

Speaking and Not Speaking

When do you speak healing words and when do you need to quench and silence your words. Here is a helpful reflection exercise to evaluate this question from a Biblical perspective. The chart below is taken from Scott Callaham’s helpful article, “*How Proverbs Helps Us To Speak Wisely*”. You can read the full article at: <https://christooverall.com/article/concise/how-proverbs-helps-us-to-speak-wisely/>

Proverbs teaches its readers both directly and indirectly about speech in every chapter. Hence Proverbs lends itself well to a thematic study on speaking wisely. A survey of direct teaching on speaking and not speaking appears below.

Speak	Don’t Speak
Right words, right time, with restraint (Prov. 10:19, 11:12, 13:2, 15:23, 16:23, 17:27–28, 21:23, 25:11, 26:4–5, 27:14, 29:11, 30:32)	When action is a greater need (Prov. 3:28, 14:23, 26:13)
Honestly and with integrity (Prov. 8:6, 8:7 12:17, 16:13, 19:1, 23:16, 24:26)	Lies, deceit, crooked speech, perverted speech, devious talk (Prov. 2:12; 4:24; 6:17, 19; 12:17; 15:4; 17:7, 20; 19:1, 5, 9; 24:24, 28; 25:14; 26:18–19, 28; 28:24; 30:20)
What is acceptable and wise (Prov. 10:32; 13:14; 15:7; 17:7; 22:18; 26:7, 9)	Unacceptable and foolish behaviors: Acting mischievously (Prov. 17:4) Acting vengefully (Prov. 24:29) Acting violently (Prov. 10:6, 11) Belittling (Prov. 11:12) Flattering (Prov. 26:28) Mocking (Prov. 17:5) Quarreling (Prov. 19:13; 21:9, 19; 22:10; 25:24; 26:12; 27:15) Scoffing (Prov. 22:10) Slandering (Prov. 20:19, 30:10) Whispering (gossiping?) (Prov. 16:28, 18:8, 26:22)
What is from God (Prov. 16:1)	If adding to God’s words (Prov. 30:6)
To bless (Prov. 11:11)	To curse (Prov. 20:20, 30:11)

To heal (Prov. 12:18)	To wound (Prov. 12:18)
Righteous words (Prov. 8:8)	Words of sin, wickedness (Prov. 8:7, 16:10)
Thoughtfully (Prov. 20:25)	Babbling (Prov. 10:8, 20:19)
With kindness (Prov. 31:26)	With hatred (Prov. 10:18, 26:24–25)
Gently, softly (Prov. 15:1, 4; 25:15)	Harshly (Prov. 15:1)
With peaceable characteristics: To bring gladness or good news (Prov. 12:25, 25:25) Graciously (Prov. 15:26, 16:24, 22:11) Justly (Prov. 31:8–9) Sweetly, pleasantly (16:21, 23:8)	
Prayer (Prov. 15:8, 29)	

When read horizontally across the columns of the table above, much of Proverbs’s positive instruction about wise speech finds its corresponding opposite in the negative instruction about how not to speak, for speaking in such ways entails speaking like a fool. For example, the righteous character extolled in [Proverbs 23:16](#)—“My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right”—contrasts sharply with the deficient character decried in [Proverbs 4:24](#), “Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.” Proverbs often contrasts foolishness and wisdom within a single verse, as in [Proverbs 12:18](#), “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Another way to take in the teaching within this table is to read the table vertically, observing positive and negative instruction about speech separately. Accordingly, to summarize how Proverbs instructs how to speak, Christians should speak with the right words, at the right time, and with restraint. An example of this teaching is [Proverbs 29:11](#), “A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.” A wise person’s speech will be filled with honesty and integrity, as seen in [Proverbs 19:1](#), “Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool.” Furthermore, Christians should speak what is acceptable and wise, a teaching epitomized in [Proverbs 10:32](#), “The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.” The wise speak what is from God ([Prov. 16:1](#)) in order to bless ([Prov. 11:11](#)) and to heal ([Prov. 12:18](#)). The wise speak righteous words ([Prov. 8:8](#)) thoughtfully ([Prov. 20:25](#)), with kindness ([Prov. 31:26](#)), gently and softly ([Prov. 15:4](#)). Their speech brings gladness or good news, as in [Proverbs 25:25](#), “Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.” Christians should generally speak graciously, for [Proverbs 16:24](#) reads, “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.” Proverbs demands opening one’s mouth for the cause of righteousness in [Proverbs 31:8–9](#). Sweetness of speech receives commendation in [Proverbs 16:21](#), “The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.” Finally, regarding religious behavior and speech, [Proverbs 15:8](#) teaches, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.”