MAKING KNOWLEDGE ACCEPATABLE by Rick Liggin

Most of us have probably heard and can recall the wise proverb that says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1). Probably all of us would agree that this proverb is so very true. Our words can either calm the wrath of someone who is upset and ease the tension in a volatile moment or they can fan the flames of anger into a blazing fire of destruction and harm. It all depends on *how* we respond to the situation.

The next verse in this chapter of Proverbs is not nearly so well known as the first verse, but its message is just as insightful and equally important. It says, “The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly” (15:2). This proverb teaches us that the truly wise man is not only interested in informing others of what they need to know. A truly wise man will want to inform in a way that makes the listener want to hear what is being said; he will speak in such a way as to make the knowledge he is trying to pass along acceptable to his audience. He is not simply trying to “get the person told.” He wants to really help the person he is trying to inform.

I’ve often heard my old mentor, George Lemasters, say, “I can tell you you’re going to hell in a way that makes you hate me for it; or I can tell you you’re going to hell in a way that makes you love me for it.” And he always added, “I want to do it in a way that makes you love me for it, because that’s when you’re most likely to listen.” The point is: if we’re careful, we can actually tell a person what he needs to hear without “pushing his buttons” or “setting him off” or driving him away! We can actually tell him what he needs to hear in a way that will make listening easier and even move him to accept what we say. And when I tell a person the truth that he needs to hear, and he accepts it – even though it’s hard to hear and requires him to make difficult changes – then I’ve actually helped him. And isn’t that really what we want to do?

Too many of us in our “quick communication, multi-media culture” have far too little concern about *how* we say what we say. We seem to be more interested in saying what we want to say, than we are in trying to communicate in ways that are truly helpful. Indeed, too many speak rashly in ways that cut deeply, “like the thrust of a sword,” but if we are truly wise and truly care about being genuinely helpful, we will speak with a tongue that actually “brings healing” (Prov. 12:18).

I encourage us all to please be more careful about how we communicate with one another in whatever form of communication we choose to use. We must remember that it’s not simply what we say that determines the effect of our words; it’s *how* we say it that so often really makes the difference. Please, think carefully before you speak (Prov. 15:28); and when you do decide to speak, be diligent to make sure you speak wisely in a way that “makes knowledge acceptable.”

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