

EVIL SPEAKING AND EVIL SURMISING

MANY ARE THE peculiar subterfuges which the fallen nature uses in its attempt to stifle the voice of Conscience. We have known people who took cognizance of the Scriptural injunction against slander, evil speaking and evil surmising, and yet who were so confused on the subject and so unaccustomed to scrutinizing their own conduct that they would utter slander in the very breath in which they expressed their strong disapproval of evil speaking. In order to avoid such a condition of confusion it is well to have in mind a clear definition of these terms.

SLANDER A FACTOR IN ANARCHY

A *slander* is anything uttered with the intention of *injury* to another, whether the statement be true or false. Both the Law of God and the laws of men agree that such injury is wrong. True, many slanderers are never prosecuted; true that even newspapers have times without number escaped heavy damages for libelous slander, on the plea that they published the defamation as news which properly belonged to the people. Public men consider it good policy to let ordinary slander go unnoticed, realizing that many of the false statements made by the opposition press will properly be credited as falsehood.

The effect of public slander is very injurious, and brings about a gradual growth of slander among the people. This condition is sure to work evil to themselves and to their institutions. Government officials and other men thus slandered lose their influence for good over the lower classes, who are thus being helped along day by day to greater lawlessness, and are being thus prepared for the period of anarchy which the Scriptures tell us is near.

EVIL SPEAKING INDICATIVE OF UNGODLINESS

Evil speaking includes all defamatory or injurious remarks against others – words of hatred, malice, envy or strife – everything which would injure another to any degree. Even an uncomplimentary remark respecting another, injuring his reputation, is evil speaking, although the uncomplimentary statement be true.

All of our words are taken by the Lord as an index of the heart. If our words are flippant, frivolous, unkind, unthankful, rebellious or disloyal, He judges the heart accordingly, on the principle that "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Matt. 12:34.) Thus in all the varied circumstances of daily life, our words are continually bearing testimony before God of the condition of our hearts.

Godlikeness certainly cannot include any harmful gossip, any unclean or unholy conversation, any disloyal or rebellious words. Let all such things be put far away from those who name the name of Christ in sincerity and in truth.

The tongue is the most powerful member of the human body. As the Scriptures say, with it we may praise God or injure men. Not only may we injure those within reach of our tongue, but our words might extend their influence throughout the world and from generation to generation. Our tongues are the most wonderful power that God has given us. It has been said that all of life's experiences deepen when presented in *language*. When uttered, thoughts impress themselves deeply upon the mind. We should certainly take heed to our *tongues*. – James 3:9,10.

EVIL SURMISING INDICATIVE OF AN IMPURE HEART

Evil surmising consists in imagining evil motives to be behind the words and the acts of others. Proceeding out of the heart not fully consecrated, evil surmising will attribute some selfish or evil motive to every good deed. This form of sin is ranked by the Apostle Paul as

contrary to the words of our Lord Jesus, opposed to godliness, and of the same spirit as envy and strife – works of the flesh and of the Devil. – I Tim. 6:3-5; Gal. 5:19-21.

Those who have cultivated that spirit of love which "thinketh no evil" have developed their characters and have become of "quick understanding in the fear of the [R5123 : page 335] Lord." (Isa. 11:3.) They will be *cautious* where there is even the appearance of evil, while at the same time they will avoid the imputation of evil intentions until forced to concede them by indisputable evidence. It is far better to take some slight risks and to suffer some trifling losses than to accuse even one innocent person. The Lord, who has directed our course in matters of this kind, is abundantly able to compensate us for any losses experienced in following His counsel.

TO IMPUTE GOOD MOTIVES IS CHARITABLE

The true Christian will cultivate the disposition to think charitably of the words and actions of others, and to suppose that their intentions are good, until he has positive evidence to the contrary. Even then he will go to the offender alone, according to Matt. 18:15, and if occasion require, will take the subsequent steps, as directed by the Lord. – Matt. 18:15-17.

From their high standard of the appreciation of the [R5123 : page 336] Divine Law, advanced Christians see that in the Lord's sight hatred is *murder*, slander is *assassination*, and the destruction of a neighbor's good name is *robbery*. Any of these things done in the Church among the professed people of God is doubly evil – the robbery or the murder of a *brother*. – I John 3:15.

Verily, with force do the Scriptures declare that the natural heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9.) Those who practice evil speaking and evil surmising and who attempt to justify their conduct have either never entered the School of Christ

or else are only in the infant class, for they seem not to know that theirs is not the spirit of brotherly love.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF MISREPRESENTING OTHERS

False witness applies not only to the utterance of falsehood, but also to any form of misrepresentation, whether by direct statement or by such indirect statement that a wrong inference may be drawn. One may bear false witness by a nod of the head, by a shrug of the shoulder or even by silence when he should speak.

One of the hardest lessons, apparently, for Christians to learn thoroughly is the *Master's command* that if they have anything unpleasant to say respecting a brother or a sister, any criticism to offer concerning the private life of another, they should go to the person alone. (Matt. 18:15-17.) Perhaps in no other way does the Adversary succeed so well in planting roots of bitterness, producing misunderstandings, anger, malice, hatred, strife, and other works of the flesh and the Devil, as in deterring the Lord's people from obedience to this command. Let us permit love to do her perfect work in our relationship to others.

LOVE A PREVENTIVE OF EVIL THOUGHTS

The Law of Love forbids the Lord's people to follow the pernicious example of the world. That Law commands *silence* to all who acknowledge the great Law-Giver, saying, "Speak evil of no man." (Titus 3:2.) Further than this, it declares against evil thoughts, evil suspicions and evil surmisings: Love "*thinketh* no evil." (I Cor. 13:5.) Love filling our hearts will not only hinder evil conduct and injurious words, but will prevent *evil thoughts*.

Indeed, to impress the importance of this subject, the Great Teacher declares to the pupils in His School, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." (Matt. 7:2.) Again He instructs them to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against

us." (Matt. 6:12,14,15.) Again He declares, "If ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses, so likewise shall My Heavenly Father do also unto you." (Matt. 18:35.) If *at heart* we treasure up resentment against others, the Heavenly Father will not forgive us.

PURITY OF HEART AN ADVANCED STAGE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Those Christians who are Elders in the School of Christ and who are therefore qualified to teach others, are not only *outwardly clean*, but *inwardly* also. They are washed by the water of the Word from the meanness, the filthiness of the flesh. No longer the slaves of sin, they are not controlled by the desires and the weaknesses of the fallen flesh and the spirit of the world. They do not bear the fruits of unrighteousness – anger, malice, hatred, strife, slander, evil speaking, evil surmising. – 2 Cor. 7:1.

A pure heart signifies purity of will, of intention, or purpose, which like the needle to the pole, always turns toward righteousness. Though some sudden or strong temptation may for an instant, through the weakness of the flesh, draw it to the right or to the left, yet it quickly recovers its normal position, which is loyalty to truth and righteousness. A pure heart loves righteousness and hates iniquity. It loves purity and despises impurity and unrighteousness. It loves cleanliness of person, of clothing, of language and of habits. It delights in the society of the pure and shuns all others, knowing that "Evil communications corrupt good manners." – I Cor. 15:33.

We should distinguish sharply between purity of heart, will, intention, and absolute purity of every act, word and thought; for while the former is possible, the latter is impossible so long as we have our mortal bodies and are surrounded by our present unfavorable conditions. The *standard* set before us is, "Be ye *perfect*, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48.) By this standard we are to measure ourselves continually, and not by one another; and to

this standard we are to seek to bring all the conduct of our lives as well as the meditations of our hearts. – 2 Cor. 10:12; Psa. 19:14.

But only our wills (hearts) have yet been transformed and renewed. Our imperfect earthen vessels in which we have this treasure will not be "changed" until our resurrection. Not until then shall we be perfected in the Divine likeness. But now, nothing short of purity of heart, will, intention, can be acceptable to God and bring us a blessing. – 2 Cor. 4:7; I Cor. 15:52.

HOW TO MAINTAIN PURITY OF HEART

Those who have made a full consecration of heart to the Lord constitute the pure in heart under the Law of Love. But notwithstanding the purity of their hearts, their intentions, their wills, to fulfil the royal Law of Love, these have a battle to wage. The law of their members, depraved through inherited sin, is the strong law of *selfishness*, in opposition to the new Law to which they have pledged themselves – the Law of *Love*. – Rom. 13:10; James 2:8.

Yet their inability to live up to the requirements of that new Law must be through no lack of will, no lack of intention of the pure, loyal heart. Whatever failure they make, however short they may come at times of obtaining the victory, it must be solely because of weakness of the flesh and the besetments of the Adversary, which their pure hearts failed to resist.

Here the Lord's promises are helpful, assuring them that He knows their weaknesses and frailties, as well as the wiles of the Devil and the influence of the spirit of the world, which are contrary to the spirit of Love. He tells them that they may go freely to the Throne of Heavenly grace, there to obtain mercy in respect to their failures to live up to the high standard which their hearts acknowledge and to which they strive to conform. He also assures them that they may find grace to help in every time of need. – Heb. 4:16; Eph. 6:12.

Availing themselves of these mercies and privileges provided through our Great High Priest they are enabled to fight a good fight against sin, to repulse its attacks upon their hearts, and to drive it off, if it has succeeded in invading their flesh.

Thus, and *only thus*, may the Christian keep himself pure in heart and maintain his stand as a fighter of the good fight, one of the overcomers of the world and its spirit.

SELF-DECEPTION OF AN IMPURE HEART

The mind of the flesh will seek to enter into partnership with the new mind, and will be very ready to accept [R5123 : page 337] love as the rule of life, *under certain conditions*. The mind of the flesh would prefer to recognize love in words, in profession, in manners only – a form of godliness without its power. – 2 Tim. 3:5.

Gentle manners, such as love would manifest, may be exercised by a selfish heart, deceiving itself and seeking to deceive others. On the lip may be the smile, the word of praise, of kindness, of gentleness, while in the heart may be feelings of selfishness, of grudge, of bitterness, of animosity. Under favorable conditions these hidden motions of sin in the flesh may manifest themselves in more or less carefully worded slander or backbiting or reproach. Or these, continuing to rankle in the heart, may when opportunity affords bring forth anger, hatred, malice, strife and other wicked works of the flesh and the Devil, wholly contrary to the course of a pure heart and at variance with the commandment of the Law of the New Creation – Love. – 2 Tim. 3:13; Rom. 7:5; Gal. 5:19-21.

We are to have clearly before our minds the fact that the *ultimate object* of all the Divine dealings with us and for us, and the ultimate signification of all the Divine promises made to us, is the development of *love*, which is godlikeness, for God is love. That this love may be developed in us in the sense and to the degree intended by the Lord, it must come from a pure heart, in full accord with the Lord and His Law

of Love, but wholly antagonistic to the Adversary and his law of unholy pride, jealousy and selfishness. – I Tim. 1:5.

LOVE DEVELOPED BY THE PRINCIPLES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

To have this kind of love in its proper development there must be a good conscience, well regulated by the Scriptures; therefore the study of God's Word is very important. Meditation upon God's Law is also necessary. We must recognize the fact that there are Divine commands with *principles* behind them and that these principles [R5124 : page 337] are to be incorporated into our characters. In other words, we are to have the mind of Christ. (I Cor. 2:16.) As the Apostle says, "Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." – Gal. 5:16.

This admonition means that we should guard all the actions of life, as well as all our words; for these are a source of either blessing or ill to others and to ourselves. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Prov. 23:7.) Some may deceive others for a time, but the Lord knows whether we are seeking to please Him.

We are to endeavor to please the Lord in all things and to watch the outward conduct so that our walk in life may be circumspect. Even though we know that the world will take our very best thoughts and endeavors for hypocrisy, nevertheless, our way is clearly marked out – the way of the Lord – the way of Wisdom.

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