

The Christian And His Speech

By Everett Hardin

The tongue is the cause of the spiritual death of many. The gift of speech is a blessing of God, but it is the will of God that we bridle the tongue. James said, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain,”* Jas. 1:26. Perfection, in the sense of maturity and completeness of character, is a scriptural goal set for each one of us. James says if we are able to control the tongue we are able to attain unto this kind of perfection.

The Bible teaches, *“death and life are in the power of the tongue,”* Prov. 18:21. the tongue is capable of great good. *“A wholesome tongue is a tree of life...a word spoken in due season, how good it is,”* Prov. 15:4,23. Therefore, David resolved, *“I will take heed to my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me,”* Psa. 139:1. Since the control of the tongue is such a big task, and so important to our welfare, we should give much time, thought and effort to its accomplishment.

The tongue is called a *“fire,”* Jas. 3:6. It is like a spark in the forest and capable of great damage to the body as the sparks are capable of doing to the forest. As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife. In similar fashion, one improper statement may start a furious flame that will consume and destroy individuals, families, and whole congregations. It is also called *“A restless evil full of deadly poison,”* Jas. 3:8. The Bible likens one who misuses his tongue to a snake. *“They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders’ poison under their lips,”* Psa. 140:3. You can measure the venom of a snake, but there is no way to measure the deadly poison of an unbridled tongue. It is full of poison, and may be used to destroy the reputation of others.

Improper Use Of The Tongue

The telling of filthy stories is a common sin, hurtful to all who tell or hear them, and is too base for a Christian to practice. Smutty jokes and vulgar talk ought never to come from the lips of one claiming to love the Lord. Paul said, *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may render grace to the hearers,”* Eph. 4:29.

Cursing and swearing is a common misuse of the tongue. Some people get in this habit so that they can hardly talk in decent company. The Bible forbids us to use God’s name in any way except with love and reverence for our Maker and Creator. His name is holy and should not be used except with reverence and awe. *“Holy and reverend is His name,”* Psa. 111:9. *“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain,”* Ex. 20:7. Profanity is not a mark of maturity but rather a reflection upon one’s intelligence.

It is wrong to lie or make a willful false accusation about another person. Lying is of the devil, John 8:44. A *“lying tongue”* is one of the things God hates, Prov. 6:16-19. To tell of a real fault in another is unjustified unless it is for his own good or for the protection of some innocent

party. Any other basis for such revelation would turn it into mere gossip or slander. There is a “four-way test” which the Christian would do well to apply to his speech: (1) Is it true? (2) Is it fair to all concerned? (3) Will it bring good will and better friendship? (4) Will it be beneficial to all concerned? *“There is that speaketh like the piercing of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health,”* Prov. 12:18.

Complaining is the fruit of an uncontrolled tongue. Even after God had delivered Israel from Egypt by His wondrous power and had provided for their needs in the wilderness by repeated miracles, these thankless people complained about their lot. God’s displeasure with their attitude was evident when He said, *“How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me?”* Num. 14:27. Paul said, *“Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer,”* I Cor. 10:10.

The gift of speech is perverted by too much talk. *“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise,”* Prov. 10:19. Some people never say anything ugly or untrue, but they never stop talking. Usually they say little that is of any importance, but they keep rattling along. Solomon suggests that somewhere along the line such people will do some harm. James says, *“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let everyman be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,”* Jas. 1:19.

One of the specific sins of an uncontrolled tongue is unjust and evil judgment of someone else. *“Speak not evil of another brethren,”* Jas. 4:11. This means literally “to talk someone down.” It means speaking of others in a way calculated to lower them in other people’s estimation, and speaking of them in their absence, when they have no opportunity to defend themselves or correct untrue statements. This is to inflict a hurtful injury on a man behind his back.

Commendable Uses of the Tongue.

Christians should use their tongue for prayer. Paul exhorts Christians to *“pray without ceasing,”* I Thess. 5:17. Of all the possible good uses to which one could put his tongue, what could be more spiritually profitable than this? Pray about personal problems and special temptations. Pray for the sick. Pray for the weak and wayward brethren.

We should use our tongues for praise and thanksgiving. We should *“offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name,”* Heb. 13:15. It is beneath the Christian to attribute his good fortune to fate or chance circumstances. *“Every good gift is from above,”* Jas. 1:17. We should continually thank God for His goodness. His children must be quick to confess Him and acknowledge Him before men.

A Christian should use his tongue to instruct people in the gospel and to exhort them to obey. So long as there is just one unsaved person in his acquaintance, the Christian’s work is not finished. It is his responsibility to plead with people to believe and obey the gospel. He must try and restore his erring brother, Gal. 6:1. If a child of God really believes that the gospel is able to save men from the terrors of an eternal hell and secure for them a heavenly inheritance he will be searching for opportunities to teach.

We must use our tongues to encourage people who are experiencing difficulties. Crisis comes to people in various ways — personal failure and disgrace, sickness, injury, bereavement, and family problems. These people need someone to stand near them and to offer encouragement and aid. “What can I tell these people?” First, remind him of his friends who love him and who will help him. Second, speak to him of love and concern. Remind him that even if everyone else

should fail him, God's love abides, Rom. 8:38-39. Third, express confidence in his ability to bear his trial. Especially should his attention be called to the fact that God has promised never to let any trial come upon us but that we will be able to bear it, I Cor. 10:13. Fourth, help him to look beyond the problems of the moment to the time when things will be better.

Since the control of the tongue is such a big task, and so important to our welfare, we should give much time, thought, and effort to its accomplishment. Like David, we should make it a matter of prayer. *"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer,"* Psa. 19:14.
