

Hoof In Mouth Disease

Ponder: When to speak and when to remain silent.

Scripture: “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise” (Prov. 10:19, NKJV).

As an old farm kid, I know about hoof and mouth disease. Inspectors at cattle auctions diligently guard against spreading that highly contagious condition. (By the way, it’s a different virus from the one that causes human “hand, foot, and mouth disease.”)

My concern here, however, isn’t hoof “and” mouth disease, but hoof “in” mouth disease. Its cause isn’t a virus, but careless speech – metaphorically putting one’s foot in one’s mouth. Most of us have done that more times than we care to admit.

Silence isn’t always golden, but oftentimes it is. The wise King Solomon’s famous saying about “A time for every purpose under heaven” includes “A time to keep silence, And a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:1, 7). We need wisdom to know when to be quiet, when to speak, and what to say if we do speak.

Certain pieces of equipment have caution labels affixed: “Start engine before engaging clutch!” The starter simply doesn’t have the power to turn the engine over with the clutch engaged to make the equipment function. Once the engine is running, it will provide the power to operate the machine when you engage the clutch.

Some witty person adapted that saying to read, “Start brain before engaging mouth!” Yes, you need to think before you speak. When you think it over, silence just might be the better course. Solomon exhorts us again: “Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few” (Eccl. 5:2). And look again at today’s Scripture.

If what you say will help someone or advance the cause of Christ, then speak boldly and clearly! But be sure you think before speaking and remain silent when your words would be better left unsaid. Remember, it’s easier to button your lip than to extract your foot from your mouth.

Hymn: “O Be Careful Little Mouth What You Say”

Prayer: Gracious Father, help us to bridle our tongues so our speech builds others up. In Jesus’ name, Amen.