

Lesson 6: Words that Build or Destroy — Speech, Counsel, and Correction



Words are never neutral. Scripture tells us they can build up or tear down, give life or deal death (**Proverbs 18:21**). The book of Proverbs is filled with piercing reminders that the tongue holds power, not because it can *magically shape reality*, but because it *reveals the heart*, directs relationships, and leaves lasting effects on the souls around us. Wise speech is not about *eloquence* or *clever phrasing*; it is about *righteousness*. The fool wounds others with careless words, but the wise bring healing. (**Proverbs 12:18**)

In our modern world, words are cheap. Our society runs on empty slogans, sarcastic banter, and constant self-promotion. At the same time, professing Christians are often careless in their speech, grumbling, gossiping, flattering, tearing down, or speaking as if God were not listening. But He is. Jesus warns us, *“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak”* (**Matthew 12:36**). Words matter because truth matters, and we answer to the God of truth.

Yet in our day, false teachers have taken the biblical truth that words are powerful and twisted it into something blasphemous. The so-called Word of Faith or Prosperity Gospel movement teaches that our words are divine instruments, that we can “speak things into existence”, attract wealth or health by positive confession, or “declare and decree” outcomes into being. This is not biblical faith. It is self-idolatry. Only God speaks reality into existence (**Genesis 1:3**). Only His Word governs the universe (**Hebrews 1:3**). Our words do not shape reality; they reveal who we are. The Word-Faith movement does not merely misinterpret a verse or two; rather, it commits theological treason. It enthrones man in the place of God.

Proverbs, by contrast, teaches us that speech is *not magical but moral*. Our words reflect our hearts. They reveal whether we fear the Lord or serve ourselves. They shape the lives of others, for good or for ill. And they will be judged by God.

Having seen how the Bible portrays the power of speech, we now turn to two crucial expressions of speech in the life of the believer, learning how we can walk in wisdom in these areas:

1. The value of counsel
2. The grace of correction

We will see how these patterns of godly speech, in counsel and correction, ultimately point us to Jesus Christ, the true and faithful Word: the greater Solomon, the final wise Son, the very Wisdom of God made flesh. His words were always righteous, never rash; always gracious, never corrupt.

While Jesus warns that every careless word will be accounted for (**Mat. 12:36**), we must read this through the lens of the gospel. For those who are in Christ, no condemnation remains (**Rom. 8:1**). Our sins, even the sins of the tongue, were judged at the cross. Yet Scripture teaches that believers will still give an account to Christ (**1 Cor. 3:10-15**; **2 Cor. 5:10**), not to judge salvation, but to receive reward or loss. We do not fear hell, but we do fear grieving the Lord who redeemed us. Words matter, not because they might threaten our standing with God, but because they reflect it.

The Value of Wise Counsel: Seeking, Receiving, Sharing

The wise are never isolated. According to Proverbs, wisdom thrives in *community*. *“Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”* (**Proverbs 11:14**) The one who walks alone, who listens only to his own instincts or resists input from others, is not *strong*, but *foolish*. *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”* (**Proverbs 12:15**)

Our culture celebrates *autonomy*, but biblical wisdom calls for *humility*. The wise *assume* they are prone to error. They know they have blind spots. And so they seek wise counsel, not just to affirm what they already think, but to be challenged, sharpened, and protected.

We must also beware the echo chamber. Some people surround themselves with “counselors”, but only those who agree with them. That’s not wisdom; it’s just flattery with a spiritual veneer. Others isolate entirely, refusing correction or guidance because they believe their decisions are “nobody else’s business”. But Proverbs exposes that impulse for what it is: pride and danger. *“Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.”* (**Proverbs 18:1**)

The wisdom of counsel, however, depends not on *how many* speak, but on whether they speak *in step with God's Word*. Many voices will offer advice, but not all advice aligns with the fear of the LORD. The counsel Proverbs commends is:

- **Rooted in truth:** not emotional, pragmatic, or worldly (**Proverbs 8:7; Ephesians 4:15**)
- **Peaceable and open to reason:** not domineering or manipulative (**Proverbs 15:1; James 3:17**)
- **Saturated in Scripture:** not detached from the Word of God (**Proverbs 2:1-6; Psalm 1:2**)

And wisdom doesn't stop with *receiving* counsel. As we grow in grace, we are called to *offer* wise counsel to others. *"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."* (**Proverbs 27:17**) This doesn't require advanced degrees or eloquent speech. It requires humility, biblical clarity, and love. God uses *ordinary* believers to bring *extraordinary* help through faithful speech.

We must learn to speak into each other's lives, not as *experts*, but as *servants*. This may mean gently asking questions, helping someone see what Scripture says about their situation, or offering a word in season to lift the weary. Sometimes it will mean saying hard things. But *"faithful are the wounds of a friend"* (**Proverbs 27:6a**), and a timely word can change a life. We must also learn to welcome those who want to speak into our lives as faithful, loving brothers and sisters in Christ. *This is very difficult.*

Ultimately, Jesus is our model and source. He is the Wonderful Counselor (**Isaiah 9:6**), whose wisdom never fails. He always speaks truth in love. His counsel is never hurried, careless, or self-centered. And in Him, we are not *only* saved; we are *also* transformed into people who speak wisely, for the good of others and the glory of God.

The Grace of Correction — Painful but Loving

Correction hurts, but to the wise, it is a gift. Again and again, Proverbs teaches that rebuke is not a mark of rejection, but of grace. *"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid."* (**Proverbs 12:1**) *"The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise."* (**Proverbs 15:31**) Those who refuse correction walk toward ruin; those who receive it humbly walk in wisdom and life.

This is not how the world sees correction. Our culture *prizes self-expression* and *despises rebuke*. To call something "wrong" is seen as judgmental, even hateful. But in God's eyes, the opposite is true: *"Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend"* (**Proverbs 27:5-6a**). It is not love to remain silent when a friend walks toward destruction. A true friend will speak hard words.

The wise welcome correction. Not because they enjoy being wrong, but because they value righteousness more than comfort. To accept reproof is to say, "I am not the standard; God is." This is the posture of humility, the soil in which wisdom grows.

And correction isn't just horizontal; it is also vertical. God Himself rebukes those He loves, *"for the LORD reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."* (**Proverbs 3:12**; cf. **Hebrews 12:6**) When the Lord disciplines His children, it is not *punishment*, it is *pruning*. His correction is not *condemnation*, but *refinement*. As Christ says to the church in Laodicea: *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."* (**Revelation 3:19**)

But pride resists this. The fool lashes out when corrected. He justifies, minimizes, or shifts blame. He surrounds himself with flatterers rather than truth-tellers. The tragic irony is that this leads not only to spiritual stagnation, but often to destruction: *"Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored."* (**Proverbs 13:18**)

To receive correction is to choose the path of wisdom and life. It is to agree with God, even when it stings. It is to say, "I would rather be rebuked and grow than flattered and perish."

As believers, we are called not only to receive correction but to offer it: humbly, wisely, and lovingly. **Galatians 6:1a** reminds us: *"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."* Correction is not about *asserting superiority*; it is about *serving* a brother or sister in need.

Christ makes this possible. Jesus never needed correction. He was sinless. But He bore the judgment for our sins. In Him, correction is not threat but invitation: the Father disciplines those He loves. By His Spirit, He gives us the humility to receive correction and the grace to offer it to others.

Christ, the Faithful and Gracious Word

The book of Proverbs is clear: our words can bring life... or they can deal death. *“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” (Proverbs 12:18)* *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21a)*. The wise uses his words to build up, to bless, to restore. But the fool uses his tongue to deceive, destroy, and divide.

This theme echoes into the New Testament with even greater force. James writes:

[5] So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. [7] For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, [8] but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. [9] With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. [10] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. (James 3:5-12, ESV)

The more we read Proverbs, and the more honestly we examine our own speech, the more clearly we see the truth: we are not the wise. Not by nature. Our words wound. We gossip. We flatter. We rage. We lie. We remain silent when we should speak. We speak when we should remain silent.

We need more than instruction. We need redemption.

This is why our hope is not in becoming better speakers, but in the One who always spoke rightly, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need more than good counsel. We need a Savior.

This is why our hope is not ultimately in wise speech, but in the Wise Speaker, the Word made flesh. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)* Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of God’s wisdom. He is not merely wise; He is Wisdom incarnate. He is the One *“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:3)*

Christ always spoke what was true, timely, and full of grace. *“All spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.” (Luke 4:22a)* He spoke with authority, not as the scribes. He knew when to comfort the broken and when to confront the proud. He never used words to manipulate, flatter, or deceive. Every word He spoke was holy.

And yet, He was condemned for His words. At His trial, false witnesses twisted His speech. The perfect Speaker was silenced, that we who speak foolishly might be forgiven. At the cross, Christ bore the judgment for every careless word we’ve ever spoken. He died for our lies, our gossip, our harshness, our flattery, our cowardly silence, for all of it.

But He did not remain silent. He rose. And now He speaks for us, interceding as our great High Priest (Hebrews 7:25), and He continues to speak through His Word and Spirit to transform us.

As new creations in Christ, we are called to speak differently. *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29)* *“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” (Colossians 4:6)* In Christ, we do not just learn new vocabulary; we receive new hearts that overflow with godly speech.

This is not moralism. It is worship. As we behold the grace and truth of Jesus, we begin to speak as those who belong to Him: wisely, truthfully, graciously. We are not saved by our words, but we are known by them. And on the day of Christ, we will see clearly that every word spoken in love for Him was not wasted.