

Thy Speech Bewrayeth Thee

"If any man among you SEEM to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is VAIN" —James 1:26

The Scriptures have much to say about our speech. The importance of its relation to the way of life or the way of death could hardly be overemphasized. The Spirit through Solomon declared (Prov. 18:21)—

"Life and death are in the power of the tongue."

By the medium of speech, Eve was persuaded to transgress the law of God. By the same medium, countless since have been deceived into the way of death. By it, too, many have been led into the way of Truth and Life.

And not only is our course directed by the influence of speech from without, but our own faithful or unfaithful use of this great power will determine our eternal destiny, for here is the key to a man's character and heart. Jesus said:

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

If the Truth is uppermost in our hearts, it will be uppermost in our speech. We all know brethren and sisters of whom this is true, and we know brethren and sisters of whom it is *not* true. Here is one of the most searching tests as to whether we truly are "in the Faith." Of course, some talk a lot about the Truth who do not have the true *spirit* of the Truth—talking is not everything—but we can be sure that *those whose conversation is always about other things are certainly not "in the Faith."*

And it is not just the subject matter of our conversation that determines our heart—it is the *spirit and character*. The Truth can be used in conversation as an instrument of abuse and antagonism to gratify pride and the perverse, evil reactions of the flesh within us. Solomon says—

"There is that speaketh like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise is health"
(Prov. 12:18).

We know of course, that the pure Spirit-Word is sharper and more piercing than any sword, but it must be wielded in meekness and wisdom and love, to purge and purify, but not to condemn and destroy—

"If a man be overtaken in a fault, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

And again (2 Tim. 2:24-25)—

"The servant of the Lord **must not strive**, but be gentle unto all men, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."

"Speak evil of no man, but be gentle, showing ALL meekness unto ALL men" (Tit. 3:2).

The supreme importance of the proper control and use of the tongue is vividly illustrated by Jesus' solemn declaration:

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"
(Matt. 13:37).

And David says in Psalm 34: 12-13—

"What man is he that desireth life? Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile."

James' short epistle devotes a whole chapter to the power of the tongue—to what a tremendous influence it wields, and how difficult it is to control. It is among those things of which Jesus says,

"With man it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible."

In this matter, we must confess our helplessness, and earnestly seek God's help. James says (3:2)—

"If a man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man and able to bridle the whole body."

If we can learn to control our tongue, we can overcome and control all. James remarks that the same tongue will pour forth blessing and cursing—blessing God with a great show of reverence and love and then turning around and cursing men, whom God hath made in His own image and all of whom He would desire to have taught and led in the loving way of life and Truth.

It is the lesson of the unmerciful debtor, and we all need to take it to heart. Who are we—weak, sinful creatures dependent upon God's love and mercy—*who are we* to take it upon ourselves to berate and condemn others? It is a natural, evil tendency of the flesh to criticise and find fault. James searchingly and decisively sums up the vital importance of our speech when he says (1:26)—

"If any man among you SEEMETH to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, **that man's religion is vain.**"

The Scripture gives much detailed instruction regarding this essential bridling of the tongue. Let us consider this instruction together, and then all *search our hearts* to see whether by failure to properly use and control this member we are making our religion vain. The Scriptures refer to at least 20 different aspects of the use of the tongue in which we can manifest the vanity of our religion. Some—such as *lying*—we may at first glance feel constitute no problem or danger as regards the brethren of Christ, but if we look into each more deeply—remembering how the law of Christ searches right down into the dark and sometimes unsuspected roots of our inmost thoughts and motives—we shall realize that *all are matters of real concern for each of us*. As James says, in alerting us to the dangers of the evil motions of the flesh within us—

"Do you think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?"
(James 4:5).

Take then, this matter of lying. Paul says, speaking of the new man, created after God in righteousness and true holiness—

"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:26).

Jesus promised in Matt. 5 that the pure in heart, and *they alone*, should see God. The Spirit through Jeremiah declares that the natural heart of man is deceitful above all things. Any deceit is lying. The purifying of the heart is a life-long task. Who of us can say we have never shunned to declare the whole truth, regardless of embarrassment or personal disadvantage? Surely none of us who have embraced the Truth would consciously tell a lie, but how easy to keep silent or cover up a mistake or give an incorrect impression, or allow a misunderstanding rather than openly face the consequences with a fearless purity of heart!

The full stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus is an infinitely high ideal. Blessed are the pure—the *completely, guilelessly* pure—in heart, for they alone shall see God.

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Evil speaking, backbiting and talebearing comprise another manifestation of the evil of the flesh that finds vent through the tongue—a very common evil that only the power of the Spirit can

control. Unless we are constantly careful, and unless we are purely motivated by love and the mind of the Spirit, we shall find that much of our conversation about others, when honestly evaluated by divine standards, comes under the heading of gossip and backbiting.

True, there are times when it is necessary to speak of the faults of others. But unless it is truly necessary, and done in the scriptural way, and in the proper scriptural spirit, we are running a grave risk of divine condemnation. The Spirit through Solomon declares—

"The words of a talebearer are wounds and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly"
(Prov. 26:22).

The immediate reaction of the flesh, on reading this passage, is to be struck with how remarkably it fits someone else. But let us for the time being curb this evil reaction and consider how remarkably they fit *ourselves*—how many times we have allowed the natural malice, of which we all have a share, to lead us into this flesh-gratifying sin. "*The words of a tale-bearer are as dainty morsels*"—how searchingly true this divine analysis!

The way of the Truth is the way of love—in *all* relationships. If our feeling toward our brethren and sisters is not pure love, regardless of their faults and weaknesses, then we ourselves are not the children of God, but are of the world. Love is kindness and gentleness and a desire to help and strengthen. Solomon records again (Prov. 17:9)—

"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love, but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends."

This does not mean a glossing over or condoning of what is wrong, but a proper, pure-hearted, sympathetic, loving approach with a desire to build up. *Let us take heed that we do not stand at the judgment seat exposed before all as what Paul describes as "tattlers and busybodies"* (1 Tim. 5: 13). It is a very easy and common sin. "Speak evil of no man" is the command. Even in our proclaiming of the Truth, let us take heed. We are not judges or executioners, but humble messengers with good tidings of light and love and divine compassion and long-suffering.

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Foolish talking is another universal failing of the flesh. "Foolish talking and jesting," says the apostle, are "not convenient"—not fitting—not in harmony with the holiness and solemnity and beauty of our calling.

It is sometimes hard for us to see the point in this, especially if we are young. It seems a crabbed and sour outlook. Joking seems so harmless and good-natured and pleasant. But as the mind grows in spiritual values, light, foolish talking is seen to be empty and shallow and false. The real, abiding joy of the Spirit is gradually realized to be deep and permanent, while humor is so transitory, and basically unsatisfying, with no lasting power. How well is it summed up in Ecclesiastes! —

"Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.
"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

"It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.

"For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity"
(Eccl. 7:3-6).

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For God's children there is never any place for *angry words*—

"Let ALL bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, be put away from you, and be ye kind"
(Eph. 4:31-32).

Solomon says (Eccl. 7:9)—

"Anger resteth in the bosom of fools."

An angry parent cannot be creating a godly child, for godliness is self-control and anger is an immature lack of self-control. How can we be teaching what we are denying by our actions? Do we realize the seriousness of angry words? Jesus clearly warns us (Matt. 5:22)—

"Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of Gehenna fire."

In the final 21 verses of the book of wisdom's way entitled Proverbs, there is a description of the ideal woman—the ideal wife—her price far above rubies. This beautiful picture is both literal and spiritual. In its fullest sense it represents the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and as such it has a message for all who aspire to membership in that glorious community. Verse 26 says—

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness."

"In her tongue is the law of kindness." At all times and under all circumstances, otherwise it would be meaningless. *Here is the essence of ideal womanhood.*

(Taken from 1958 Berean by Bro. G. Growcott)