

Prudence*



My dear friends, not every spirit is to be trusted, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets are at large in the world.¹ This cautions us not to believe and act upon every word that comes our way especially if it speaks evil of our neighbors rather than of their good.

If you seek perfection, be in no hurry to speak; do not hastily declare yourself before God; for God is in heaven, you on earth. Be sparing, then, of speech.² Human nature is often impulsive so it is very easy to slip in speech. For we all trip up in many ways. Someone who does not trip up in speech has reached perfection and is able to keep the whole body on a tight rein.³

Even more dangerous is to be obstinate and overly persistent in our own opinions. Seek the advice of those who are wise and good, listen to them before being intractable in your ways. Ask advice of every wise person; never scorn any profitable advice.⁴

A good life makes a person wise in spiritual ways and yields valuable experiences. Be humble, obedient to God's will to the best of your ability, and you will find peace in all you do. Whoever strays far from the way of prudence will rest in the assembly of shadows.⁵

Do not be a braggart: Yahweh says this, 'Let the sage not boast of wisdom, nor the valiant of valor, nor the wealthy of riches! But let anyone who wants to boast, boast of this: of understanding and knowing me. For I am Yahweh, who acts with faithful love, justice, and uprightness on earth; yes, these are what please me,' Yahweh declares.⁶

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up⁷ and wisdom and peace shall flow to you.

This article is based on Book 1, Chapter 4 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. (rfm)

*Definition of prudence: an intellectual habit enabling us to see in any given juncture of human affairs what is virtuous and what is not, and how to come at the one and avoid the other. It is a cardinal virtue. (Catholic Encyclopedia)

¹ 1John 4:1

² Eccl 5:1

³ James 3:2

⁴ Tobit 4:18

⁵ Proverbs 21:16

⁶ Jeremiah 9:22-23

⁷ James 4:10