

# A Joyful and Good Word

*Proverbs 15:23*

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*“A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!” – Proverbs 15:23 (Cf. 24:26; 25:11).*

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Just to begin, as we often do, we should put in our figuring that “man” or “male” rarely, in Proverbs, exclusives the reference made to those of the male sex. It is very often used to of “mankind”, the entire race. It has view as to gender, race or religion or anything of that nature. Solomon is here speaking to all of those who would seek to please the Lord and live in a way that's is pleasing to Him, reaping the rewards of Godly living. The word translated “man” in most version is actually very direct in the original – meaning “person” and is deliberately “non-specific. ‘We might make the argument that the word and the subsequent translations of the passage did have a bit of bent toward the males in Solomon’s audience given what the prejudices and predispositions of the time were. This not to excuse it, not at all’ but rather to seek to explain it. It is this that Solomon did most often in the Book. He left the definition of the gender of the group he was speaking to be decided by the context of the verse. For instance, when he would speak of “man who is a father”, the context would demand that “man” be understood as referring to a male.

“Has” is actually a preposition and could be understood as meaning “with” making the verse implying a gained possession rather the acquiring of same. This first phrase of the verse tells us that this first section is the due result of the second part. Such ties are often used in the Book, Solomon, apparently was very good with grammar. By the mechanism mentioned in a moment one comes into the passion or enjoyment of “joy”. Joy, here, refers to everything from the common idea of intense happiness, to mirth, gladness or to the active idea of rejoicing or actively enjoy a thing or experience.

How does Solomon say this will come about? It comes about by “the answers of his mouth”. “By” is another preposition that suggests mechanism, and is used appropriately here. It is “by means of” the answers of the mouth that joy can come to the one offering those answers. Notice that he is not talking just about what we could call generic speaking. But rather he is talking about responses, answers given to input from others. Answer is a relatively infrequently used word in the OT, appearing only 8 times. There is an implication inherent to the word that suggests that this answer or response is given “for himself”.

We should note also that this is a singular response or answer. It is not that the one in view is giving any kind of argument or distended answer. Rather, Solomon is referring to a simple, basic answer to something asked or required. It is not talking about any kind of reasoned or developed answer. This is the known and satisfying answer given to a question.

We ought to note also that there is another idea present here. First is the truth that Solomon is speaking about a vocalized answer, given to satisfy and/or comfort others. We are not talking about an answer aimed at pleasing ourselves as in “There! I guess I told you what!” It is a legitimate and specific answer given to meet the need of the one speaking to.

The second part of the verse is fairly obvious as to its’ application. The “word” in this second phrase is essentially the same as the “answer” in the first; with the exception that it is not necessarily offered as an answer to some question or need. The phrase “in due season” simply speaks of the fact that this word is withheld until the moment it is needed’ or, perhaps that it is offered when appropriate, whether withheld or not. It is given when needed, for the sake of one it is given to, not for the satisfaction of self. Solomon finishes with much the same idea as in the first phrase. The word spoken in this fashion is “good” or satisfying. There is also the implication that the word offered in such a fashion is “better” than one offered “out of season” or when not appropriate.

Both of these are presented as things that we ought to pursue and develop as we are able’ and that we are to use as a part of our regular interaction with those around us.

And so, the “joy” here spoken of is that which a one experiences when he has made a good answer, proved to be so by its effect. Not only an “answer,” but any “word spoken in due season, how good is it!” If spoken officially (as by a judge or ruler), it will earn him popularity (24:26). If as from one friend to another, or in a council of friends, it will commend itself by its relevancy and good taste (25:11).

The Scripture has several illustrations of this very idea for us to consider:

1. “The Preacher” himself, pre-eminently among men possessed the gift he here extols.
  - a. Witness his successful dealing with the “hard questions” of the Queen of Sheba, and the famous judgment pronounced by him.
2. But how much more He who announced Himself as “a greater than Solomon”!
  - a. To Him was given “the tongue of the learned,” that He “should know how to speak a word in season” (Isa. 50:4).
  - b. All His words were of this nature, but specially note the conclusive answers by which He silenced captious objectors (Matt. 21:24; 22:15, 34),
  - c. His happy mode of improving objects and events (Luke 13:1, etc., 21:1, etc.; John 15:1),
  - d. His skillfully constructed reproofs (Luke 7:40; John 21:15, etc.). That