what it communicates (at home, at work, in the neighborhood, among believers, on the internet, etc.) is always “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” as determined *by God*. This extends to what the God-fearer even speaks *to himself* and *about himself* in the depths of his own heart (Ps 15:2).

## **2. Put on speech that is patient.**

Despite the pressing need for truthful speech in a world filled with lies, Solomon also taught that God-honoring speech does not come naturally or quickly. Truthful speech must always be mixed with *patience* in order to: (1) hear the full story to avoid misjudgment; (2) speak at the opportune time to ensure effectiveness; and (3) speak what is only necessary in order to avoid the errors that come with excess.

- **10:19** – “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.”
- **15:28** – “The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.”
- **17:27-28** – “He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.”
- 18:2, 13, 17; 21:23

Wise speech will not be the *interrupting kind* that plagues so many conversations. It will always seek to be “quick to hear” and “slow to speak,” thereby radically decreasing the potential for sin (James 1:19).

## **3. Put on speech that is persuasive.**

We often believe that our *personal authority* is enough for people to believe our words. The response to any question is a simple, “Because *I* said so.” But Solomon teaches that the wise are skilled in *the art of persuasion*.

- **10:32** – “The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable [*lit.* ‘favorable’], but the mouth of the wicked what is perverted.”
- **15:2** – “The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly.”
- **16:21** – “The wise in heart will be called understanding, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.”
- **16:23** – “The heart of the wise instructs his mouth and adds persuasiveness to his lips.”
- **25:11** – “*Like* apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.”
- 22:11; 25:15

This aspect of God-glorifying speech adds *beauty* to the expression of truth. Wise speech is not only expressing “the brute facts.” It believes that the means of delivery—*eloquence*—is important because the content it communicates—*truth*—is important. Truth demands beauty.

Someone once asked a well-known theologian about his approach to defending the truth before skeptics. He answered with a Latin phrase, “*Suaviter in modo; fortiter in re,*” which translates as “Gentle in manner, powerful in substance.” Anyone committed to wise speech will make this motto his own for all areas of life.

#### 4. Put on speech that is peaceable.

Not only is God the God of truth, He is also *the God of peace* (Rom 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16; Heb 13:20). Consequently, speech that is consistent with His character will be likewise marked by *peace*. In fact, those whose speech instills peace are those who will have the highest privilege of being called “sons of God” (Matt 5:9). They give dramatic testimony of the Spirit’s sanctifying work in them (Gal 5:22).

Some of Solomon’s most memorable descriptions about wise speech point to its *calming effect* on its hearers.

- **12:18** – “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”
- **15:1** – “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh [‘painful’] word stirs up anger.”
- **15:18** – “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute.”
- **14:29** – “He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.”

Such speech is exactly opposite to the kind of bellicose, snarky, antagonistic, and hostile speech that characterizes every-day quarrels (face-to-face, on social media, etc.). As a husband, father, neighbor, or church member, the wise man responds to such hostility with a tranquility that deescalates tension and does not give anger any further fuel. Such wisdom is aptly described by James when he writes, “And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (Jas 3:18).

#### 5. Put on speech that is corrective.

Patient and peaceable speech is in no way synonymous with cowardly silence. Alongside all the proverbs that speak about the need for patience and gentleness, the book of Proverbs includes frequent reminders about the need to speak against error.

- **24:4-5** – “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly *deserves*, that he not be wise in his own eyes.” Many have wondered whether these back-to-back proverbs are contradictory, but deeper study reveals them to be complementary.
  - **Verse 4** teaches that in responding to the error of the fool, one must not answer using the fool’s same logic, worldview, manner, etc. To employ the fool’s own way of reasoning is the best recipe for becoming just like him!
  - **Verse 5** teaches that silence in response to foolishness is not an option either. Therefore, the wise man must answer the fool in such a way as to reveal the error of his logic, worldview, manner, etc. Folly requires a full expose.
- **25:12** – “*Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear.”
- **27:5-6** – “Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”
- **28:23** – “He who rebukes a man will afterward find *more* favor than he who flatters with the tongue.”

The need for reproofing speech is especially evident in the father’s responsibility to his children.

- **29:15** – “The rod [corporal punishment] and reproof [verbal correction] give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.”
- **29:17** – “Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul.”

While the father must not provoke his children to anger through merciless discipline (Eph 6:4), he must also avoid the other extreme of silence. The quickest way to ruin a child is to let him never know correction.

**“Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin. It is a ministry of mercy, an ultimate offer of genuine fellowship, when we allow nothing but God’s Word to stand between us, judging and succoring.” —Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 107**

## 6. Put on speech that is hopeful.

It is often said that one of the most essential qualities of a biblical counselor is his ability to inspire *hope*. The same is true for anyone who desires to harness the power of words for the glory of God and the promotion of life.

- **10:11** – “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”
- **12:25** – “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad.”
- **15:4** – “A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit.”
- **16:24** – “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”
- **18:21** – “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”
- **27:9** – “Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man’s counsel is sweet to his friend.”

Life in this treacherous world is hard, especially for the sinner. But God has uniquely designed *words* to bring hope and life to the hopeless.

- **Romans 10:14, 17** – “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? . . . So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

There is no greater privilege than to use the capacity of language to bring the gospel to the lost. It is in this capacity where our language most beautifully reflects the character and mission of God.

## For Further Reflection

- Continue to read one chapter of Proverbs each day.
- Memorize Ephesians 4:29 – “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”
- Review each of the six descriptions of speech the book of Proverbs instructs us to “put on.” Decide on two practical ways you can implement each of these six descriptions in your daily conversations.
- Colossians 3:12-17 contains the Apostle Paul’s teaching on what to “put on” as a Christian. Spend time making observations in this text. In particular, focus on Colossians 3:16. What does this verse teach about “the word of Christ” and our words?

***This Week’s Audio & Notes:*** [gracechurch.org/motw](http://gracechurch.org/motw)

***Next Meeting:*** Dec 2 – Fall Fellowship