

The Counselor's Corner

"It is better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid, than to open it and remove all doubt." (Mark Twain)

This early American writer seems quite profound. Before him, Corinthians (13:1-13) tell us about people who speak and are nothing other than a "resounding gong or a clanging cymbal". An old saying refers to "talk" as "cheap". Whether our focus is the past or present, it seems important to make sure that what we say has value.

We must train ourselves to think before we speak, especially when we are angry or after someone has pushed our buttons. We must ask ourselves why we are verbalizing our internal thoughts, if they are not kind or warranted. Very little in life is free with the exception of advice. Recommendations on finances, child-rearing, relationships, decorating, or anything else is out line if no sound, adult has asked for it. Are we saying nice things, or are we putting people down, leaving a trail of hurtful comments on another's heart? Do we fool ourselves into believing we are having conversations when we are actually preaching or performing a monologue? When we state our point of view and do not give others the freedom to do the same, we close off all learning and unknowingly label ourselves as pompous and lacking in empathy and credibility.

We are so blessed to be living in a time where technology has increased our communication. Sometimes, I watch old police stories, and I think how much easier things would have been if they had cell phones. Now, we have gone way beyond with Fitbits and Apple watches. When it comes to electronic devices, we have to heed the advice for talking. **Think first.** Many people utilize Facebook to speak their minds about politics, religion, minority groups, spouses, children, and parents, to name a few. Although we live in a free country, and people are free to delete us and what we post, we will pay a price for speaking our minds without considering our audiences. Did people ask us to post lots of things about a controversial topics? Do we really believe we are going to change anyone's mind? When we dish up dirt about another, it is seen by a wide array of people, and the sender doesn't even have one second to change his/her mind after the send button has been pushed. There is always a victim in gossip, but the spreader will appear small-minded and mean, a puppet of his/her own anger. Besides our friends, there are myriad people looking at our posts. Some are criminals; some are law enforcement officials. Some are current or potential employers. Facebook is not infallible. There are myriad false postings that can stir up negative feelings. One needs to go to Snopes.com before buying into anything of an explosive nature and commenting on it.

Tweeting can be lots of fun, but it happens quickly and allows less time for thinking. People tweet about how they feel at the moment, but the moment is not static. The sender might be drunk. The sender may be very emotional and hurting. When people have time to clear their heads, they may have a change of heart and regret what was posted. Unfortunately, people do not always read follow-up tweets, and those hurt in the process may never recover.

Whatever arena we select for communication, we must train ourselves to think and reflect before we speak, write, or send. We cannot respond to external pressure to bare our souls. If not, our talk will be cheap and we will be nothing but resounding gongs that do not ring in harmony.

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