

A Mouth that Speaks Gently, Not Harshly
Proverbs 15:1; Proverbs 25:15

It's just as proper to say, 'Jesus died to create a new humanity,' as it is 'Jesus died for my sins' (Jon Zens).

I. Gracious speech is a characteristic of graced people.

The Hebrew word Solomon used, translated in our two texts is *rak* which means soft, or tender. The word doesn't mean to speak in a whisper but in a gentle, loving tone. This is what Paul means when he describes the Christian's walk as "worthy" (Ephesians 4:1-2). Paul has just described what it means to be touched by grace in chapters 1-3, and now says "live worthy [consistent with] your calling."

II. Gracious speech is a corrective for angry people.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath" (Prov. 15:1). "A gentle tongue can break a bone" (Prov. 25:15). Wrath, as translated in our text, translates a Greek word that means heat or "hot with anger." It's anger of extreme intensity and the English word that best translates it is **fury**. "Break a bone" in the Latin, *Vulgate*, is "hardness." The same principle applies. When heated and angry words are directed at you, speak gently, for "a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). Angry speech is never about you. Anger is a tool to control other people to obtain something the angry person needs or values in life. "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control" (Prov. 29:11). Are you thinking of a comeback for a hurtful comment? Think grace. Angry people are broken by it.

III. Gracious speech is a continuum for God's people.

A continuum is a series of events that pass from the future through the present to the past. The center of time and history is the coming of God's Son to die on Calvary's cross. The fact that Jesus had to die for us to be forgiven indicates that *we are a lot worse off than we think*. Grace corrects us. "In light of God's judgment and justification of me at the cross of Christ, I can begin to discover how to deal with any and all criticisms. No one can criticize me more than the cross has. And the most devastating criticism turns out to be the finest mercy. If you know yourself to have been crucified with Christ, then you can respond to any criticism, even mistaken or hostile criticism, without bitterness, defensiveness or blame-shifting" (Excerpt from *The Cross and Criticism* by Alfred Poier).

A. Christ calls you to depend on Him and not defend yourself.

The One who created you, the One to whom you will return, the One to whom you must give an answer has cleared you of all defects and turned your harshest criticism into showers of blessing. When you are criticized by others, think of your identity and security in Christ.

B. Christ calls you to craft words that build up others.

"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29).

1. "Unwholesome" translates a Greek word that means "rotten" (*sapros*). *Sapros* is a synonym for "foul". It is only used a couple of other times besides here (Luke 6:43; Matthew 7:17) and each time it is used it refers to something rotten or decayed, as in rotten fruit, rotten fish, and rotten words. Rotten words are those "disconnected from the Spirit." You must stop it.
2. "Edification" translates a Greek word that means "build up" (*oikodomeo*). Flattery is given with the aim of personal gain; edification is unselfish and good. Words designed to fit the occasion—"such as fits the occasion."

C. Christ calls you to give words of grace.

Words of grace convey this truth: "You are loved, chosen, embraced, pursued and completed."