

Cautious Speech

Proverbs 25:8

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Solomon, the wise author of the proverbs, had a great many things to say about wise speech. In Proverbs 25:8 he cautions us in a way we would all do well to heed.

Do not go out hastily to argue your case;
Otherwise, what will you do in the end,
When your neighbor puts you to shame.

How like us to be quick to defend our position, to jump at those who oppose our views or question our actions. I don't believe Solomon is condemning argument to defend a case or cause. Some causes demand defense. The cause of Christ is just; we must not shrink from it when opposition is strong. A case based upon the truth is right; we dare not keep quiet when lies seek to destroy. But there is an important caution which Solomon's words seem to sound. It is a caution many of us need to heed. He says, "Do not go *hastily* to argue your case;.."

When you speak your convictions, speak them with due wisdom and forethought. If you don't, your opponent may put both you and your case to shame. Don't be afraid to take due time in preparing your case. *What* should be said? *How* should it be said? *When* should it be said? It is not an indication of cowardice but, rather, a point of wisdom to bide time until ready rather than, at the first provocation, to jump on your horse and ride off in all directions at once.

Solomon's words are wise instruction for many of life's endeavors, but the most important application is in our personal teaching of the lost. Our words must be thoughtfully selected and lovingly spoken. They must be words carefully selected from the pages of God's book to stir need in a lost heart; words spoken at the right time and place, in a certain way, wisely chosen to give the message its greatest chance for success. There is so much at stake and there is so little time! For what greater purpose did He give us words?

What among God's creation can be more useful than the word, especially the spoken word? Properly selected written words are certainly effective, but a spoken word, especially one from one heart to another, can have the added impact of being carefully selected to fit the need of the moment and can be conveyed with the tone, inflection and bodily expression that heightens its usefulness and contributes to its beauty. The kind of words Solomon enjoins upon us are apt words, those which flow easily, rolling along as if on chariot wheels, perfectly suited to the circumstances at hand.