

The Right to Speak
Proverbs 25:9, 10
Charlie Brackett

Please consider Proverbs 25:9 and 10:

Argue your case with your neighbor,
And do not reveal the secret of another,
Lest he who hears it reproach you,
And the evil report about you not pass away.

How natural and human it is, when you have a dispute with someone, to take your complaint to a third person. It is so much more comfortable to plead your cause to someone with a sympathetic ear, someone who will not challenge your position, than it is to face the one with whom you disagree. Your opponent may point to the weaknesses in your case; he may put you on the defensive and, in the end, you may be embarrassed, shown to be wrong, or worse, be made to admit guilt in the matter. It is much easier to simply talk to another about it; he will be easier to convince that your case is just. He will more readily admit what a great fellow you are.

But, despite the unpleasantness involved, Solomon advises that a dispute be argued directly with the opposing party without taking it to a third person. It is the courageous thing to do. And the wise. Never is it manly or wise to air the details of a private matter with a third person. Revealing the secret of another is fraught with danger. The one to whom you reveal it, or someone who overhears, or someone who finds out that you are a revealer of secrets is liable to reproach you and you will be without defense. Such a report about you may travel a long way and live a long time. A report that you are a revealer of private information which you have no right to tell may prove to be very injurious to your character and next to impossible to reverse.

In a general sense, Solomon is helping us to see that we can speak only what we have a right to speak. There are some words, even though true, which are not ours to divulge. That which is entrusted to us in confidence. Knowledge we occasionally acquire about the weaknesses, sins and plights of others. Details of private disputes. These words are not ours to use loosely. They generally do not edify and normally are better left out of our speech.