



Wise Counsel

Proverbs 18:13,15,17 He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame. ...The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out. ...The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.

- First published in 1876, *Robert's Rules of Order* has become the standard operating procedure in many organizations for how to conduct meetings in an organized way. Generally how it works is someone makes a motion—that is they bring a proposal to the group. Then another member has to “second” the motion to acknowledge that it is worth further investigation and discussion, and finally the motion is subject to a majority vote before it becomes binding for the organization. Now whether you thrive or chafe under Robert's Rules of Order, it can be an effective way for decisions to be made and points of view to be heard. As we've studied the book of Proverbs these last several weeks we've seen that Solomon's aim is to give us both practical and eternal wisdom. Today's sayings are a good example of this-worldly-wisdom that makes someone a better communicator, counselor, committee member, and witness for Christ.
- In order to fully grasp and respond to any problem or situation, one first needs to be a good listener. As our mothers always told us, “God gave you two ears and only one mouth for a reason.” Careful patient listening allows us to understand not only the issue at hand but also the perspective of the speaker. Communication experts say that one of the best things you can do is periodically repeat what you're hearing to check for comprehension. This also has the side-benefit of confirming your care for the speaker and proves you value their perspective.
- Listening is especially important when we're witnessing for our Lord because the temptation can be to address the presenting problem (let's say something like abuse of alcohol) without addressing the deeper, spiritual problem that further listening might uncover (such as remorse or a lack of love). Indeed anyone can speak and contribute their two cents, but not everyone has the discipline to listen. In the previous chapter Solomon noted that “even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.” When we're overly quick to speak it is often a sign of our own foolishness and pride and ignorance—God preserve us from this!
- Yet, in order for decisions to be made in any venue, eventually someone must be brave enough to come forward and suggest plan of action. This leads to the next important step: questions and evaluation. It's unfortunate that at times people will see questions as an almost personal attack, but according to Solomon wisdom would dictate that such inquiry is essential to prove that a proposal is robust. After all, if it can't withstand some hypothetical questions, how will it survive being implemented in the real world? Solomon, the wisest man to have ever lived, saw great value in seeking the advice of others. He wrote, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (Prov. 15:22). So too, when people ask our advice wondering, “What should I do...?” that is often a golden opportunity for us to go beyond our own opinions and experience and incorporate the eternal wisdom and truth and love of God's Word. Then we will be able to offer truly wise counsel.

Prayer: Lord God, give me a gentle and empathetic heart. Make me quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry so that I can show others that I truly care for them like you do. When I must and ought to speak, give me wisdom and courage to guide others to your truth. Amen.