deTrompet

When to Holster Those Thumbs

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Should I send this text? Should I make this comment? Should I express that thought?It seems fewer and fewer people ever ask themselves these questions—and it's causing mayhem.

To everything there is a season, a time for everypurpose under heaven, wise Solomon wrote. This includes "A TIME TO KEEP SILENCE" (Ecclesiastes 3:7). Yes, there is a time the thought in your mind is best left right where it is—unspoken, untexted.

Sadly, this is becoming less and less "common sense." Our world is faster than ever; news, facts, opinions, judgments, "hot takes" and other reactions circle the world in a blink. People not only *say* all that is on their minds, they text, tweet, chat, blog or vlog it too, without hesitation.

It's *never* a good idea to speak rashly. Knowing when to keep your mouth closed and your thumbs off your phone is a critical life skill. And God has a lot to say about it. The Bible brims with admonitions to control what you say and warnings of the woe you'll cause if you don't. This invaluable guidance is *doubly* true of texting and posting online.

"A FOOL takes no pleasure in understanding, but*only in expressing his opinion"*(Proverbs 18:2; Revised Standard Version). Is there any better description of what triggers a *majority* of social media posts?

If you aren't restraining your words, God bluntly calls you a*fool.* "Be not rash with thy mouth …. [A]FOOL'S voice is known by *multitude of words"* (Ecclesiastes 5:2-3). "[T]he mouth [or phone] of fools pours forth foolishness" (Proverbs 15:2; New King James Version).

Compare what you see online to the wisdom in these proverbs: "He who guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin. … He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. … He who keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble" (Proverbs 13:3; 17:27; 21:23; RSV).

This advice is important for what you *say* to a friend or two, and *essential* for what you text or post online to be seen by dozens or thousands or more. Online, that offhand comment can easily reach ears and eyes you never intended, and cause untold damage to others' names and your own. In addition, colleges, employers and others often scrutinize your online statements when deciding whether to offer you opportunities like admittances and job offers. What you post can live on and be difficult or impossible to erase. Many people are frustrated to find their lives "coming to ruin" because of ill-considered comments or photos they posted—sometimes years ago as teenagers.

This is one more reason we ought all heed the Apostle James: "[L]et every man be swift to hear, slow to speak [slow to text, slow to post], slow to wrath …. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:19, 26). Another proverb: "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 29:20; RSV).

Biblical wisdom gets more specific about one area where*far too many people* have grown *far too comfortable* letting their opinions fly: criticism and condemnation. Workplaces echo with it. The Internet swims in it.

When a condemning thought pings your mind, it is definitely "a time to keep silence"! James says plainly, "Speak not evil

one of another, brethren" (James 4:11). The Apostle Paul says we ought to "speak evil of no man" (Titus 3:2).

Why is this so important? Ignoring this wisdom destroys relationships, ruins reputations, and brings bitterness and grief to others—and to you. "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Proverbs 12:18; RSV). Before you speak or post, honestly ask yourself: Do your words wound, or do they heal?

At the heart of all this biblical instruction beats this simple truth: God's way of life is giving, loving concern for others above self. Satan's way is getting, vain concern for self above others. The urge to criticize springs from *Satan's* way. You trumpet the weaknesses and mistakes of others to knock them down a notch. You tell that juicy story to feel superior and get a laugh, not even considering whether you have the whole story, how it might hurt the person, whether he or she deserves the courtesy of privacy, or how you want others handling such unflattering tidbits about you.

Gossip, rumor and slander have bedeviled all human history, and now they are amplified by smartphones and social media. With the scuttle of thumbs on a little screen, gossipy goodies can resound around the world within seconds. The feeling you get is potent and addictive.

And God hates it. He commands, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people …" (Leviticus 19:16)—and with 4G and wifi, you can "go up and down" without leaving your seat. Even more: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother *in thine heart* …" (verse 17). God wants you to bridle not just your lips and your fingers, but also your mind and heart.

Learn the godly wisdom in recognizing "a time to keep silence." Live the *give* way. Think on the good and praiseworthy in others (Philippians 4:8). Show kindness and respect. Speak what builds up (Ephesians 4:29)—not what hurts, but what heals.