

“Biblical Principles of Sound Speech – A Time to be Silent”

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**"A time to be silent"
(Ecclesiastes 3:7)**

A Time to Be Silent - 123RF Photo – Ecclesiastes 3:7

"There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven— A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak." (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7)

"Speak little, because for one sin which we may commit by keeping silence where it would be well to speak, we commit a hundred by speaking upon all occasions" (Pinart, Ref. 1).

This lesson is the fourth and final lesson in the series on Biblical Principles of Sound Speech.

Consider. What times or examples can you think of where the Bible says we should be silent instead of speaking?

When circumstances demand. "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7). In Ecclesiastes 3:7, the Hebrew word for *silent* is *chashah*, which means *to hush, keep quiet, hold peace, keep silence, be silent, be still* (Ref. 2).

English Theologian John Gill (1697 - 1771) (Ref. 3, Ref. 4) described three circumstances when we should be silent:

1. During an evil time or a time of national calamity (Amos 5:10-13)

2. To express sympathy - "When a particular friend or relation is in distress, as in the case of Job and his friends" (Ref. 4, Job 2:13). Note that Job's friends showed support for Job by visiting Job and sitting with him silently for seven days. Sitting on the ground "marked mourning" (Ref. 5, Lamentations 2:10). "Seven days was the usual length of it" (Ref. 5, Genesis 50:10, 1 Samuel 31:13).

3. "When in the presence of wicked men, who make a jest of everything serious and religious" (Ref. 4, Psalms 39:1)

To listen to God. "Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2).

To respect God and to be in awe of God. The prophet Habakkuk said, "The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him" (Habakkuk 2:20). Habakkuk was comparing the profit-less act of speaking

to false idols with the *reverential awe* we should have for the living, true God (Habakkuk 2:18-19).

To guard our soul from troubles. "He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23).

To avoid transgression. "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19). "Loquacity leads to exaggeration and untruthfulness, slander, and uncharitableness" (Ref. 1).

When we're feeling angry. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). "Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).

To be counted as wise. "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*" (Proverbs 17:27-28, italics added). When I was a youth, my father quoted this saying to me - "It is better to keep silent and have people think you are a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." Researchers disagree whether to attribute this quote to American author Mark Twain or to President Abraham Lincoln, or to someone else. However, the concept is clear.

Apply. Think about this topic. In what personal situations or circumstances would it be better for you to remain silent instead of speaking?

References

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