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JUSTIFIED OR CONDEMNED BY WORDS

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." – MATTHEW 12:37.

THE word justified here used by our Lord is not the justification referred to generally in the New Testament. The "justification by faith" of which St. Paul writes is the clearing before God of those who have from the heart accepted Jesus as their Savior. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Our justification is on the basis of our faith in God; we cannot come into His family without faith. The Apostle James declares that a living faith shows itself by works. And in God's arrangement He has made it necessary that we manifest our faith by such good works as we are able to perform. So faith and works together are bringing us into the character-likeness of Christ, thus to be sharers in His resurrection. If we have only faith and not works, we shall never reach the goal; if we have all works and no faith, we shall likewise fail.

But "by thy *words* thou shalt be justified, and by thy words condemned": here our Lord is not addressing the Church at all. None were accepted to full justification [R5470 : page 167] and begetting of the Holy Spirit until Pentecost, which was some time after this statement was uttered. These words were spoken to the Pharisees, who were being reproved. The word justified is used here in a limited sense. For instance, we might speak of some transaction we have made, and say, I felt justified in taking that course. Jesus was here using this word in a similar manner. He was addressing those who professed to have a special relationship with God under the Law Covenant, and to be especially holy. The Jews were not justified to life, but merely to fellowship with God. And now they were in their trial time: would they prove *worthy*?

DAY OF THEIR VISITATION UNRECOGNIZED

We read that they did not realize that they were in a testing time – that they had come under a certain judgment of God as to whether or not they as a people might continue as His servants. "They knew not the time of their visitation." Our Lord said, when riding into Jerusalem, "Behold, your House is left unto you desolate!" They as the House of Servants were not worthy of a continuance of special favor at that time. For three and a half years there had been a certain kind of favor shown to them; the Gospel was preached in their midst. But the Gospel did not appeal to the nation; only to the "Israelites indeed" from among them, the faithful *remnant*. After the three and a half years which ended the "seventieth week," the Lord's favor to the Jews terminated, and from that time the door was thrown open to the Gentiles. And ever since then the Jews have had no preeminence over others.

The Pharisees professed entire consecration to God and great holiness. Jesus told them that they made broad their phylacteries, and enlarged the borders of their garments; that they took the chief seats in the synagogues, and for a pretense made long prayers; and that they paid tithes even of the smallest seeds, mint and anise and cummin, but omitted the weightier matters of the Law, and that theirs was merely an outward, perfunctory observance of that Law. (Matthew 23:5,6,14,23-25.) He declared that the Law commanded that they should love their neighbor as themselves. And He charged that they "devoured widows' houses"; they were ready to take advantage of the fact that these had no natural protectors. He told them that it would be foolish to think that by offering prayers on the street corners, etc., they were keeping the Law.

WORDS AN INDEX OF THE HEART

"By thy words thou shalt be condemned"; that is to say, they should lose God's special favor. By their words they proved themselves dishonest. They perceived the good works of Jesus, but

through jealousy and spite they said all manner of evil against Him and crucified Him. Everything they said against Him showed their real heart-condition. They were demonstrating themselves as unworthy of God's favor. We are not to think, however, that the Jews came under God's everlasting disfavor. During this Gospel Age they have been under special chastisements: they have had much persecution; but their faith in God has brought them this persecution.

God's wrath came upon them "to the uttermost" during those forty years ending the Jewish Age. At the close of the year A.D. 70 the *nation* went to pieces. But the *people* have remained very much alive! And they are now soon to return fully to God's favor: "they are still beloved for the fathers' sakes." They have still a share in the arrangement made from the beginning, so their condemnation was not an everlasting condemnation. But they have lost the chief blessing.

Had they said, We are not yet able to see that this is the Messiah, but we are convinced that there is some wonderful power operating in Him – had they used such words, they would have demonstrated themselves as desirous of knowing the right way, which God would have shown them just as some others were shown – especially after Pentecost. In such a case by their words and their conduct they might have been justified. They did not speak those words, however, because they did not have the right condition of heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Their heart-attitude was shown in their words; favor to their nation terminated.

WHAT CONSTITUTES EVIL-SPEAKING

The Apostle Paul says, "Speak evil of no man"; he does not say, Speak evil of no creed. Some of the creeds should be very evilly spoken of! It would do the people good who are bound by them. He does not say that we **[R5471 : page 167]** are not to speak

evil of an evil principle, but brings the matter down to personality. The Bible speaks of mankind as evil-thinking, evil-speaking, evil-doing; they are all under the ban in this sense. And to say that the whole world are sinners, is not speaking *evil*; for all recognize the fact. It is true, and every person ought to know that all men are sinners: sin prevails.

But when we come down to personalities, we are getting on dangerous ground. Jesus said that the Pharisees were hypocrites and whited sepulchres. He did not thus address an *individual*, but He spoke evil of the *system*, and of a *class*. So if we call attention to pickpockets, we are not necessarily casting reproach on any one in our neighborhood. But when we single out an individual and speak evil of him, we are on wrong ground, according to the Scriptures, except as a matter of necessity. If you know of a pickpocket, the proper course is to have him arrested. If you know that at one time a certain person *was* a pickpocket, it does not necessarily follow that he is one *now*; he might have reformed.

Therefore, when giving advice respecting pickpockets, it would not be right to single out this person or that one, unless we have positive knowledge. There are some behind prison bars who are today serving Truth and righteousness. And so it is with some who have come out from behind prison bars. To keep up a reproach and brand one because of certain misconduct earlier in life is not right. It is not right to hold a reproach against any one, and hinder him from an honest course in the future. We would better say, Now you are a free man, and I believe you are determined to do right. The effect of this would be good – to let him see that some one who knew about the past was willing to help him. But if he gave no assurance of doing right, then we would feel free to put others on guard against him. If he were willing to do right, we should cooperate with him in any way possible.

THE WORLD FULL OF EVIL-SPEAKING

There is no doubt that there is much evil-speaking: the world is full of it. A man in business will often say of another, I would trust that man about as far as you could throw an elephant by the tail – a graphic way of saying how much confidence he has in him. Another expression is, I would not trust *him* with even a cellar full of cold water! The world has not come into the School of Christ; it is the Church, therefore, that is especially instructed to speak evil of no man. Of course, it is natural for our fallen flesh to "dodge" nearly everything, and to try to think out some way by which we could justify ourselves in saying something unfavorable of another; and it seems that even the Lord's people have often "edged [R5471 : page 168] around" to see what excuse they could find for speaking evil and yet not feel condemned.

THE HUMAN HEART VERY DECEITFUL

It is to be assumed and presumed that every child of God has a heart that is desirous of doing the Lord's will, and that, therefore, none of them would *desire* to do that which is *contrary* to the Lord's will. But there is something in the fallen human heart which is very deceitful – determined to do the thing it used to do in the world. We have known people of the world who think nothing whatever of telling anything and everything about people. They will often say it in a whisper, knowing that the person to whom they tell it will whisper it to somebody else in five minutes. Even if they are not sure that it is true, it is too "good" to keep! They want others to share such a fine thing! They roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongue for awhile, and then hasten to spit it out to others, that they may help to carry it on! Evil burns to get out.

Well, it would not be wrong to tell the truth about a person, says one. Yes, it *would* be *wrong!* But, if I do not tell John Smith that Mary Jones owes me a bill, *he* may trust her. I must tell it to others because she may get in debt to *them*. I will not say very

much: I will just shrug my shoulder and nod my head and say, You would better look out, or you will get bitten! And so if it were only a dime the person owes, she would be done a thousand dollars worth of injury.

Do we know something that we could tell, and is it "aching" to get out? If so, let us go before the Lord in prayer, and earnestly strive to follow out the injunction of the Apostle Paul: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and *evil-speaking*, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." – Ephesians 4:31,32.

IMPORTANT TO THE LORD'S PEOPLE

We believe that this matter of evil-speaking, dear brethren, is one of the difficulties of Christians – to know how and when and where to hold our peace in respect to the reputation of others. We know of a brother who had been in prison, and was released. He told us that he was glad to get out. We asked, Have you been telling any one about your having been in prison? Yes, he answered. Well, do not tell it again. Very few of the Lord's people would trust you if they knew. We will go to these that you have told, and tell them not to mention it, at all. It is a trait of our fallen nature to speak of these things.

EVIL-SPEAKING DEFINED

Of course there are people who are foolish; they would tell unfavorable things about themselves as well as about others. But most people would not be willing to tell anything disparaging about themselves, and we should stop and think, Shall I say anything detrimental about *anybody*? If the circumstances were changed, if I were in his place and he were in my place, would I like him to tell this about me?

But how would it be if we saw a man picking another man's pocket? Then we would feel fully justified in taking all the steps necessary for his arrest, because we would think that it would be the very best thing for that man as well as for others. We would think it right to shout, *Pick-pocket! Pick-pocket!* and have him arrested.

So far as we can determine, evil-speaking means the saying of anything that would be injurious to another, in a way or under circumstances that, if it applied to ourself, we would think unkind and injurious. In certain instances we have known of one who had been doing wrong, and we have sent him word that if he pursued such a course, we would believe it our duty to take some action in the matter; but that if he assured us he would abandon his course, we would do nothing. In this way, in several cases, the person has been kept from doing harm to others; and we were saved from openly making reference to the matter about which we knew, and which, perhaps, no other person in the world knew.

We need the wisdom from on High. And we believe that this attitude represents a *necessary* development of Christian character. If we really desire the good of our neighbor, and our own good, if we desire to honor him as we would wish him to honor us, then we must follow the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you."

Much evil-speaking would be avoided by remembering the following bright little jingle clipped from a secular Journal. The sentiment is wholesome and Scriptural:

"Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,

As long as ever you can."

St. Paul gives the same thought briefly, in the words, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men." – Galatians 6:10.

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