

MONDAY MANNA

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RESTRAIN YOUR LIPS – YOU MIGHT BE REWARDED

By Rick Boxx

There is an old American saying, “Loose lips sink ships.” A British equivalent, “Careless talk costs lives,” carried the same meaning – to *beware of unguarded talk*. These slogans during World War II were used to warn against discussing ship movements or unintentionally leaking vital information to spies. No sense letting the enemy know your plans.

In the business and professional world, we do not typically regard ourselves as engaging in “war,” but the principle still applies: Careless, poorly considered words can be very damaging. “Loose lips” can ruin friendships, destroy customer relationships, and transform near-success into failure.

Take Don, for example. He had formed a partnership with a close friend. Unfortunately, these two men had a serious dispute, and Don left the business angry, hurt, and suffered a substantial financial loss through no fault of his own.

He considered suing his former partner, and wrestled with the temptation to disparage him when the right occasion presented itself. After all, Don had been wronged and he felt justice should be served. However, after much prayer – and the counsel of trusted friends – rather than seeking his own revenge, Don chose to honour God. He maintained contact with the former partner and demonstrated to him, in both word and deed, the unconditional love of Jesus Christ every time an opportunity arose.

Don also chose to restrain himself from speaking poorly about his one-time business associate to others. About a year later, God restored the friendship, along with the partnership. Because he had refrained from speaking negatively about his partner, there was no need for damage control, no unnecessary wounds to heal.

This is why Bible passages like Proverbs 10:19 are so powerful and useful. It teaches, “*When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.*” One way of applying this admonition is that if someone has hurt us, it would be good to take a long-term view and restrain our lips. We never know what the future brings. Here are some other Scripture passages to consider:

The tongue, tough to tame. Just as a small bit controls a horse, or a rudder guides a large ship, how we use our tongue affects the course of our lives. “*...the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body...*” (James 3:5-6).

An instrument for either good or evil. Whether in a business meeting, a private conversation, or at a podium before many people, the tongue can serve as a tool for healing or a weapon for destruction. “*The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse*” (10:32). “*Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing*” (Proverbs 12:18).

Our use of words can be to our benefit, or for our harm. If cautious about what we say and how we say it, a day can go smoothly. If we speak unwisely and impulsively, a good day can quickly be ruined. “*He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin*” (Proverbs 13:3).

Postal Address:

PO Box 8168,
Woolloongabba, QLD, 4102

ABN: 42 005 622 515

Office Address:

Suite CBMC,
Sung Do Lawyers,
12 Annerley Road,
Woolloongabba, QLD 4102

Email:

admin@cbmcaustralia.com.au

Phone:

07 3172 9365

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Loose lips sink ships," "Careless talk costs lives," or something similar? What does it mean to you?

What do you think of the example of Don, who overcame the temptation to demean his former partner, even though he could have justified what he was saying because of the wrongs he had suffered?

How difficult is it to avoid lashing out toward others when we feel they have caused us harm or we have been treated unfairly?

In the example of Don and his partner, the friendship and business relationship eventually were restored. What if we suffer unjustly, but do not experience such a "happy ending" – does this mean our determination not to strike back in vengeance, not to speak ill of the offending person(s), was ill-advised? Why or why not?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 4:24, 10:20-21, 11:12, 12:13-14, 13:13, 15:2,7,28

James 3:3-12