

"Can We Talk?"

Comedian Joan Rivers used to set up her next joke with the question, "Can we talk?" The phrase was basically a question of can I be honest and blunt with you. She would then go into a humorous situation which should have been obvious but is often overlooked.

With a change of punctuation we have a totally different meaning of the same words. "Can We Talk!" There are times it seems we do not know how to do anything else. There are times it seems when we cannot stop ourselves. Our talking reveals more than the words we say. The indiscretion we display by talking when we should be silent, the lack of self control, and the lust to be the center of attention can all be exposed when we talk.

Prov 17:27-28 says, *"He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."*

Great knowledge is not always revealed by long speeches. In fact, the more we talk the more likely we are to misspeak. The Proverb suggests part of understanding is knowing when to keep our mouths shut. The excellent spirit knows there are times when words should be spared.

The man who remains silent may not have great understanding, but his silence will cause people to suspect he has. When our mouths are shut we cannot say anything foolish. Mark Twain wrote something like, "It is better to remain silent and have people think you are a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."

One problem with talking is that when we talk we do not listen. And when we do not listen we cannot learn.

Zech 2:13 says, *"Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation."*

The implication of the verse is that God has raised up because He is ready to speak. Who would rather listen to himself instead of hear from God? The answer, I'm afraid, is most people in our current culture.

Eccl 5:1-3 adds to the idea of silence before God. *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*

The wise man goes on to tell us not to make commitments rashly. Why should we make a pledge and then have to work at backing out of it. *4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. 6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?*

The New Testament also warns us in James 1:19 *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:* We need to engage our mind before our mouth goes into motion. We should think about what we should say before we say anything. It is amazing that the complicated process of speaking can be done without thinking. We need to see the danger of this and regulate our speech.

Much of the damage done in the church and in the home comes from an improper use of the tongue. When I write a bulletin article I have plenty of time to think. When I make a mistake in the piece I can backspace my way out of it. In fact, my backspace key is starting to stick from overuse. I sometimes wish to remove a letter but end up removing a line. Unfortunately our tongues do not come with a backspace key. Once something leaves our mouth it is irretrievable.

Seeing this danger, Paul said in Col 4:3-6 *Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*

The Apostle requested prayers that he might speak God's Gospel as he should. We should seek such prayers also. Once again we see in the text that walking in wisdom is connected with speaking properly. Thinking and speaking should go together.

When we ask someone, "Can we talk?" It ought to be with our mind and heart in control. We may need to rebuke sin or teach a hard truth. These words can easily offend and must be handled with care. If the person we are talking to gets angry we must not let them influence us into saying angry words.

Prov 15:1-2 *A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.*

Sometimes we think before we start a conversation but we stop thinking when we are responding to another's comments. Keep your brain and your heart in every conversation. Slow down your words. Listen with your ears and your heart.

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