

- Previously we have considered the WHAT (truth) and the WHY (for the good of the person and the glory of God) of our speech. This week I want us to think about the WHEN.
- I may have truth to speak, and my motives may be good and pure, but there are several factors related to this that should guide our general communication.
- Remember, these are general principles, not exact rules. I using these words in a particular way to indicate a difference between principles that are general that need to be worked out with wisdom and love in contrast to an exact mechanical “procedure.” This is more than going through the steps, but seeking to cultivate loving relationships through the wonderful principles of the Word of God.
- What follows are several questions that we need to work into our thinking when communicating, and particularly when correction or rebuke is necessary.

1. Have I Rightly Considered the Matter?

- When it comes to evaluating and discerning the actions, words, or motives of others, we should realize that we ourselves are fallen in our judgment and limited in our understanding. This doesn't mean that we don't have responsibilities to others, but Jesus calls us to “judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24)
- There is a difference between exercising judgment, and being judgmental.
- We can draw conclusions based on misinformation, or incomplete information. Often we assume know the rest of the story, or know the motives of other peoples' hearts. Sometimes we can act in such a way that displays a kind of arrogance of being able to know the heart. God alone knows this (Jeremiah 17:10).
- We need to cultivate a spirit of love in bearing, believing and hoping all things in our dealings with others (1Corinthians 13:7),
- One of the things that will help us to do this is to “hear” a matter, not “answering” something without knowledge Proverbs 18:13.
- When more than one person is involved, we need to hear both sides of the story Proverbs 18:17.
- We have examples of God Himself doing this Genesis 3:9 (w/Adam), 11:5 (Tower of Babel), 18:21 (Sodom and Gomorrah).
- In other words, we should not jump to conclusions.

2. Is It My God Given Duty and Providential Responsibility to Speak?

- We should realize that it is not our responsibility to speak in every situation and to every person. Some things aren't our business
- Proverbs 26:17 warns us about getting into business that is not our own, and the harmful effects of doing so.
- We see an example of Jesus refusing to enter into disputes and making judgments that weren't His Luke 12:14.
- I have given this counsel to a number of people over the years who have a tendency to carry the burdens of others, and feel they are always obligated to speak out.
- We should ask ourselves “has God providentially places me in a place where I am responsible, and have the necessary influence?”
- Frequently, the answer is “yes”, there is a responsibility. Where some must be encouraged not to meddle in a business not their own, there are others who need to be encouraged to fulfill their responsibility.
- This includes speaking up for those who can't defend themselves Proverbs 31:8 (written first and foremost to a king) and 24:11-12.
- There are relationships which call us to this responsibility such as parents to children, husbands to the family, pastors to church members, members to other members (including pastors). When duty and responsibility is ours (primarily based on relationship), we are then to be bold as lions (Proverbs 28:1) even in the face of adversity.
- There are times when we remain silent that we neglect our duties and demonstrate foolishness.

4. Have I Considered How I Will Speak?

- What kind of words do we intend to speak? What will we say? How will approach the person? To speak without thinking through, making hasty words is a display of foolishness 29:20
“Unseemly language makes wholesome truth more unpalatable” (Bridges)
- This doesn't mean we won't make mistakes, or that we should never speak until we could speak perfectly, but it does mean with think about it, and ask God for help.
- Wisdom is displayed in learning wise speech, honey instead of vinegar 10:32
- While not being a man pleaser (Galatians 1:10) we should seek to speak in a way pleasing to man. This includes humility and a loving spirit. There will be enough potential offense even when speak kindly, no need to add to the offense
“We may think to relieve our conscience by speaking our mind. But to do it rudely and harshly, may put a stumbling block in our brother's way” (Bridges)
- Even in rebuke, there should be wisdom Proverbs 25:12

3. Is it the Appropriate Time to Speak?

- Ecclesiastes 3:7 tells us that there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.
- Supposing the previous questions, this is a question that follows. There
- Proverbs 25:11 tells us of a “word, fitly spoken.” It is something beautiful. This includes the issue of timing (Proverbs 15:23). Marg. “a word upon the wheels – not forced nor dragged, but rolling smoothly along, like the chariot-wheel” (Bridges).
 - “...although nothing is to be spoken but truth, yet truth is not always to be spoken” (Lawson)
 - “We must not only lay ourselves out to do good, but to watch the fittest seasons of doing it” (Bridges)
- Sometimes even right things can be said at the wrong time Proverbs 27:14.
- This too takes discernment. Thinking about the present situation, asking “is now a good time to talk?”
- We must sensitive whether someone can bear what we have to say John 16:12

5. Have I Considered the Person’s Potential Response?

- There are times when we are actually not to give correction Proverbs 9:8.
- There is great wisdom needed to discern when and when not Proverbs 26:4.
 - “What may be at one time our duty to restrain, at another time, and under different circumstances, it may be no less our duty to do.” (Bridges)
- We should hope that our brethren are those with an obedient hear Proverbs 25:12; if there is an aversion to the receiving of wise and gracious rebuke, then there is a spiritual problem (Matthew 18 directs to take others if they will not hear you in matters of sin).
- Having said this, there are times when our position calls us to speak to those who may not have obedient ears. This is true with parents, superiors and pastors who are called to rebuke at times when they know there will not be reception. It is not a display of wisdom to keep completely silent when “Oh, they just won’t listen”
- If we should determine that we are not to speak, we must ask the Lord to show us if it is merely 1.) man-fearing or 2.) laziness and neglect of responsibility. One way to handle this is, if it isn’t the right time, to look for an appropriate moment.
- Proverbs 15:28 sums these things up in directing us to “study how to answer.” Also Proverbs 15:2 and 16:23
- These principles apply to all kinds of speech: general conversation, dispute and debate, rebuke, exhortation, comfort and encouragement, witnessing.