

## Proverbs 15:1

### Wisdom for Living: It Guards our Tongue

August 31 & September 2, 2014

#### Proverbs 15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Many years ago, the captain of a ship looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south." Promptly a return message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north." The captain of the ship soon became angry. He thought: "How dare they tell him what to do. After all, I signaled first." So he sent a second message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am the captain!" Soon another message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am a seaman third class Jones." Immediately the captain sent a third message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am a battleship." Then the reply came: "Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am a lighthouse." How easy it is to let **"a harsh word stir up anger"** as Solomon writes in our text?

Some statistics show that we spend about one fifth of our life speaking words. If all our words in a day were to be put into print, they would fill a 50-page book. In a year's time the average person's words would fill 132 books of 200 pages each! Somewhere among all those words there are bound to be some spoken in anger, carelessness, or haste. As we continue to look at Solomon's Words of Wisdom for our lives, let us see that God's wisdom guards our tongues.

It is not easy to give **"a gentle answer"** that **"turns away wrath."** Over 20 years ago, when we still lived in Florida, I was burning some brush off in the woods by the parsonage that we lived in. The quickest way to get a fire started is gasoline. I sprinkled some gas on the pile. Threw a match on it – instant fire. In a minute or two the flames went out. Thinking that it had burned itself out, I did what most guys would do – throw more gas on the pile. However, it had not gone out completely. The new gas caused an unexpected burst of fire causing me to drop the five gallon gas can with gasoline now pouring out on the pile of brush that was burning. I ran to the house, got a fire extinguisher to put out the fire. Within in a couple of minutes the flames were gone. I got lucky. I have not used gasoline to start a fire again.

Sometimes words can be like that gasoline. Words get exchanged as someone gets angry. As the tensions rise, more words get exchanged. Before long, there is a roaring blaze that can get out of control. Now it becomes a much greater challenge to put those flames out. Solomon describes what soon may happen with those angry words: **"Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out."** (Proverbs 17:14)

Words carry a lot of power. Think what we can do with our words. With a gentle whisper, we can calm a crying child. With gentle words, we can thank people for what they do. What power there is in those two words: *"Thank You!"* Words can tell someone that we love them. Yet, words have destroyed marriages, homes and families. Words can leave scars that can take years to heal open wounds.

When words are used to hurt or spoken out of anger, our natural reaction is to speak harsh words to retaliate. Maybe you saw in the news this week, the two different people who caused two airline flights to divert and make unplanned landings because words were exchanged over reclining seats. What were they thinking? What are we thinking when we fight fire with fire? If words are flung at us, we fling them back. We use words to defend ourselves. We use words because we are not going to admit we were wrong. And so, **"a harsh word stirs up anger."**

This section of Proverbs seems so easy to carry out. But, in practice it is much harder to do. It is so hard to **"speak a gentle answer."** There is a saying that says: *"If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all,"* or *"It is better to keep your mouth closed and be thought to be a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."* As Solomon says in our first lesson today: **"The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly."** Wisdom is not the lack of knowledge, it is the understanding on how best to use such information.

If there is anyone in this world that would have every right to be angry at us, it would be God. He created a perfect world for mankind. He created them perfect. And then they blew it. It would have been so easy for God just to wipe out mankind and his now imperfect world. Yet, he didn't. Instead he promised to send His Son to rescue it.

Look what mankind did to that Savior. They crucified him on a cross. They made fun of him. They spit on him. They tortured him and killed him. But not even all those things were going to stop Jesus from carrying out the mission that His heavenly Father had given. As Paul says in our second lesson: **"For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living."**

It doesn't stop there. The Holy Spirit comes to us, who are these imperfect people, and works faith in our hearts. We believe it. The love that God has shown us, moves us to **"give a gentle answer,"** when it would be so easy to **"speak a harsh word."**

Our tongues are such a small muscle in our bodies. It is amazing how powerful it is. May the Lord help all of us to follow these words of wisdom from Solomon: **"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."** Amen.