

Take hold of God and pull

by Calvin Seerveld

PROVERBS 25

It says in the first verse of Proverbs 25 that the wise men at Hezekiah's court copied over some of the "artful comparisons" Solomon had made in his day. Since these careful sayings are the Word of God, it is important for every man to hear their instruction.

A word spoken at the right time and place:
Just like gold apples stand out in silver art works!
Like a gold earring, a pure gold jewel!
appears the correcting word of wisdom to the ear straining to hear.

To have an envoy you can trust to send
is like a snow-cold drink on the day of cutting harvest: it
perks up a master's spirits again.
But a man who boasts of gifts he will never deliver on is
like wind and fog, with never a shower of rain.

Remember:
by holding off a long time from snapping back you
can convince those who must judge;
a gentling tongue breaks to stillness the bone (of anger) ...

Suddenly unconcealed wind chokes out a flash shower: just
so, secretive tongue-talk can whiplash persons' faces.
It is better to while away time secluded on the roof somewhere than
spend it with a bickering wife and a household of companions.

Hearing supportive good news from a faraway, land
is like (a cup of) cold water to a wearied-out fellow who is faint; but
polluted well water, a dirtied spring of water
(is talk about) an upright man stumbled by someone wicked.

More and more when eating honey is not good,
but going all out to get to the bottom of difficult, weighty matters is
something splendid!

However, a man who cannot curb his driving spirit
is like a city that is ruptured, without protective walls

- never forget it!

(Proverbs 25:77-75,23-28)

Talk is cheap, but it is also deadly. So with a tongue in everybody's mouth you have a worse problem on your hands, says the scriptures, than a loaded gun in every home. People by nature can't stand to have others get ahead of them, and nothing is more tempting than to shoot down a neighbor or a stranger, your colleague or an enemy, with a word or two. All it takes is a touch of knowledge, a little breath, and enough malice to get your

hatefulness on the road. Perfectly legal. If you can ruin the work of someone else by talk, just a secretive, misleading remark, you stand to gain yourself (we think).

But God says *false witness* shall be cursed. As the Lord of Truth, God himself hates especially

haughty eyes,
a tongue you can never count on,
a heart that thinks together strategies to
do what is wicked;
God outright hates!

feet all set to run after evil doing, anyone
who whispers deceptive things, false
witness,
or who keeps bickering going on
among those who are close to one
another (Proverbs 6: 16-19).

That means: back-biters, people with a tricky tongue, those who twist information out of normed contexts into gossip, go to hell. And whoever says he knows God but undermines the life of his fellow man with false witness is a liar, says the scriptures (Read through Paul's letter to Titus), and grieves the Holy Spirit.

But Proverbs 25 has more for us to hear: testimony that remains unfulfilled and passionate speech that knows no ego bounds is also good for nothing! Such testimony and fiery speech, even if it be Jesus-talk, is only *spilled witness*.

For a man who constantly makes promises and does not come through with the goods mocks the fact that a word is a deed, and if his word-deed is not trustworthy it is useless, like spilled milk. To tell a man that Jesus Christ is the answer for all his life problems, and when he believes it you walk away without showing him the goods, is an instance of spilled witness. Like wind and fog it befuddles rather than refreshes, says our passage.

Worse still is the untempered speech of the zealot too full of himself in his cause to check his bottomless commitment with the gentling discipline of "if the Lord will, let it be so." A clarion call to repent and reform in Christ's Name is prophetic if it convicts and rallies men together by making them jealous of God's mercies upon those following His Way. But if the revival appeal is compulsive and the sloganeering tongue unbridled, then instead of genuine prophecy you have vanity and a rupture on your hands (cf. James 1:26 and chapter 3). Such witness does not get heard and bear good fruit in the land, but is only spilled.

A word of wisdom spoken at the right time and place, however, - says Proverbs 25, is the norm for *true witness* in God's world. Concern for clarity and logical consistency in language can sometimes block one's awareness of the confessional dimension to speech, that talk needs to be holy passionate and certain as well as clear. Above all, what comes out of the mouth of God's sons and daughters should be timely and wise, that is, show what kind of response concretely in all sorts of affairs would make God happy. And timely, wise words must be spoken in the right place to be true witness.

That means, in our day, we who confess Christ are called to get our testimony off the street-corners and into the courts like Christ intended (Matthew 10:16-20). We Christians must shut up our false witness and get straight that testimony for our individual neighbour's benefit falls short of the scriptural mandate: we are to testify *for Christ's sake!* not our neighbour's sake (Matthew 10:26-39). Believers who wish to act within the full biblical dimension must press the claims of the Lord before the secular magistrates and the leaders of our culture (as Paul and the apostles did), get the Truth live before the heads of families and shaping education, with the vision of Christ's building a royal priesthood of generations of believers (I Peter 2: 1-10).

True witness happens with a meek sureness that no one shall mistake for timidity. And it is done today not particularly as churchmen, but as people of God, trustworthy envoys in all walks of life, from distant and nearby lands, who have heard and will obey Proverbs 25.

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