

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, December 21, 2025

### **Do Not Answer A Matter That You Have Not Heard**

**Proverbs 18:13** *“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”*

While this is a simple and obvious instruction, it is a perpetual trap that we all fall into. Answering a matter simply means that we form an opinion – render a judgment – and then often bring that judgment forth into spoken words. To rashly, hastily render such a judgment without appropriately seeking out the truth, and considering the full perspective, is damaging, shameful folly. If we are sincerely examining ourselves, we would have to admit that we run afoul of this instruction every single day of our lives, even if only briefly in the recesses of our hearts. It is sin. We have to see it as such, and strive against it.

In a general sense, it is vexing and disheartening to consider just how hard it is to know the truth of any topic in this day and age. Aside from the truth of the scriptures, taught by the Spirit of God, it is nigh on impossible to know the truth of any matter that you didn't personally see and hear - live and in person – with your own eyes and ears. While information abounds, truth is scarce as hen's teeth. Every form of information from across the entire globe is right in the palm of your hand, ready to be consumed. The AI arms-race ratchets up the speed with which you can parse and present increasingly complex information in a consumable format in the blink of an eye. This reality ratchets up the pride of man to nuclear proportions; it is the natural conclusion of the presumption of our first parents in the Garden. Everyone thinks that they know everything. Ironically, perhaps the most ignorant and foolish generation to ever walk the face of the earth has access to the most information, and believes themselves to be the wisest and most advanced. Satan's ego-provoking deceptions are a sight to behold; the most subtil of all creatures, indeed. My friends, information is not truth; information is not true knowledge. Information is certainly not wisdom. Wisdom – that wisdom that comes from above - is the thing to seek after, to cleave to, and to walk by. Information that doesn't feed and build up wisdom is worthless! We have to be very cautious to take any information at face value, especially if we are basing our mindset, actions, or words upon that information.

*Proverbs 18:15 The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.*

Our verse contains the kind of general application that I just discussed: we need to reasonably test all of the meaningful information that we encounter in this life, so that our actions can be driven from a baseline of truth. For the sake of our discussion today, I am going to focus more specifically on the way we form opinions and make judgments about people, and conflict between people, because I think that is the primary application of the verse. It applies to every relationship we have in this world, but I am going to focus my perspective on how we treat one another as fellow members of the body of Christ.

### **Anatomy of this sin:**

When a loved one is mired in some conflict or distress, they need spiritual help. They might need tactical help also, but primarily we should look to minister to the souls in these situations. When a person comes to you with accusation or distress, they will have all kinds of different presentations: worried, overcome, pleading, tearful, depressed, raging with anger, manipulative, impatient, threatening, manic, demanding, etc. They will have all kinds of different motivations as well: everything from pure malicious vengeance to sincere desire to help a person that they think is in trouble. Whatever the case, and whatever they think they are trying to get from you, what you absolutely owe them is measured, scripturally based counsel. In order to give that counsel, you have to actually search the matter out before landing conclusions. There are several reasons that we hastily jump to a conclusion; it's worth considering some of those reasons, so that we can more readily examine ourselves, and guard against this foolish behavior, and thereby be a real help to our friends.

- **Naivete** – you simply don't have enough experience to recognize that just because a person comes with emotion and emphatic words doesn't make their words capital-T-Truth. We all have a myopic perspective by nature – we are limited, fallible creatures, who are full of biases, pride, and lust. Our flesh is heavily impacted by emotion, environment and circumstance, and it is bloody war to keep under ourselves. Our "truth" is not The Truth. There is only one Truth, and that is the word of God, everything else is tainted by limited, imperfect, sinful human perspective.
- **Stress** - Many of us are overly busy with the duties of our lives, and feel pressed. As a result, we can be hasty to want to get rapidly to a conclusion. This is straightforward and understandable, but it cannot drive the train. Not everything has to be searched out to the minute details, but when something needs to be established, we cannot avoid doing the work just because we are stressed. If we are feeling overwhelmed at a moment, then defer to render a full opinion until you can appropriately consider the matter; and then actually wait to form your opinion.

- **Pride** - I'm smart. I'm a quick thinker. I don't need to hear what you've got to say, because I'm already several steps ahead of you. I already know the answer, even though you haven't finished presenting the issue. In fact, while you're talking, I've already formed what I'm going to say. I'm not actually listening so much as impatiently waiting for you to shut your yap so I can say the thing I want to say. *Gill: "Whereas, though a ready wit is an agreeable thing to employ, it is solid judgment and sound wisdom that do business."*
- **Envy** – You want to be the person to solve the matter; you want to be seen as a good counselor, and it frustrates you that people don't come to you for help, so you press into the matter with that goal in mind. I'm mature and capable – I have wisdom – people should listen to me. I've got the goods, and I'm going to demonstrate it. I'm a hammer looking for a nail. It's good to want to help, but you have to operate within the bounds of your own habitation – the lot that God has appointed – which includes your opportunities and your gifts. Be very careful, my friends to meddle with strife that doesn't belong to you. *"He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears."* (**Proverbs 26:17**) You don't have to get in the middle of something. If someone is laying out their complaint to you, quite often the right thing is to challenge their perspective about the facts and motives of the other person, put scriptural standards in front of their eyes, and provoke them to engage on the basis of those standards (reassess, forebear, forgive, go humbly to entreat and exhort the person privately, etc.) Then step away, and seek the Judge of all the Earth to visit those souls involved, and bring them to peace.
- **Halo Effect** – You have a particular fondness for the person making complaint to you, so you feel obligated to support them. You see everything that they say and do through the lens of virtue, and so you tend toward blindly agreeing and flattering them. This is partiality – respecting persons – and it is poisonous.
  - **Proverbs 29:4** *"A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet."*
- **Horns Effect** – Sometimes your perception of a person has a negative lean, which makes it easy to get you riled up toward that person. This can be because of a personal grudge that biases your view, or because you are myopically focused on one particular weakness that the person has, and you can't get out of your own way long enough to consider them from any other perspective. Every issue that passes your view related to that person will always come back to the issue that you are focused on. When you hear something about someone, and you leap to believe it, or it ignites wrath in you, then you need to ask the Lord to help you to mortify that deed of your flesh before proceeding further. It is the easiest thing in the world to be right in our own eyes, seeing every perceived fault in others with sharp clarity. It is easy and fleshly to put the worst possible face on a situation, forcing it into the pattern of perception that we have about a person. Humans tend to be

merciless in our ability to exact a standard that we are not holding ourselves to. This is hypocrisy. This is the leaven of the Pharisees. We have to war against this.

- **Sloth and impatience** - You just want it to go away, so you take the path of least resistance without being interested in the actual truth, or the consequence of your actions.
- **Thoughtless** – you don't guard your tongue; you say undisciplined words, perhaps adding in your own angst to the equation while you mull the thing over, without considering the impact of your words. The result is that you stoke the fire in the person bringing their complaint to you, or you carelessly repeat the claims that have been made, such that you ignite fire in others. Careless words dealing with matters about people and their reputations can cause immense damage, even if unintended.
- **Fear** – you don't want to deal with the consequences of making the appropriate judgment, so you twist your counsels around the path of least resistance. If the person making the complaint, or the person being complained about has a habit of foolish behavior that will make your life miserable, then you will be apt to agree with them, or else avoid telling them the thing that is true and for the good of their soul. This is an awful outcome, but it is all too common, because we are flesh and blood, and we tend toward cowardice. We have to be honest with ourselves about this. Don't complicate this – when it rises up in you, own it for what it is, and trust God!
  - **Proverbs 29:25** *“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”*

### **A word for those making accusation:**

- **Proverbs 18:17** *“He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.”*
- This is the other side of the coin from our main text: the person making the accusation or complaint. There is an old saying: “One tale is good ... until another is told”.
  - **Gill:** *“His neighbour comes into the house, where he is telling his tale, and reports it in another manner, and shows the falsehood of his relation, and exposes the errors of a man engaged in a wrong cause, and refutes his arguments. The first that opens a cause is very apt to prejudice the judge in his favour, and they are ready to think at first hearing that he is in the right; but it is not proper to be hasty in forming a judgment till the other side is heard; for his antagonist comes and traverses the point, unravels the whole affair, shows the weakness of his cause, the vanity of his pretences, and makes void all his allegations; and then “he searcheth” - inquires more narrowly into the case, in order to find out truth, and pass a right judgment.”*

- It is a part of our prideful, depraved flesh to present our cause in the way that flatters our own selves, and presses toward our own desires. Our hearts are deceitful, and so we must be on our guard – walking meekly and humbly and striving to be truthful. Tell the whole truth, including the parts that aren't so flattering to you. Don't intentionally lie, or omit, thereby putting your thumb on the scale. We can deceive ourselves, we might even be able to deceive our friends for a time, but ultimately the Lord will speak, and the matter will appear very different than we rehearsed it. Consider Job after the Lord chastened him, and put his situation into a proper perspective: *“Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.”* (**Job 40:3,4**)
- Many more words could be said about this, but for today, I will leave this topic with the following passage, and then return our focus to our main text for today.
  - **Proverbs 25:8-10; 18,19** *“8 Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. 9 Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: 10 Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away. ... 18 A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow. 19 Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.”*

### Impact of this sin:

- We damage the accused party:
  - Reputations are harmed, outcomes are unjust, relationships are damaged. This is serious business that the Lord does not take lightly.
  - **Matthew 18:10** *“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”*
- We damage ourselves:
  - This kind of thing damages our relationships, and breaks trust.
    - **Proverbs 17:9** *“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.”*
  - It tends to domino into other sins:
    - Talebearing / gossiping: Once you start carelessly wagging your tongue about someone, it's like a contagious virus rampaging through the population.
      - **Proverbs 11:13** *“A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”*
      - **Proverbs 18:8** *“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”*

- **Proverbs 20:19** *“He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.”*
- **Proverbs 26:20** *“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.”*
- Stubborn pride: Once we declare a position, pride kicks in, and we tend to resist admitting our fault. We are apt to twist around the axle of justifying our mistake, rather than owning and abandoning it, and any bad thing that flowed from it.
- We offend God:
  - **Proverbs 6:16-19** *“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: 17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19 A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”*
- We create division in the church, fomenting strife and contention:
  - **2Corinthians 12:20** *“For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:”*
  - If you have said words that you later learn to be false or incomplete, then you have a responsibility to diligently track back to wherever those words landed and humbly correct the error. This should be done with all speed, sincerity and zeal.

### **Our duty in these situations:**

- How we should behave:
  - Behave justly.
  - Do not be hasty and rash.
  - Judge righteously – according to God’s word, and not our fickle emotions. A righteous man judges all things, and ultimately, we will judge the world. Act like it! That truth ought to bring us to a sobriety and gravity wherein we act like members of the royal household, and not gossip columnists.
    - **Isaiah 1:16,17** *“16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; 17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.”*
  - Diligently seek truth and speak truth. Not self-righteous nit-picking in the name of truth, but useful and meaningful truth.

- Be slow to speak – heavy emphasis on asking questions and listening to the answers.
  - **James 1:19,20** *“19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”*
- Be discreet and trustworthy with sensitive information. Do not gossip and talebear.
- Submit to one another.
- Put on charity, which thinketh no evil.
- Provoke peace.
- Consider yourself.
  - If it was me being talked about, how would I want the person hearing the matter to respond? How would I want that person to think about me? Would I want them to seek out the truth?
  - Consider your own sinful frame when assessing others, lest you land on them with both feet, and then hypocritically walk in the same sin.
- If you make a mistake, and make a bad judgment and say it to other people, then once you realize it – own it, and correct it with diligence.
- The role of the church in these matters:
  - **Matthew 18:15-20** *“15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. 18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*
  - This passage describes a process for how to deal with situations of contention between people, but don’t miss the forest for the trees. This passage is describing that the church – the Bride of Christ – is **the place** where God meets with His people, and where we will find wisdom and help. Whether that be with the whole assembly, or with 2 or 3 gathered as representatives of the assembly, the body is led by her head.
    - If you don’t value the Bride of Christ as that priceless woman of Proverbs 31, whose price is far above rubies, then you are headed for serious trouble. If you lightly esteem her, then you lightly esteem

Christ. The church is where God will provide truth and safety for our souls. Lean into the body of Christ. Submit yourself. Drink in her good, spiritual counsels as health to your bones! Seek it – love it – live it with joy that we are afforded such a privilege! Despise her at your own eternal peril.

- **Proverbs 11:14** *“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”*
- The role of 2 or 3 witnesses is to be undertaken with all gravity and sobriety. When members of the body come together to hear a matter, they are doing so as representing the body. They aren’t there to support a particular person or position; they are certainly not someone’s billy club to wield. If you are asked to participate in such a thing, you are bound to be impartial, and to fully hear the matter without being swayed by the emotional telling of one party or the other. The goal is to seek out truth, establish it, and give instruction to all involved such that they are set on a course of peace. You aren’t there to represent your own interest; you are there to represent the interest of the church.
- The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. That isn’t just a conclusion to lazily rest upon, it is a provocation to seek out His wisdom early and often. Earnestly, frequently, specifically, seek Him with full trust that He will show the truth of all matters to us, how and when it is needful, and according to the wisdom and will of the Father.
  - While we should be employing all of our gifts and faculties to seek out and walk in truth, we have to know that we are fundamentally unable to do that of our own accord. We must have the spirit to guide us. Consider Paul when dealing with Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5**); Consider Samuel when dealing with Saul. (**1Samuel 15**)

I will leave you with this example of a blessed servant of God rashly answering a matter before hearing it. Here we find David returning from exile after the treasonous Absalom was killed. On his way back to the throne, he encounters Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, the only remaining son of Jonathan.

**2Samuel 16:1-4** *“1 And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. 2 And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king’s household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit*

*for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. 3 And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father. 4 Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth. And Ziba said, I humbly beseech thee that I may find grace in thy sight, my lord, O king."*

Ziba lied through his teeth, and David believed him without asking any questions. The result of that is that Mephibosheth lost his inheritance in an instant. Some time later Mephibosheth went to see David in Jerusalem:

**2Samuel 19:24-30** *"And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace. 25 And it came to pass, when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth? 26 And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. 27 And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes. 28 For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king? 29 And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. 30 And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house."*

It's noteworthy that David didn't apologize, or fully reverse course. More noteworthy perhaps is the spirit of Mephibosheth, who shows forth an excellent example for us to emulate. Even though he was so poorly handled in this matter, he is willing to endure the wounds of a friend, seek peace, and rejoice in the Lord. He submits himself. He understands what happened. He doesn't hold David to account, but rather, he praises God. There is nothing in this world that is worth grinding away our days over in angry discontentment. We look to the time when our Lord will come again in peace unto his own house, having put down the usurper. In the meanwhile, we love one another with thankful hearts, and endure all things for the elect's sake. (**2Timothy 2:10**)

I love you all. Amen.