

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The Bible says that there is “a time to be silent and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7).
 - 1. All of us know that this is true, but we don’t always know how to determine whether the present moment calls for silence or speech.
 - 2. Many times, we choose exactly the wrong course, speaking when we should be silent and being silent when we should speak.
- B. Presently, let us consider the need to discern between the time for silence and the time for speech. Specifically, let us understand when we must speak under the mandate of God.

II. BE SLOW TO SPEAK

- A. The word of God commends silence as a sign of wisdom.
 - 1. Consider the message of Proverbs 17:27-28:
²⁷He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. ²⁸Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.
 - 2. Likewise, Proverbs 10:19 says, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.”
 - 3. Similar messages can be found in these proverbs:
 - a. Proverbs 12:23 – A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly.
 - b. Proverbs 13:3 – The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
 - c. Proverbs 18:13 – He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.
 - d. Proverbs 21:23 – He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles.
 - 4. Indeed, the old saying is true that states, “Silence is golden.”
- B. Therefore, it is wise for Christians to restrain their tongues and to be very careful about what they say.
 - 1. The book of James has much to say about the use of the tongue.
 - a. James 1:19 tells us to be “quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.”
 - b. In James 3:1-2, the Scripture warns us, saying,
¹Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.
 - c. James 3-12 then tell us about the great dangers of the tongue.
 - 2. The application of these passages is obvious, for if we want to avoid stumbling into the dangerous fire and poison of the tongue, then we will keep our words under control.

III. A TIME TO SPEAK

- A. We must be careful not to take the application of these passages concerning the restraint of the tongue to an errant extreme.
 - 1. The old saying might state that silence is golden, but it also says that speech is silver. This means that words are still quite valuable, and we must be good stewards over this valuable treasure.
 - 2. As we noticed before, the Bible says that there is “a time to be silent and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7). It is just as wrong to be silent when it is time to speak as it is to speak when it is time to be silent.
 - 3. The warnings of Scripture concerning words are not intended to cause us to take a vow of silence, but rather their purpose is to make us careful when we do speak.
- B. Specifically, we must not use the Bible’s commendation of silence as an excuse for failing to speak the truth of God’s word.
 - 1. We have an assignment from the Lord to “go into the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). This requires us to speak, for there is no other way to keep Christ’s commandment.
 - 2. The early Christians kept this assignment diligently as they “went about preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). Are we as diligent as they were?
 - 3. The Bible says that “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:21).

- a. The power of the tongue is not in silence, but it is in the speech that God made the tongue able to give.
 - b. The tongue's power for death is in lies, guile, gossip, slander, blasphemy, etc., but its power for life is in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16).
 - c. It is our duty as bondservants of Christ to share this power for life by telling the good news of our Lord to everyone.
- C. Not only are we to preach the good news of salvation in Christ, but we are also to warn those who are in sinful opposition against the Lord.
1. We are to be like watchmen of the Lord, about whom God says, "All day and all night they will never keep silent..." (Isa. 62:6).
 2. In Ezekiel 33:1-9, the prophet was told by God that he was accountable for sounding the warning to God's people. If he did not warn them of the danger he saw coming because of their sins, then their blood would be required from his hand. Are we not also accountable for sounding the warning today?
 3. Consider the words of David in Psalm 39:1-3 when he mistakenly interpreted the need for controlling his tongue as a mandate for silence in the presence of sinners.
 - a. David recalled:

¹I said, "I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle while the wicked are in my presence." ²I was dumb and silent, I refrained even from good, and my sorrow grew worse. ³My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue.
 - b. David learned that remaining silent about the sin of the wicked was the wrong choice. It caused him to refrain even from doing good and multiplied his sorrow.
 4. Jeremiah had the same experience when he suppressed God's word. He said, "But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,' then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it" (Jer. 20:9).
 5. Likewise, when Peter and John were commanded by the Sanhedrin to stop preaching Jesus, they said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. Do we have that burning impulse in our hearts to speak the truth of God's word?
 1. Can we stand by silently as we meet people who are lost in sin without the Lord?
 2. Will we say nothing when we see our own brothers or sisters in Christ carried away in sin (1Cor. 5:1-2; Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20)?
- B. There are many excuses we may attempt to use to shirk our duty before God, but none of them excuse us.
 1. We might say, "It's none of my business," "I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings," "Someone else should do it," or "I don't know what to say."
 2. None of these will justify our failure to speak when we should have sounded the warning.
- C. Our silence in such situations is evidence of a heart that has grown cold and insensitive to the spiritual needs of others and the love of Christ.
 1. Where is that burning desire felt by David, Jeremiah, Peter, John, and all those who loved God?
 2. Jeremiah said, "My soul, my soul! I am in anguish! Oh, my heart! My heart is pounding in me; I cannot be silent, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war" (Jer. 4:19).
 3. We have heard the trumpet and the alarm as well. Do we feel the anguish in our hearts? Can we keep silent?