

## **CONTROL OF THE TONGUE A NECESSITY**

**"I say unto you, that every idle [unprofitable or pernicious] word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment." – Matthew 12:36.**

OUR LORD was addressing some of the Scribes and Pharisees who were trying to "catch Him in His words" – to take advantage of technicalities of language. In their endeavor to oppose Him, those Scribes and Pharisees were doing everything they could to discomfit or vanquish Him in His reasoning, even going to the extent of using arguments which they did not really believe. This is a very dangerous procedure. No matter how just we think our cause to be as a whole, we are not to resort to any misuse of language to uphold what we believe to be the Truth.

Possibly those Pharisees might have said amongst themselves, "We must use strong arguments to keep ahead of that Nazarene. He uses strong language Himself. We must hold up our end of the controversy, and not show the white feather." But this position did not justify their conduct. Since Justice is the foundation of the Throne of God, any attempt to take advantage of another in any manner whatever will surely bring its own punishment.

From our Lord's comments at various times on the subject of the *tongue* we realize that in His day there must have been some seriously wrong condition prevailing amongst those with whom He came in contact. The Scribes and Pharisees attributed evil power to Him, and declared that He was the tool of Satan – that Satan was speaking through Him, etc. At first our Lord told them in a general way that they deceived themselves. Later, He reproved them severely and showed the fallacy of their arguments. In connection with our text He declared that by their words they

should be condemned – be dealt with, corrected in righteousness and brought to true reformation, or else perish in the Second Death.

## **THE POWER OF THE TONGUE**

Human beings are the only earthly creatures that can talk – whether orally or in writing or otherwise. More and more the people of God realize the wisdom of the Apostle James' statement that although the tongue is a little member, yet it is the most dangerous of all, because it has the widest influence. If a man sin not with his tongue, he is a perfect man. (James 3:2.) We cannot estimate the possible results of our words. This influence may reach even to the ends of the earth. Therefore we are to consider carefully what we may say, in order to determine whether our words will glorify God or whether they will dishonor Him – whether they will stir up good thoughts and impulses in the minds of others or whether they will stir up that which is evil.

In His Wisdom God has seen fit so to create us that our conduct of today has much to do with our character of tomorrow. Thus we are either making or breaking character continually. It is well that all should know this fact. Not only worldly people, but Christians also, should understand this principle; for Christians are now on trial for glory, honor and immortality. Therefore by neglecting to weigh carefully their words they might lose the great prize for which they are striving.

## **THE DAY OF JUDGMENT**

By way of emphasis our Lord declared that every idle word – every unprofitable utterance – must be accounted for in a day of reckoning. With the Church, we understand the Scriptures to teach that this day of reckoning is this Gospel Age. Daily are we to go to our Heavenly Father and say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us." Not only must we render up our account daily, but at the end of our course there will be a

general summing up. By this we do not understand that at the end of our race course we shall be lined up and questioned about every word of our experience, but that each one who comes into contact with the Truth is either building up character or else breaking it down, and that his character at the end of his probation will determine his reward. As a pupil daily learns his lessons and prepares himself for the final examinations at the end of the year, when there is a general testing of his knowledge, so with the pupils in the School of Christ. Day by day our Master deals with us; but at the end of our course there is to be a summing up.

Doubtless there are in every one of us some things that are disapproved of the Lord; for we all have the treasure of the New Mind in earthen vessels and therefore cannot do as we would. But we have pledged ourselves to serve the Lord and to be loyal in doing His will. Therefore He is dealing with us *now*. In so doing, He warns us that the tongue is a very important member of our body, and that we are to be careful how we use it; for it will have a bearing upon the final decision in the end of this Gospel Age, when the returns are brought in. Then it will be determined whether we are worthy of the highest honor – joint-heirship with our Savior – or whether we shall be servants to that class or whether we [R5518 : page 245] shall be unworthy of life upon any plane of existence.

### **OUR LORD'S ESTIMATE OF SLANDER**

But there is also a reckoning with us now. Our Lord declares that the tongue is so important a member that it represents our hearts more accurately than does anything else. The hand might do a good deed, yet the heart might be very different from the hand. In fact, the hand might not express the real sentiment of the heart at all. But the tongue is sure to give utterance to what is really in the heart. Therefore by our words we are daily either building up or tearing down character.

There is a spirit which shoots out bitter words. From the standpoint of the Lord, this is MURDER. Thus at the end of the Jewish Age the Scribes and Pharisees criticised and slandered our Lord. Although from their knowledge of the Law they knew that they would be accountable for their actions, yet they did not appreciate the fact that they would be judged by their words.

So will it be in the world's Judgment Day – the Millennium. Mankind will be held responsible for the work of their tongues. But they will have a more favorable opportunity than if judged now; forces will then be at work which will give them a more prompt judgment; and therefore they will learn their lessons quickly. They will have a responsibility for their words. Those that "knew not will be beaten with few stripes"; but those who "knew and did not" act according to their knowledge, "will be beaten with many stripes."

### **SPECIAL BRIDLES FOR THE TONGUE**

Under stress of sudden temptation the Lord's people, who are now on judgment, might impulsively say that which is not pleasing to the Master. But we must *learn* not to speak thoughtlessly; we must learn to weigh our utterances. Since we are servants of God, we should ever take heed to our ways, in order to render the best possible service. We are not merely to have a good will to do that which is right; we are to seek to bridle our tongues. Whatever vows or resolutions or restraints we may seek to put upon our tongues may be considered as bridles, by which we are determined to bring ourselves into full subjection to the will of God. **[R5518 : page 246]**

So long as Satan and his demon host are at large, the Lord's people will do well to take heed to their ways, that they sin not with their tongue. Satan and his angels are seeking to subvert those who have given themselves to the Lord and to catch them in their words. So while we are in their presence we must be especially on guard,

that they may not entrap us. As the Psalmist says, "I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked [One] is before me."

### **AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR ALL**

Although our Lord declared that men should give account for every pernicious word, yet He referred to the thoughts behind the words. It was the attitude of heart that distressed Him. He knew the attitude of heart displayed by the Scribes and the Pharisees would bring injury upon them.

Amongst the Lord's people there is nothing more important than that they should learn to be very just. While it is right to be loving, kind, generous, yet *justice* is the very foundation of character. All love and kindness not based upon justice are neither satisfactory nor pleasing to the Lord. In dealing with others, a child of God will not think, What will my fellow-men let me take from them? but, What are the rights of others, and what would my Heavenly Father have me do?

It is very natural for one to recognize his own rights in any matter, but the fallen nature does not so quickly perceive the rights of others. Therefore one of the most important lessons for the Lord's people to learn is to do unto others as they would have others do unto them – simple justice.

We fear that many of the Lord's dear people have not fully realized that obedience to the rules which govern the New Nature means absolutely the "Golden Rule" on their part toward all others. They must not do to others what they would not have others do to them. It is the duty of the New Creature to bring the body into such subjection that justice shall rule in every act and word, and so far as possible in every thought. One must be just in his thoughts before he can properly be just in his dealings. Whoever thinks unjustly will act unjustly in spite of endeavors to the contrary.

## THE TREASURE STORED IN OUR HEARTS

As we reflect that the Church is standing before the Bar of Divine Judgment, under the personal inspection of our Lord, and that in His estimation our words are a criterion of judgment, we cannot weigh too carefully the underlying principles upon which His decision will be made. Our Lord's words, as recorded in Matthew 12:34-36, indicate that both the heart and the mouth are under special scrutiny. How necessary therefore is a right condition of heart, in order that the words of our mouth may be acceptable to our Lord and Redeemer!

In our Lord's statement, the heart is *representative* of the character, and the mouth is the *index* of that character. The word *heart* is sometimes used in Scripture with the force of the word *mind*. Out of the abundance of the mind the mouth speaks. A good man brings forth good things out of the treasure of his mind. But all mankind are by nature sinners; therefore all are by nature evil to some extent. God does not approve of any who are under the sentence of death. Nevertheless there are those of the condemned race of Adam who are relatively good – those who, despite the imperfections under which they were born, the blemishes of their fallen nature, are desirous of being in harmony with the One who is all-good.

We find nothing in Scripture to support the doctrine of total depravity – to imply that there is nothing whatever of good in humanity. Even though no one is perfect, nevertheless, there are some who have at least a good will, good intentions. Such superior characters of past Ages were represented in the Ancient Worthies – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Prophets of Israel, etc., who fully demonstrated their obedience to God and their loyalty to the principles of righteousness.

## **THE CLASS APPROVED OF GOD**

During this Gospel Age also there are some who are good. Amongst the heathen, as well as in Christian lands, there are those who are well-meaning, well-intentioned, those who are not malicious, not striving to do wrong, but endeavoring to do right. In order to have the Divine approval in this Age, however, one must be of those who come unto the Father through Jesus; for none others are accepted of God. The Father will not receive any one whose heart is not sincere, who does not have good intentions, who does not manifest loyalty to Him and to the principles of righteousness.

Therefore any whom we have reason to believe are accepted of God, begotten of the Holy Spirit, are no longer to be counted as "children of wrath, even as others," but as of the Household of Faith. Despite the frailties of their flesh, they are good at heart; else God would not accept them. With these there is a constant conflict between the New Will and the desires of the flesh.

When we come to consider those who are good at heart, we find that all of them have imperfect bodies – some more so than others. Shall we give up the struggle for the prize because we cannot do perfectly? No! The Lord assures us that He looks at the heart, not at the flesh; that He has made a very gracious arrangement through our Lord Jesus by which the imperfections are cleansed away. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Therefore all His children may come with courage to the Throne of Heavenly Grace, there to obtain mercy and help in every time of need.

## **CHIPS OR APPLES – WHICH?**

The good things brought forth from the treasure of a good man's heart will be those things which he has stored up from time to time. As the Psalmist says of the godly man, "His delight is in

the Law of the Lord; and in His Law doth he meditate day and night." And of himself he declares, "Mine eyes prevent [anticipate] the night watches, that I may meditate in Thy Word," Law, precepts – the spirit, the purpose of that Law, not merely the outward form. So should we meditate upon the spirit of the Law of God. The sentiment of our heart should be the desire to get the Divine Mind as nearly as possible on every subject. All who are eager to be in harmony with God and to attain His character-likeness will think upon things that are good, pure, holy. – Psalm 1:2; 119:148; Philippians 4:8.

As one thinks upon things that are good, the mind becomes stored with good. Wherever there is a mouth disposed to speak upon things that are evil, there is an evil disposition – a mind in which evil has been stored. Whatever one has stored up in the mind will be *topmost* and sure to be spoken. An evil treasure will show itself, despite all endeavors to hide it; and likewise a good treasure will manifest itself; for the mind can hold only a certain amount. – Luke 6:45.

A father saw his son reading a novel. He knew that his son was in the habit of reading along this line. Calling the boy, he said, "John, I wish you to empty the apples out of that basket, and then take the basket to the woodshed and fill it with chips." The son did as he was directed. When he returned the father said, "Now put in **[R5519 : page 247]** the apples." The son replied that he could not do this, because there was not room enough in the basket for both chips and apples. Then the father said, "That is just what you are about to do with your mind. You have been filling your mind with chips; and when you try to put in apples, there will be no room." Thus it is with all of us. If we fill our minds with jokes, foolish sayings, etc., we shall not be able to fill them with the things of the Holy Spirit. – Ephesians 5:1-7.



Many of the Lord's people find that, while their hearts are good, there is in their flesh a tendency for certain things that are not good. Thus there is a continual struggle between the flesh and the spirit as to whether the treasure stored up shall be chips or apples, so to speak. It is for each New Creature to decide which shall fill his mind – what kind of society he will choose, where he will go, what he will read, what kind of influences he will come under, what kind he will resist, etc. If in the past he has to any extent treasured up evil things, he should now try to rid himself of them. If his mind has been filled with jokes and levity, things not proper to the child of God, he should seek to put these away.

### **HOW CHARACTER IS BUILT**

Finally, there is a relationship between this laying up of a good treasure in our minds and that of which our Lord spoke when He said, "Lay up for yourselves treasure in Heaven." In laying up treasure in our minds and hearts, we are building character. Whoever goes into a man's house and sees what he has gathered in the way of treasures can easily perceive the direction in which that man's mind is bent. His preferences demonstrate his character. Thus it is with us all; the things which we cultivate are an index to our character.

When we come to render up our account as New Creatures, character will decide whether we shall be esteemed worthy to be of the Lord's elect Little Flock. Only those who have laid up the treasure of a character like that of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Pattern, will be fit for an inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. Our eternal destiny therefore will be decided by the way in which we now use our minds and the thoughts which we now accumulate. Whoever cultivates good thoughts will receive a blessing, not only in the present life, but throughout the future.

Our first concern, then, must be for the heart – that its affections and dispositions may be wholly under the control of

Grace Divine; that every principle of truth and righteousness may be enthroned there; that justice, mercy, benevolence, meekness, self-control, faith, brotherly-kindness, love, supreme reverence for God and for Christ, and a fervent love for all the beauties of holiness, may be firmly fixed as the governing principles of life. If these principles are established in the heart, we shall have no difficulty in controlling our tongue; for out of the good treasure of our heart the mouth will speak forth words of truth, soberness, wisdom and grace.

