

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 152

THE EVIL TONGUE

*“But the tongue can no man tame;
it is an unruly evil.”*

James 3:8

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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#152

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THE DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF FALSE TEACHERS

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

SATAN labors with all his strength by false teachers, which are his messengers and ambassadors, to deceive, delude and forever destroy the precious souls of men.¹ The prophet Jeremiah declared, “And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, *and caused my people Israel to err*” (Jer 23:13). And through the prophet Micah, the Lord Himself complained, “The prophets that *make my people err*” (Mic 3:5a). They seduce them and carry them out of the right way into by-paths and blind thickets of error, blasphemy and wickedness, where they are lost forever. Jesus Himself warned, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mat 7:15). These scoundrels lick and suck the blood of souls, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers...” (Phi 3:2). These evil men kiss and kill; they cry, “Peace, peace,” until souls fall into everlasting flames (see Pro 7²). Now the best way to deliver poor souls from being deluded and destroyed by these messengers of Satan is to display them in their true colors, so that being known, poor souls may shun them and flee from them as from hell itself. Now you may know a false teacher by the following *distinguishing marks*:

1) **The first distinguishing mark is that they are men-pleasers.**³ They preach more to please the ear than to profit the heart. Isaiah thus described the longing of God’s rebellious people, “Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits” (Isa 30:10). And again the Lord complained through Jeremiah in these words: “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and *my people love to have it so*: and what will ye do in the end thereof?” (Jer 5:30-31). These men handle holy things rather with wit and entertainment than with godly fear and reverence. False teachers are soul-destroyers. They are like evil surgeons, that skin over the wound, but never heal it. Flattery destroyed Ahab and Herod, Nero and Alexander. False teachers are hell’s great enrichers. It is not bitter, but flattering words which do all the mischief, said Valerian, the Roman emperor. Such smooth teachers are sweet soul-poisoners (Jer 23:16-17).⁴

¹ See Act 20:28-30; 2Co 11:13-15; Eph 4:14; 2Ti 3:4-6; Ti 1:11-12; 2Pe 2:1-3, 18-19.

² Brooks views the seductress as a portrait of the false teacher who deceives the simple with empty words.

³ Note the clear contrast with a true teacher as seen in Gal 1:10; 1Th 2:1-4.

⁴ A common expression is, “While a jackass is stroked under the belly, you may lay on his back whatever burdens you please.” So false teachers treat their all-too-willing victims.

2) **The second distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they are notable for casting dirt, scorn, and reproach upon the person, names, and credits of Christ's most faithful ambassadors.** Thus Korah, Dathan, and Abiram charged Moses and Aaron that they took too much upon themselves, seeing all the congregation was holy (Num 16:3). "You take", they said, "too much state, too much power, too much honor, too much holiness on you; for what are you more than others, that you take so much upon you?" And likewise Ahab's false prophets fell upon good Micaiah, paying him with fits and fists instead of a reasonable reply (see 1Ki 22:10-26). Yes, even Paul, that great apostle of the Gentiles, had his ministry undermined and his reputation blasted by false teachers: "For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2Co 10:10). They rather despise him than admire him; they look upon him as a dunce rather than a doctor. And indeed, the same harsh treatment had our Lord Jesus from the scribes and Pharisees, who labored as if their life depended on it, to construct their own esteem upon the ruins of His reputation. And never did the devil have a more prosperous business in this way than he does in these days (Mat 27:63). Oh, the dirt, the filth, the scorn that is thrown upon those of whom the world is not worthy! I suppose false teachers fail to consider that saying of Augustine, "He that willingly takes from my good name, unwillingly adds to my reward."

3) **The third distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they spew out the devices and visions of their own heads and hearts.**⁵ "Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart" (Jer 14:14). "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD" (Jer 23:16). Are there not multitudes in this nation whose visions are but golden delusions, lying vanities, brain-sick fantasies? These are presently Satan's great benefactors, but one day divine justice will hang them up in hell as the greatest malefactors, unless the Physician of souls graciously delivers them.

4) **The fourth distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they easily pass over the great and weighty things both of the law and the gospel, and dwell mostly upon those things that are of the least importance and concern to the souls of men.**⁶ Thus Paul warned Timothy: "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be

⁵ See Mat 24:4-5, 11; Ti 1:10; Rom 16:18.

⁶ Luther complained of such men in his time who would strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. This age is full of such teachers, such monsters. The high priest's spirit (Mat 23:24) lives and thrives in these days.

teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1Ti 1:5-7). And our Lord rebuked the Pharisees: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Mat 23:23). False teachers are meticulous in the lesser things of the law, and quite negligent in the greater! Once more the Apostle Paul spoke strong words to Timothy when he said: “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1Ti 6:3-5). If such teachers are not genuine hypocrites, I know nothing (Rom 2:21-22). The earth groans to bear such wicked men, and hell is fitted for them.

5) The fifth distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they cleverly disguise their dangerous principles and soul-deceiving notions with very attractive speeches and golden expressions. Many in these days are bewitched and deceived by the magnificent words, lofty strains, and stately terms of deceivers, such as illumination, revelation, and deification.⁷ As harlots paint their faces and adorn and perfume their beds, the better to allure and deceive simple souls,⁸ so false teachers will put a great deal of paint and garnish upon their most dangerous principles and blasphemies, in order that they may better deceive and delude poor ignorant souls. They know that sugared poison goes down sweetly; they wrap up their pernicious, soul-killing pills in gold.

In the days of Hadrian the emperor, there was a man Ben-Cosbi who gathered a multitude of Jews together, and called himself *Bencocuba*, the son of a star, applying the promise of Numbers 24:17 to himself; but he proved to be *Barchosaba*, the son of a lie. And so will all false teachers, for all their lofty expressions will prove at last to be the sons of lies.

6) The sixth distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they strive more earnestly to win men over to their opinions, than to improve their behavior. The Lord Jesus again spoke with great soberness when He said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Mat 23:15).⁹ They busy themselves most about men’s heads. Their

⁷ **deification** – a term which captures the notion that false teachers claim their doctrines come directly from the Deity, God Himself.

⁸ See Gal 6:12; 2Co 11:13-15; Rom 16:17-18; Mat 16:6, 11-12; 7:15.

⁹ Concerning this passage, J.C. Ryle declares, “They labored incessantly to make men join their party and adopt their opinions. They did this from no desire to benefit men’s souls in the least or to bring them to God. They only did it to swell the ranks of

work is not to better men's hearts, and mend their lives; and in this they are very much like their father the devil, who will spare no pains to gain converts.

7) The seventh distinguishing mark of false teachers is that they exploit their followers through covetousness. The Apostle Peter, nearing his own death (see 2Pe 1:12-15), warned his followers: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (2Pe 2:1-3). They eye your goods more than your good; and care more for the serving of themselves, than the saving of your souls. So long as they have your possessions, they care not though Satan possess your souls (Rev 18:11-13). In order that they may better pick your pocket, they will hold forth such principles as are very indulgent to the flesh. False teachers are the great worshippers of the golden calf, as the Lord declares: "For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely" (Jer 6:13).

Crates threw his money into the sea, resolving to drown it, lest it should drown him. But false teachers care not who they drown, so long as they may have their money.

Now, by these seven distinguishing marks you may know false teachers, shun them, and so deliver your souls out of their dangerous snares. And that you may, my prayers shall meet yours at the throne of grace.

From a Calvary Press extract of *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, printed by The Banner of Truth Trust.

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680): Nonconformist preacher and advocate of the Congregational way. Born into a Puritan family, he was sent to Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Author of *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, and many others. He was buried in Bunhill Fields, London, England.



their sect and to increase the number of their adherents and their own importance" (from *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, Vol. 1, p. 184, Evangelical Press, published 1985).

THE EVIL TONGUE

Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.”—James 3:6

THE apostle James in this Scripture describes the evil of the tongue, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.”

1. “It is a fire.” It burns with intemperate heat; it causeth the heat of contention; it sets others in a flame.

2. “A world of iniquity.” It was at first made to be an organ of God’s praise, but it is become an instrument of unrighteousness. All the members of the body are sinful, as there is bitterness in every branch of wormwood, but the tongue is excessively sinful, “full of deadly poison” (verse 8).

Doctrine: The tongue, though it be a little member, yet it has a world of sin in it; the tongue is an unruly evil. I shall show you some of the evils of the tongue.

1. The evil tongue is the silent tongue; it is wholly mute in matters of religion; it never speaks of God or of heaven, as if it cleaved to the roof of the mouth. Men are fluent and knowledgeable enough in other things, but in matters of religion their lips are sealed up. If we come into some people’s company, we do not know what religion they are of, whether Jews or Mohammedans, for they never speak of Christ; they are like the man in the gospel, who was possessed with a dumb spirit (Mar 9:17).

2. The evil tongue is the earthly tongue; men talk of nothing but the world, as if all their hopes were here, and they looked for an earthly eternity; these have earthly minds, “He that is of the earth...speaketh of the earth” (Joh 3:31).

3. The evil tongue is the hasty or angry tongue; it has no command of passions, but is carried away with them, as a chariot with wild horses. I know there is an holy anger, when we are angry with sin: Christ had this anger when they made the temple a place of merchandise (Joh 2:15). That anger is without sin, which is against sin; but that is an evil tongue, which is presently blown up into exorbitant passion; this tongue is “set on fire of hell.” A wrathful spirit is unsuitable to the gospel; it is a gospel of peace, and its author is the Prince of Peace, and it is sealed by the Spirit, who came in the form of a dove, a meek peaceable creature. You who are given much to passion, whose tongue is often set on fire, take heed you do not one day in hell desire a drop of water to cool thy tongue.

4. The evil tongue is the vain tongue, that vents itself in idle words: “Under his tongue is...vanity” (Psa 10:7). A vain tongue shows a light heart; a good man’s

words are weighty and prudent; his lips are as a tree of life to feed many and his speech is edifying, “The tongue of the just is as choice silver” (Pro 10:20). But, “The mouth of fools poureth out foolishness” (Pro 15:2). How many idle away the day of grace in frivolous discourses? A wise man’s words are like gold, weighty, and will sink into the hearts of others; but the words of many are light and feathery and will make no impression, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Mat 12:36).

5. The evil tongue is the censorious tongue, “Who art thou that judgest another?” (Jam 4:12). Some make it a part of their religion to judge and censure others; they do not imitate their graces, but censure their failings. Such an one is an hypocrite, for this comes from pride. Were men’s hearts more humble, their tongues would be more charitable. The censurer sits in the chair of pride, and passeth sentence upon another, and does reprobate him; this is to usurp God’s prerogative, and take his work out of his hands; it is God’s work to judge, not ours. He who spends his time in censuring others spends but little time in examining himself and does not see his own faults. There is not a greater sign of hypocrisy than to be overhasty in judging and censuring persons.

6. The evil tongue is the slanderous tongue, “Thou sittest and...slanderest thine own mother’s son” (Psa 50:20). Slandering is when we speak to the prejudice of another, and speak that which is not true. Worth and eminency are commonly blasted by slander; holiness itself is no shield from slander: John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, yet they say he hath a devil (Mat 11:18). Come and let us smite him with the tongue. A slanderer wounds another’s name, and no physician can heal these wounds. The sword doth not make so deep a wound as the tongue. The Greek word for slanderer, signifies devil. Some think it is no great matter to belie and defame another; but know, this is to act the part of a devil. The slanderer’s tongue is a two-edged sword, it wounds two at once; while the slanderer wounds another in his name, he wounds himself in his conscience. This is contrary to Scripture, “Speak not evil one of another” (Jam 4:11). God takes this ill at our hands, to speak evil of others, especially such as are eminently holy, and help to bear up the honour of religion: “Were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Num 12:8). What! My servant who has wrought so many miracles—whom I have spoken with in the mount face to face—were not ye afraid to speak against him? So will God say, You must take heed of this, it is a sin your nature is very prone to; and remember, it is no less sin to rob another of his good name, than to steal his goods or wares out of his shop.

7. The evil tongue is the unclean tongue, that vents itself in filthy and scurrilous words, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth” (Eph 4:29). A sign of a great distemper, that the fever is high, is when the tongue is black: a sign men’s hearts are very evil, when such black words come from them.

8. The evil tongue is the lying tongue, “Lie not to one another” (Col 3:9). The Cretians were noted for liars (Ti 1:12). It becomes not Christians to be Cretians. Nothing is more contrary to God than a lie; it shows much irreligion; lying is a sin that does not go alone, it ushers in other sins. Absalom told his father a lie, that he was going to pay his vow at Hebron (2Sa 15:7), and this lie was a preface to his treason. Lying is such a sin, as takes away all society and converse with men; how can you have converse with him, that you cannot trust a word he says? It is a sin so sordid, that when the liar is convicted, he is ashamed. God’s children have this character, they are “children that will not lie” (Isa 63:8), the new nature in them will not suffer them. The liar is near akin to the devil, and the devil will shortly claim kindred with him, “The devil...is a liar, and the father of it” (Joh 8:44). He seduced our first parents by a lie (Gen 3:4). How does this sin incense God? He struck Ananias dead for telling a lie (Act 5:5). The furnace of hell is heated to throw liars into; “Without are dogs, and sorcerers...and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (Rev 22:15).

9. The evil tongue is the flattering tongue, that will speak fair to one’s face, but will defame, “He that hateth dissembleth with his lips” (Pro 26:24). When he speaks fair, believe him not; dissembled love is worse than hatred. Some can commend and reproach, flatter and hate—honey in their mouths, but a sting of malice in their hearts: better are the wounds of a friend, than the kisses of such an enemy. Hierom says, “The Arian faction pretended friendship; they (says he) kissed my hands, but slandered me and sought my ruin.” Many have dissembling tongues; they can say, “Your servant!” and lay snares. “A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet” (Pro 29:5). You often think you have a friend in your bosom, but he proves a viper. To dissemble love is no better than to lie; for there is a pretence of that love which is not. Many are like Joab, “And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And he took Amasa by the beard...to kiss him...so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib...that he died” (2Sa 20:9). For my part, I must question his truth towards God, that will flatter and lie to his friend. God will bring such an one to shame at last, “Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation” (Pro 26:26).

10. The evil tongue is the tongue given to boasting, “The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things” (Jam 3:5). There is an holy boasting, “In God we boast all the day” (Psa 44:8), when we triumph in his power and mercy: but it is a sinful boasting, when men display their trophies, boast of their own worth and eminency, that others may admire and cry them up; a man’s self is his idol, and he loves to have this idol worshipped. There “rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody” (Act 5:36). Sinful boasting is when men boast of their sins, “Why boasteth thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man?” (Psa 52:1). Some boast how

wicked they have been; how many they have made drunk; how many they have deflowered; as if a beggar should boast of his sores; or a thief boast of being burnt in the hand. Such as boast of their sinful exploits, will have little cause to rejoice, or hang up their trophies when they come to hell.

11. The evil tongue is the swearing tongue, “Swear not at all” (Mat 5:34). The Scripture allows an oath for the ending of a controversy, and to clear the truth (Heb 6:16); but in ordinary discourse to use an oath, and so to take God’s name in vain, is sinful. Swearing may be called “the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11). There is neither pleasure nor profit in it; it is like a hook the fish comes to without a bait, “Because of swearing the land mourneth” (Jer 23:10). Some think it the grace of their speech; but, if God will reckon with men for idle words, what will he do for sinful oaths?

“But it is only a petty oath,” they swear by their faith! Surely they which have so much faith in their mouth, have none in their heart. “But it is my custom”: Is this an excuse, or an aggravation of the sin? If a malefactor should be arraigned for robbing, and he should say to the judge, “Spare me, it is my custom to rob on the highway”; the judge would say, “Thou shalt the rather die.” For every oath you swear, God puts a drop of wrath into his vial.

But—some may think—what if now and then I swear an oath? Words are but wind. But they are such a wind as will blow you into hell, without repentance.

12. The railing tongue is an evil tongue: this is a plague-sore breaking out at the tongue, when we give scornful language. When the dispute was between the archangel and the devil about the body of Moses, the archangel did not bring a railing accusation against him, but said, “The Lord rebuke thee” (Jud 9). The archangel did not rail against the devil. Railing often ends in reviling, and so men bring themselves into a premunire,¹ and are “in danger of hell fire” (Mat 5:22).

13. The seducing tongue is an evil tongue. The tongue that by fine rhetoric decoys men into error, by “fair speeches deceive[s] the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:18). A fair tongue can put off bad wares; error is bad ware, which a seducing tongue can put off. The deceit lies in this; a smooth tongue can make error look so like truth, that you can hardly know them asunder; as thus, in justification, Christ bears infinite love to justified persons; this is a glorious truth, but under this notion, the Antinomian presseth libertinism; believers may take more liberty to sin, and God sees no sin in them. Thus, by crying up justification, they destroy sanctification; here is the seducing tongue; and error is as dangerous as vice; one may die by poison as well as by a pistol.

14. The evil tongue is the cruel tongue, that speaks to the wounding of the hearts of others. The tongue is made almost in the fashion of a sword; and the tongue is

¹ **premunire** – offense or penalty brought on oneself.

sharp as a sword, “Their tongue [is] a sharp sword” (Psa 57:4). Kind, loving words should be spoken to such as are of a heavy heart, “To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed” (Job 6:14). Healing words are fit for a broken heart: but that is a cruel, unmerciful tongue, which speaks such words to the afflicted, as to cut them to the heart, “They talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded” (Psa 69:26). Hannah was a woman of a troubled spirit, “She was in bitterness of soul...and wept sore” (1Sa 1:10). And now Eli, in verse 14, “said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.” This word was like pouring vinegar into the wound. When Job was afflicted with God’s hand, his friends, instead of comforting him, told him he was an hypocrite (Job 11:2). These were cutting words, which went to his heart: instead of giving him cordials to his fainting, they use corrosives. This is to lay more weight upon a dying man.

15. The evil tongue is the murmuring tongue, “These are murmurers” (Jud 16). Murmuring is discontent breaking out at the lips; men quarrel with God, and tax his providence as if he had not dealt well with them. Why should any murmur or be discontented at their condition? Does God owe them anything? Or, can they deserve any thing at his hands? O, how uncomely is it to murmur at providence! It is fit for a Cain to be upset with God (Gen 4:6).

(1) Murmuring proceeds from unbelief. When men distrust God’s promise, then they murmur at his providence, “They believed not his word: But murmured” (Psa 106:24-25). When faith grows low, then passion grows high.

(2) Murmuring proceeds from pride. Men think they have deserved better; and, because they are crossed, therefore they utter discontented expressions against God. He who is humble bears any thing from God; he knows his punishment is less than his sin, therefore says, “I will bear the indignation of the Lord” (Mic 7:9). But pride raises discontent; and hence comes murmurings. Murmuring is a sin that God cannot bear, “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me?” (Num 14:27). The murmurer discovers much ingratitude; a murmuring tongue is always an unthankful tongue; he considers not how much he is a debtor to free grace, and whatever he has is more than God owes him; he considers not that his mercies outweigh his afflictions; there’s more honey than wormwood in his cup; he considers not what God has done for him, more than such as are better than he; he has the finest of wheat, when others feed, as Daniel, on pulse. The murmurer, I say, does not consider this; but, because he is crossed in some small matter, he repines against God. O ingratitude! Israel, though they had manna from heaven, to satisfy their hunger, angel’s food, yet murmured for want of quails; not content that God should supply their want, but must satisfy their lust too. O unthankful! Israel’s murmuring cost many of them their lives, “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1Co 10:10). Their speeches were venomous, and God

punished them with venomous serpents.

16. The evil tongue is the scoffing tongue. The scoffer sits in the chair of scorers, and derides religion. Surely the devil has taken great possession of men, when they have arrived at such a degree of sin, as to scoff at holiness. It was foretold as a sin of the last times, “There shall come in the last days scoffers” (2Pe 3:3). Some scoff at the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the immortality of the soul; this is the worst sort of tongues. When men have laid aside the veil of modesty, and their consciences are seared, then they fall a-scoffing at religion; and when once they are come to this, their case is desperate; no reproofs will reclaim them; tell them of their sin, and they will hate you the more, “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee” (Pro 9:8). Such a man is on the threshold of damnation.

17. The evil tongue is the tongue given to cursing, “His mouth is full of cursing” (Psa 10:7): a wishing some great evil to befall another; cursing is the scum that boils off from a wicked heart. Though it is true, the curse without cause shall not come—it is not in man’s power to make another cursed—yet to wish a curse is a fearful sin. If to hate our brother be murder (1Jo 3:15), then to curse him, which is the highest degree of hatred, must needs be murder. To use a curse, is for a man to do what in him lies, to damn another. Some wish a curse upon themselves: so the Jews, “his blood be upon us”. And so do your “God damn me’s,” as if damnation did not come fast enough: “As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him” (Psa 109:17).

18. The evil tongue is the unjust tongue; that will for a piece of money open its mouth in a bad cause. The lawyer has a tongue that will be sold for money, “How long will ye judge unjustly?” (Psa 82:2). Some will plead any cause, though never so bad: though it appears the deeds are forged, the witnesses bribed, there’s perjury in the cause; yet they will plead it. When a man pleads a bad cause he is the devil’s attorney: as God hates false weights, so a false cause. Better to be born dumb, than open one’s mouth in a bad cause. O, what times are we in! Many pervert justice, and, for enriching themselves, overthrow a righteous cause; these are worse than they that rob, for they fleece men’s estates under a colour of law, and ruin them under a pretence of doing justice.

Application

See what a blow we have sustained by the fall; it has put out of frame the whole course of nature. Original sin has diffused itself as a poison into all the members of the body; it has made the eye unchaste, the hands full of bribes. Amongst the rest it has defiled the tongue; “it is a world of iniquity.” That which was made to be the organ of God’s praise, is become a weapon of unrighteousness.

If there be so much evil in the tongue, what is the heart? If the stream be so full of water, how full of water is the fountain? If there be a world of iniquity in the

tongue, how many worlds of sin are there in the heart, “Their inward part is very wickedness” (Psa 5:9). If the tongue, which is the outward part, be so wicked, the inward part is very wickedness; the heart is deep (Psa 64:6); it is such a deep as cannot be fathomed: deep pride, hypocrisy, atheism. The heart is like the sea, where is the leviathan, and creeping things innumerable (Psa 104:25-26). If the skin has boils of leprosy in it, how much corruption is in the blood? If the tongue be so bad, how diabolical is the heart? It is the heart that sets the tongue a-work: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34): there are the seeds of all atheism and blasphemy, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries...these...defile a man” (Mat 15:19-20). If a branch of wormwood be so bitter, then how bitter is the root? O, what a root of bitterness grows in a man’s heart! Some say they have good hearts; but if the tongue be so bad, what is the heart? If I see a smoke come out of the top of a chimney, what a fire burns within? “A wicked man walketh with a froward mouth...Frowardness is in his heart” (Pro 6:12, 14). Solomon shows the reason why the mouth is so froward, “Frowardness is in his heart.” The heart is a storehouse of wickedness, therefore called the “evil treasure” of the heart (Mat 12:35). Original righteousness was a good treasure, but we were robbed of that; and now there is an evil treasure of sin. The word treasure denotes plenty, to show the fullness and abundance of sin that is in the heart. The heart is a lesser hell, which is a matter of deep humiliation; the heart is, like the Egyptian temples, full of spiders and serpents.

If you would have better tongues, labour for better hearts. It is the heart that has influence upon the tongue. If the heart be vain and earthly, the tongue will be so; if the heart be holy, the tongue will be so. Look to your heart, get a better heart, and a better tongue.

How Shall I Get My Heart Bettered?

Get a principle of grace infused. Grace is like the salt cast into the spring; grace changes the heart, and sanctifies all the members of the body. It sanctifies the eyes and makes them chaste; it sanctifies the tongue, and makes it meet and calm. When the Holy Ghost came upon the apostles, they “began to speak with other tongues” (Act 2:4): when God’s Spirit comes on a man with a sanctifying work, he speaks with another tongue; the speech is heavenly. Grace makes the heart serious, and that cures the levity of the tongue; when the heart is serious, the words are savoury.

Remember, you must give an account to God, as well of your speeches, as your actions, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Mat 12:36); words of no account, will have an heavy account. And, if God will reckon with men for every idle, angry word, then, what will he do for sinful oaths? “Oh that my words were now written!” (Job 19:23).

Truly, if many people's words were written, they would be ashamed of them. And, let me tell you, your words are written: "The books were opened" (Rev 20:12). In the book of God's remembrance all your words are written; you had need then be careful you offend not with your tongue; God writes down all you speak, and you must give an account to him. When the books are opened, God will proceed with you in judgment, according to your words; by your words you shall be saved or condemned: "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Mat 12:37).

From *Harmless as Doves*, Christian Focus Publications;
edited and updated in modern English.

Thomas Watson (c.1620-1686): Nonconformist Puritan preacher and prolific author of *A Body of Divinity*, *The Lord's Prayer*, *The Ten Commandments*, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, and numerous others. Actual place and date of birth unknown.



David would more and more abase himself before the Lord. He felt that whatever Michal's opinion of him might be, it could not be more humbling than his own view of himself. If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be. If he charges you falsely on some point, yet be satisfied, for if he knew you better he might change the accusation, and you would be no gainer by the correction. If you have your moral portrait painted and it is ugly, be satisfied, for it only needs a few blacker touches, and it would be still nearer the truth.—*C. H. Spurgeon*

DEACON LEE'S OPINION

From Old Faith Contender

DEACON Lee, who was a kindly, silent, faithful, gracious man, was one day visited by a restless, ambitious, worldly church member who was laboring to create uneasiness in the church, and especially to drive away the preacher. The Deacon came in to meet his visitor who, after the usual greeting, began to lament the low estate of religion, and inquire as to the reason why there had been no conversions for two or three years past.

"What do you think is the cause of things going dull here? Do you know?" he persisted in asking. The Deacon was not ready to give his opinion and, after a little thought, frankly answered, "I don't know."

"Do you think the churches are alive to the work before them?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you think the minister fully realizes the solemnity of his work?"

"No, I don't."

A twinkle was seen in the eyes of this troubler in Zion; and taking courage, he asked, "Do you think Mr. B. a very extraordinary man?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you think his sermon was anything wonderfully great?"

"No, I don't."

Making bold after all this encouragement in curt replies, he asked, "Then don't you think we had better dismiss this man and hire another?"

The old Deacon started as if shot with an arrow and, in a tone louder than he wanted, shouted, "NO, I DON'T!"

"Why?" cried the amazed visitor, "You agree with me in all I have said, don't you?"

"No, I don't."

"You talk so little, sir," replied the guest, greatly amazed, "that no one can find out what you mean."

"I talked enough, once," replied the old man, rising to his feet, "for six praying Christians. Thirty years ago, I got my heart humbled and my tongue bridled, and ever since then I have walked softly before God. I then made vows, solemn as eternity, and don't you tempt me to break them!"

The troubler was startled at the earnestness of the hitherto silent, immovable man, and asked, "What happened to you thirty years ago?"

"Well, sir, I'll tell you. I was drawn into a scheme just like this one of yours to uproot one of God's servants from the field in which He had planted him. In my blindness, I fancied it a little thing to remove one of the 'stars' which Jesus holds in His right hand, if thereby my ear could be tickled and the pews filled with those who turned away from the simplicity of the gospel. I and the man that led me—for I admit I was a dupe and a fool—flattered ourselves that we were conscientious. We groaned because there was no revival while we were gossiping about, criticizing, and crushing, instead of upholding by our efforts and our prayers, the instrument at whose hand we harshly demanded the blessings.

"Well, sir, he could not drag on the chariot of the gospel with half a dozen of us taunting him for his weakness, while we being as a dead weight to the wheels; so we hunted him like a deer till, torn and bleeding, he fled into a hiding place to die. Then God came among us by His Spirit to show us that He had blessed the labors of His dear, rejected servant.

"Our own hearts were broken, and our wayward children were converted, and I resolved to go at a convenient season to visit my former pastor and confess my sins, and thank him for his faithfulness to my wayward sons, who like long buried seeds, had now sprung up. But God denied me that relief that He might teach me a lesson, that 'he who toucheth one of His servants toucheth the apple of His eye.'

"I heard my former pastor was ill and, taking my oldest son with me, set out on a twenty-five mile journey to see him. It was evening when I arrived, and his wife, with a spirit which any woman ought to exhibit toward one who had so wronged her husband, denied me admittance to his chamber. She said—and her words were as arrows to my soul— 'he may be dying, and the sight of your face might add to his anguish!' 'Had it come to this?' I asked myself, 'that the man whose labors had, through Christ, brought me into the fold, who had consoled my spirit in a terrible bereavement, and who had, until slandering men alienated us, been to me a brother—that this man could not die in peace with my face before him!'

"I confessed my sins to that meek woman and implored her for Christ's sake to let me kneel before His dying servant and receive his forgiveness. As I entered the room of the blessed warrior, whose armor was falling from his limbs, he opened his weak eyes and said, 'Brother Lee! Brother Lee!' I bent over him and sobbed, 'My pastor! My pastor!' Then, raising his white hand, he said in a deep, impressive voice, 'Touch not My anointed and do My prophets no harm.'

"He was now unconscious of everything around him. The sight of my face had brought the last pang of earth to his troubled spirit. I kissed his brow and told him how dear he had been to me. I craved his pardon for my unfaithfulness, and promised to care for his widow and fatherless children, but his only reply,

murmured as if in a troubled dream was, ‘Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.’

“I stayed by his bed all night and at daybreak I closed his eyes. I offered his widow a house to live in the remainder of her days, but like a heroine she said, ‘I freely forgive you, but my children who entered deeply in their father’s anguish shall never see me so thoughtless of his memory as to take anything from those who caused it. He has left us all with his covenant God and He will take care of us.’

“Well, sir, those dying words sounded in my ears from that coffin and from the grave. When I slept, Christ was there in my dreams, saying, ‘Touch not Mine anointed and do My prophets no harm.’ Those words followed me until I fully realized the esteem in which Christ holds those men and women who have given up all for His sake, even if they are not perfect. Since that day, sir, I have talked less than before and have supported my pastor, even if he is not a very extraordinary man. My tongue shall cleave to the roof of my mouth and my right hand forget her cunning before I dare to put asunder what God hath joined together. When a minister’s work is done in a place, I believe God will show it to him.

“So, I will not join you, sir, in the scheme that brought you here. I would give all I own to recall what I did thirty years ago. Stop where you are and pray God if perhaps He will forgive you the thoughts of your heart.”

From the Living Fragments of Truth ministry; edited and updated in modern English.



THE EVIL OF BACKBITING AND EVIL-SPEAKING

Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

ABOUT backbiting and evil speaking it may be said the following.

1. It is forbidden of God among the heinous, damning sins, and made the character of a notorious wicked person, and the avoiding of it is made the mark of such as are accepted of God and shall be saved. It is made the mark of a reprobate mind, and joined with murder, and hating God, viz. “full of envy...debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters” (Rom 1:29-30). “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?...He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour” (Psa 15:1, 3). And when Paul describes those whom he must sharply rebuke and censure, he describes the factious sort of Christians of our times. “For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults” (2Co 12:20). “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be kind one to another, tenderhearted” (Eph 4:31).

2. It is a sin which gratifies Satan, and serves his malice against our neighbour. He is malicious against all, and speaking evil and doing hurt are the works which are suitable to his malignity! And should a Christian make his tongue the instrument of the accuser of the brethren, to do his work against each other?

3. It signifies want of Christian love. For love speaks not evil, nor reveals men’s faults without a cause, but covers infirmities; much less will it lie and slander others, and carry about uncertain reports against them. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you: and how essential love is to true Christianity, Christ himself has often told us.

4. It is a sin which directly serves to destroy the hearers’ love, and consequently to destroy their souls. If the backbiter understood himself, he would confess that it is his very end to cause you to hate (or abate your love to) him whom he speaks evil of. He that speaks good of a man, represents him amiably; for amiableness and goodness are all one. And he that speaks evil of a man represents him hatefully or unlovely; for hatefulness, unloveliness, and evil are all one. And as it is not the natural way of winning love, to entreat and beg it, and say, I pray you love this person, or that thing; but to open the goodness of the thing or person, which will command love: so is it not the natural way to stir up hatred, by

entreating men to hate this man or that; but to tell how bad they are, which will stir up hatred in them that do believe it. Therefore to speak evil of another, is more than to say to the hearers, I pray you hate this man, or abate your love to him. And that the killing of love is the killing or destroying of men's souls, the apostle John does frequently declare.

5. And it tends also to destroy the love, and consequently the soul, of him that you speak evil of. For when it comes to his hearing (as one way or other it may do), the evil you have reported of him behind his back, it tends to make him hate you, and so to make him worse.

6. It is a great peace-breaker wherever it is practised. It tends to set people together by the ears. When it is told that such a one spoke evil of you in such a place, there are then heart-burnings, and rehearsals, and sidings, and such ensuing malice as the devil intended by this design.

7. They that speak evil of others behind their backs, it is ten to one will speak falsehoods of them when they do not know it. Fame is too ordinarily a liar, and they shall be liars who will be its messengers. How do you know whether the thing that you report is true? Is it only because a credible person spoke it? But how did that person know it to be true? Might he not take it upon trust as well as you? And might he not take a credible person to lie that is not? And how commonly does faction, or interest, or passion, or credulity, make that person incredible in one thing, who is credible in others, where he has no such temptation! If you know it is not true, or have not sufficient evidence to prove it, you are guilty of lying and slandering interpretatively though it should prove true; because it might have been a lie for all you knew.

8. It is gross injustice to talk of a man's faults, before you have heard him speak for himself. I know it is usual with such to say, O we have heard it from those as we are certain will not lie. But he is a foolish and unrighteous judge, that will be peremptory upon hearing one party speak, and knows not how ordinary it is for a man when he speaks for himself, to blow away the most confident and plausible accusations, and make the case appear to be quite another thing. You know not what another man has to say till you have heard him.

9. Backbiting teaches others to backbite. Your example invites them to do the like: and sins which are common, are easily swallowed, and hardly repented of. Men think that the commonness justifies or extenuates the fault.

10. It encourages ungodly men to the odious sin of backbiting and slandering the most religious, righteous person. It is ordinary with the devil's family to make Christ's faithful servants their table talk, and the objects of their reproach and scorn, and the song of drunkards. What abundance of lies go current among such malignant persons, against the most innocent, which would all be ashamed, if

they had first admitted them to speak for themselves. And such slanders and lies are the devil's common means to keep ungodly men from the love of godliness, and so from repentance and salvation. And backbiting professors of religion encourage men to this; for with what measure they mete, it shall be measured to them again. And they that are themselves evil spoken of, will think that they are warranted to requite the backbiters with the like.

11. It is a sin which commonly excludes true, profitable reproof and exhortation. They that speak most behind men's backs, do usually say least to the sinner's face, in any way which tends to his salvation. They will not go lovingly to him in private, and set home his sin upon his conscience, and exhort him to repentance; but any thing shall serve as a sufficient excuse against this duty; that they may make the sin of backbiting serve instead of it: and all is out of carnal self-saving; they fear men will be offended if they speak to their faces, and therefore they will whisper against them behind their backs.

12. It is at the least, but idle talk and a misuse of your time: what the better are the hearers for hearing of other men's misdoings? And you know that it doesn't profit the person of whom you speak. A skillful, friendly admonition might do him good! But to neglect this, and talk of his faults unprofitably, behind his back, is but to aggravate the sin of your uncharitableness, as being not contented to refuse your help to a man in sin, but you must also injure him and do him hurt.

Application

Rebuke backbiters, and do not encourage them by hearkening to their tales. "The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue" (Pro 25:23). It may be they think themselves religious persons, and will take it for an injury to be driven away with an angry countenance: but God himself, who loves his servants better than we, is more offended at their sin; and that which offends him, must offend us. We must not hurt their souls, and displease God, by drawing upon us the guilt of their sins, for fear of displeasing them. Tell them how God hates backbiting, and advise them if they know any hurt done by others, to go to them privately, and tell them of it in a way that tends to their repentance.

From *A Christian Directory*, Vol. 1, edited and updated in modern English.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691): Puritan preacher and theologian in the Church of England; his ministry at Kidderminster was marked by a dramatic transformation of the whole community. Well-known author of *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, *The Reformed Pastor*, *A Christian Directory*, *A Call to the Unconverted*, and others. Born in Rowton, Shropshire, England.

It must be a sign that reformed preachers are rendering acceptable service when they are resented and resisted by the carnal in their congregation. This is not meant as a defense of ministerial indiscretion, but as an encouragement to ministerial faithfulness. A young preacher is apt to blame it all in himself when the principal men and women of a congregation are aroused against him. It may indeed be that he is partly to blame. But the greatest sin might rather be in those who rise up against him because his application of God's Word is all too true. Religious sinners, when cut close to the bone, can react with incredible fury, and they can spit like fire at the hand which wields the sword in the pulpit.

—*Maurice Roberts* (“Acceptable Service,”
The Banner of Truth, July 1989, p. 3.)

GOSSIPS

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

IN Walton Church, in our county, there is a brank, or scold's bridle, which was used in years gone by to keep women's tongues from troubling their husbands and their neighbors. They did queer things in those good old times. Was this bridle a proof of what our parson calls the wisdom of our ancestors, or was it a bit of needless cruelty?

"It is nothing—only a woman drowning," is a wicked and spiteful old saying, which, like the bridle, came out of the common notion that women do a world of mischief with their tongues. Is it so or not? John Ploughman will leave somebody else to answer, for he owns that he cannot keep a secret himself. He likes a dish of chat as well as anybody; only John does not care for cracking people's characters, and hates the slander which is so sweet to some people's teeth. John puts the question to wiser men than himself: Are women much worse than men in this business? They say that silence is a fine jewel for a woman, but it is very little worn. Is it so? Is it true that a woman only conceals what she does not know? Are women's tongues like lambs' tails, always wagging? They say foxes are all tail, and women all tongue. Is this false or not? Was that old prayer a needful one—"From big guns and women's tongues deliver us"? John has a good and quiet wife of his own, whose voice is so sweet that he cannot hear it too often, and therefore he is not a fair judge; but he is half afraid that some other women would sooner preach than pray, and would not require strong tea to set their clappers going. Still what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and some men are quite as bad blabs as the women.

What a pity that there is not a tax upon words: what an income would come from it; but, alas, talking pays no toll! And if lies paid double, the government might pay off the national debt; but who could collect the money? Common fame is a common liar. Hearsay is half lies. A tale never loses in the telling. As a snowball grows by rolling, so does a story. They who talk much lie much. If men only said what was true, what a peaceable world we should see! Silence seldom makes mischief; but talking is a plague to the parish. Silence is wisdom. By this rule, wise men and wise women are scarce. Still waters are the deepest; but the shallowest brooks brawl the most; this shows how plentiful fools must be. An open mouth shows an empty head. If the chest had gold or silver in it, it would not always stand open. Talking comes by nature, but it needs a good deal of training to learn to be quiet; yet regard for truth should put a bit into every honest man's

mouth, and a bridle upon every good woman's tongue.

If we must talk, at least let us be free from slander, but let us not blister our tongues with backbiting. Slander may be sport to talebearers, but it is death to those whom they abuse. We can commit murder with the tongue as well as with the hand. The worst evil you can do a man is to injure his character. The Quaker said to his dog, "I'll not beat thee, nor abuse thee, but I'll give thee an ill name." All are not thieves that dogs bark at, but they are generally treated as if they were. The world for the most part believe that where there is smoke there is fire, and what everybody says must be true. Let us then be careful that we do not hurt our neighbor in so tender a point as his character, for it is hard to get dirt off if it is once thrown on; and when a man is once in people's bad books, he is hardly ever quite out of them. If we would be sure not to speak amiss, it might be as well to speak as little as possible. If all men's sins were divided into two bundles, half of them would be sins of the tongue. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."

Gossips of both genders, give up the shameful trade of talebearing; don't be the Devil's bellows to blow up the fire of strife. Leave off setting people by the ears. If you do not cut a bit off your tongues, at least season them with the salt of grace. Praise God more and blame neighbors less. Any goose can cackle, any fly can find out a sore place, any empty barrel can give forth sound, any brier can tear a man's flesh. No flies will go down your throat if you keep your mouth shut, and no evil speaking will come up. Think much, but say little. Be quick at work and slow at talk; above all, ask the Lord to set a watch over your lips.

From *John Ploughman's Talk*, Christian Focus Publications.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential Baptist minister in England. The collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry fill 63 volumes. The sermons' 20-25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and stand as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity. Born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



REDEEMING THE TONGUE

Maurice Roberts

WHEN the Christian comes to the end of his pilgrimage, one sin he will regret is his idle speech. It is assumed that no true believer allows himself to go on in outward sins such as drunkenness, theft or immorality. It is assumed, too, that the believer is concerned to put a stop to all inward sins, not least to sinful thoughts. But there is reason to believe that our sins of speech are specially in need of correction.

Our sins of thought bring us much shame inwardly; but our sins of speech expose us to shame in the eyes of others. Our sinful words are our sinful thoughts verbalized. They are audibly broadcast. They reflect the corruption within us as in a mirror. They do harm to ourselves and they do harm to others.

Every Christian is profoundly thankful that many of his thoughts are known to no one besides himself and God. If the brain had a natural power of transmitting our private thoughts to other people, we should all be covered with confusion and disgrace. Who could look his neighbour in the eye? In kindness, however, God has erected a screen of privacy around the mind so that only He and we are aware of the constant trickle of unholy and foolish thoughts within us. Into this confessional, happily, no third party need be introduced.

But when our thoughts are clothed with speech, they remove this screen of silence and pass through into the outside world. Our folly, formerly known only to ourselves, is now apparent to all men. It is to be feared, therefore, that we do not read God's Word on this subject with anything like the attention it deserves. "The heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness" (Pro 12:23). "The mouth of fools poureth out foolishness" (Pro 15:2). "A foolish woman is clamorous [loud, noisy]" (Pro 9:13). "A fool's lips enter into contention" (Pro 18:6). "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul" (Pro 18:7). "A fool uttereth all his mind" (Pro 29:11). What shame a good man feels when he spoils his testimony by speaking foolishly! Scripture says: "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary [perfumer] to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour" (Ecc 10:1).

Holiness

There is another reason, too, why we might look back in sorrow at our misuse of the tongue and therefore keep a more careful watch over it in the future. The tone of a Christian's conversation gives us a fair idea of how sanctified he is. "By thy

words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned,” said Christ (Mat 12:37). The meaning must surely be that words betray the true character of every man. They reveal the state of the heart and proclaim us worthy of heaven or hell. But if words reveal the state of the heart, do they not also reveal the degree of a Christian’s holiness?

There is a wide difference between the everyday conversation of one Christian and another. All believers speak the language of heaven; but not all speak it equally consistently or fluently. If proof of this is required, we need only make the experiment of visiting half a dozen homes of Christian friends and neighbours. Every believer knows how little profit he gets from visiting some homes of professing Christians and, on the other hand, how much he gets from others. And it is not always as one might think. There are preachers whose table-talk is unprofitable, just as there are widows and orphans whose conversation is spiritual, holy and uplifting. Here sometimes, as elsewhere, “the first are last and the last first.”

It must be owing to our ignorance of God that we sometimes permit our tongues to roam up and down in idle talk. Was it not our Saviour and Judge himself who warned us: “I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Mat 12:36)? Similarly, the apostle Paul issues this sober command to us: “Let no corrupt [morally degenerate] communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29). There is a twofold duty placed before us in these words: to refrain from careless and unprofitable talk and to study to build one another up by well-chosen, soul-fattening conversation.

One reason why, as modern Christians, we talk so much about so little is that we are bombarded by trivial speech on every side. The entertainment world, which now has a mouth-piece somewhere in most houses, has a great deal to answer for. It has taught us all how to talk endlessly about nothing. So-called radio and television “personalities” are often little better than mass educators in the art of trivial talk. That is the world’s way and it is to be, in a sense, expected from them. But this bad example is picked up by Christians too. We learn to conform to ever easier and lower levels. Instead, we should raise the tone of our daily conversation to something more consistent with our calling as the sons of God.

How perfect in this respect, as in all others, is the example of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ! Let any atheist who cares to do so come forward with critical scissors and cut out from the four Gospels every saying of Christ’s which is frothy, light, and trivial. He will find it a hopeless task. Wherever we look in the Gospels, no single sermon, phrase, or even syllable appears in the mouth of Jesus which could be called unprofitable. What a wealth, rather, we have of weighty doctrine from

his lips! What an encyclopedia of theology! What a compendium of holy living! What a “book of quotations”! What an anthology of edifying and immortal sayings, stories, parables, prophecies, and (even in our modern secular world) household expressions! If character is to be judged from a man’s words, then we have here another reason for falling down at the feet of this Man, who so spoke as none ever did before or since. For Christ out-speaks all who ever spoke and makes the skill of an Aristotle grow pale. He out-Homers Homer and out-Shakespeares Shakespeare! One public sermon of Christ virtually makes the wisdom of the ages redundant; and his briefer words uttered in private carry the same hallmark of divine spirituality.

It is to be feared that our Saviour has too few disciples who study to copy him in his high-toned level of conversation. But, however greatly we have failed, we must repent and cultivate a way of speaking which better reflects the holiness of our Master.

Practical Guidelines

We would suggest the following guidelines as being a way to improve the tone of Christian conversation:

1. When the Lord’s people meet, they should always try to lead one another’s thoughts to God. Granted that we need to enquire after one another’s families, health and circumstances, it should be our aim soon to rise in our talk to the things of the Spirit. We may do this by cultivating the habit of bringing the Scriptures into our conversation as a matter of course. It is surely a great pity if the heirs of heaven cannot talk naturally to one another about their Saviour and his Word. But as J. C. Ryle somewhere says, there are too many believers who “in conference add nothing” to us (Gal 2:6).

2. The Lord’s people should attempt to cultivate a theological habit of mind and speech. It is still the excellent practice of Christians in parts of the Highlands of Scotland to gather regularly in homes in order to spend two or three hours discussing points of Christian doctrine and experience. One wishes that the practice could be exported to every corner of the evangelical world. Over a period of years Christians become in this way familiar with the whole spectrum of truth and they develop the valuable gift of expressing themselves theologically. A senior Christian man normally takes the “chair” and a question is proposed for the members of the group to discuss. Typical questions might be: “Did Adam know he was a public person before he sinned?” “When Christ said, ‘It is finished!’, what was finished?” “What is ‘liberty’ in prayer?” This meeting of kindred minds leads to enriching insights for the whole group.

3. The pulpit should encourage the practice of spiritual conversation among members of a congregation. A preacher may do this by throwing out one or two questions for the people to meditate on and discuss among themselves during the

week, or else some passage of Scripture to explain. R. M. M'Cheyne used to do this. He would give out from the pulpit some text or chapter to think about. The fruits of the people's study and meditation might then be gleaned during a group meeting in the week, when mistakes could be corrected and valuable insights shared.

4. Particularly on the Lord's Day, Christians should endeavour to spend most of their free time in meditating on and speaking about spiritual subjects. If the Puritans' strictures are to be taken seriously, we must believe that "unnecessary thoughts, words or works about our worldly employments or recreations" (Shorter Catechism 61) are forbidden by the fourth commandment.

The great Christians of the past have striven to make the Lord's Day a heaven on earth and to weave as much of Christ into their conversation and meditation as they could. They sometimes did this in a way which was far from "heavy." For instance, Archbishop Ussher once said to a friend, "A word about Christ ere we part." More forcibly, Calvin declares, "Every man ought to withdraw himself from everything but the consideration of God and his works [i.e., on the Lord's Day], that all men may be stirred up to serve and honour him" (Sermon 93 on Deuteronomy 15).

On the other hand, deeply spiritual minds are particularly grieved by trivial and worldly conversation on God's day. David Brainerd, speaking of those who talked about secular matters on the Sabbath, wrote in his Journal: "Oh, I thought what a hell it would be to live with such men to eternity." A large part of the due sanctification of the Lord's Day consists in restricting our thoughts and words very specially to divine and spiritual subjects and omitting unnecessary talk about ordinary things.

In conclusion, it needs to be said that there is a special blessing attached to godly and spiritual conversation. To this Malachi alludes in his prophecy: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name" (Mal 3:16). What a promise! If Christians today were seriously to practice the pattern of this verse, how much more of God's presence we should enjoy! Then let us study to edify one another. Those who do so will discover that even the Almighty himself gives ear.

From *The Thought of God* (used by permission), The Banner of Truth Trust.

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The tongue of the slanderer is a devouring fire, which tarnishes whatever it touches; which exercises its fury on the good grain equally as on the chaff, on the profane as on the sacred; digs even into the bowels of the earth, and fixes itself on things the most hidden; turns into vile ashes what only a moment before had appeared to us so precious and brilliant; acts with more violence and danger than ever in the time when it was apparently smothered up and almost extinct; sparkles and delights before it destroys.—*Massillon*

THE CONDITION OF THE HEART OF MAN AND THE CURE

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843)

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”—Jeremiah 17:9-10

1. The State of the Natural Heart

This is a faithful description of the natural heart of man: the heart of unfallen Adam was very different. “God made man upright” (Ecc 7:29). His mind was clear and heavenly. It was riveted upon divine things. He saw their glory without any cloud or dimness. His heart was right with God. His affections flowed sweetly and fully towards God. He loved as God loved, hated as God hated. There was no deceit about his heart then. It was transparent as crystal. He had nothing to conceal. There was no wickedness in his heart—no spring of hatred, or lust, or pride. He knew his own heart. He could see clearly into its deepest recesses; for it was just a reflection of the heart of God.

When Adam sinned his heart was changed. When he lost the favour of God, he lost the image of God. Just as Nebuchadnezzar suddenly got a beast’s heart, so Adam suddenly got a heart in the image of the devil. And this is the description ever since: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (verse 9).

(A) “Deceitful above All Things”

Deceit is one of the prime elements of the natural heart. It is more full of deceit than any other object. We sometimes call the sea deceitful. At evening the sea appears perfectly calm, or there is a gentle ripple on the waters, and the wind blows favourably; during the night a storm may come on, and the treacherous waves are now like mountain billows, covering the ship. But the heart is deceitful above all things—more treacherous than the treacherous sea. The clouds are often very deceitful. Sometimes, in a time of drought, they promise rain; but they turn out to be clouds without rain, and the farmer is disappointed. Sometimes the clouds appear calm and settled; but, before the morning, torrents of rain are falling. But the heart is deceitful above all things. Many animals are deceitful. The serpent is more subtle than any beast of the field; sometimes it will appear quite harmless, but suddenly it will put out its deadly sting, and give a mortal wound. But the natural heart is more deceitful than a serpent—above all things. It

is deceitful in two ways, in deceiving others, and itself.

(1) *In deceiving others.* Every natural man is a hypocrite. He is different in reality from what he appears to be. I undertake to say, that there is not a natural man present here today in his true colours. If every natural man here were to throw off his disguise, and appear as he really is, this church would look more like the gate of hell than the gate of heaven. If every unclean man were to lay bare his heart, and show his abominable, filthy desires and thoughts; if every dishonest man were now to open his heart, and let us see all his frauds, all his covetous, base desires; if every proud, self-conceited one were now to show us what is going on below his coat, or below that silk gown—to let us see the paltry schemes of vanity and desire of praise; if every unbeliever among you were openly to reveal his hatred of Christ and of the blessed Gospel—O what a hell would this place appear. Why is it not so? Because natural men are deceitful—because you draw a cloak over your heart, and put on a smooth face, and make the outside of a saint cover the heart of a fiend. Oh! Your heart is deceitful above all things. Every natural man is a flatterer. He does not tell other men what he thinks of them. There is no plain, honest dealing between natural men in this world. Those of you who know anything of this world, know how hollow the most of its friendships are. Just imagine for a moment that every natural man were to speak the truth when he meets his friends; suppose he were to tell them all the bitter slanders which he tells of them a hundred times behind their back; suppose he were to unbosom himself, and tell all his low, mean ideas of them—how worldly and selfish they are in his eyes. Alas! What a world of quarrels this would be. Ah, no! Natural men, you dare not be honest—you dare not speak the truth one to another; your heart is so vile that you must draw a cloak over it; and your thoughts of others so abominable that you dare not speak them out. “The heart is deceitful above all things.”

(2) *It shows itself in another way—in self-deceit.* Ever since my coming among you I have laboured with all my might to separate between the precious and the vile. I have given you many marks, by which you might know whether or not you have undergone a true conversion or whether it has only been a deceit of Satan—whether your peace was the peace of God or the peace of the devil—whether you were on the narrow way that leads to life, or on the broad way that leads to destruction. I have done my best to give you the plainest Scripture marks by which you might know your real case; and yet I would not be in the least surprised if the most of you were found at the last to have deceived yourselves. Often a man is deeply concerned about his soul; he weeps and prays, and joins himself to others who are inquiring. He now changes his way of life, and changes his notions; he talks of his experience, and enlargement in prayer; perhaps he condemns others very bitterly; and yet he has no true change of life—he walks after the flesh

still, not after the Spirit. Now others think this man a true Christian, and he believes it himself: yea he thinks he is a very eminent Christian; when, all the time, he has not the Spirit of Christ, and is none of His. Ah, “the heart is deceitful above all things”!

(B) “Desperately Wicked”

This word is borrowed from the book of the physician. When the physician is called to see a patient past recovery, he shakes his head and says: This is a desperate case. This is the very word used here. “The heart is desperately wicked”—past cure by human medicine.

(1) *Learn that you need conversion or a new heart.* When we speak of the necessity of a change to some people, they begin to be affected by it, and so they put away some evil habits, as drinking, or swearing, or lying; they put these away, and promise never to go back to them; and now they think the work is done, and they are in a fair way for heaven. Alas, foolish man! It is not your drinking or your swearing or your lying, that are desperately wicked, but your heart. You have only been cutting off the streams—the source remains polluted—the heart is as wicked as ever. It is the heart that is incurable. It is a new heart you need. Nothing less will answer your need.

(2) *Learn that you must go to Christ for this.* When the woman had spent her all upon physicians, and was nothing better, but rather worse, she heard of Jesus. “Ah,” said she, “if I may but touch the hem of His garment I shall be made whole!” Jesus said to her: “Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole” (Mat 9).

(3) *Come then, incurable, to Christ.* The leprosy was always regarded as incurable. Accordingly, the leper came to Jesus, and worshipping, said: “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” Jesus said, “I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed” (Mat 8). Some of you feel that your heart is desperately wicked; well, kneel to the Lord Jesus and say: “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” You are a leper—incurable; Jesus is able—He is also willing—to make you clean.

(C) “Unsearchably Wicked”

“Who can know it?” No man ever yet knew the badness of his own heart. We are sailing over a sea, the depths of which we have never fathomed.

(1) *Unawakened persons* have no idea of what is in their hearts. When Elijah told Hazael what a horrible murderer he would be, Hazael said: “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?” (2Ki 8:13). The seeds of it were all in his heart at that moment; but he did not know his own heart. If I had told some of you, when you were little children playing beside your mother’s knee, the sins that you were afterwards to commit, you would have said: “Am I a dog that I should do this

thing?” And yet you see you have done them. If I could show each of you the sins that you are yet to commit, you would be shocked and horrified. This shows how ignorant you are of your own heart. I suppose that the most of you think it quite impossible you should ever be guilty of murder, or adultery, or apostasy, or the sin against the Holy Ghost; this arises from ignorance of your own black heart: “Who can know it?”

(2) *Some awakened persons* have an awful sight given them of the wickedness of their own hearts. They see all the sins of their past life, as it were, concentrated there. They see that their past sins all come out of their heart—and that the same may come out again. And yet the most awakened sinner does not see the ten thousandth part of the wickedness of his heart. You are like a person looking down into a dark pit—you can only see a few yards down the sides of the pit; so you can only see a little way down into your heart. It is a pit of corruption which is bottomless: “Who can know it?”

(3) *Some children of God* have amazing discoveries given them of the wickedness of their own hearts. Sometimes it is given them to see that the germs of every sin are lodging there. Sometimes they see that there never was a sin committed, in heaven, in earth, or in hell, but it has something corresponding to it in their own heart. Sometimes they see that if there were not another fountain of sin, from which the fair face of creation might be defaced, their own heart is a fountain inexhaustible, enough to corrupt every creature, and to defile every fair spot in the universe. And yet even they do not know their own hearts. You are like a traveller looking down into the crater of a volcano; but the smoke will not suffer you to look far. You see only a few yards into the smoking volcano of your own heart.

Learn to be humbled far more than you have ever been. None of you have ever been sufficiently humbled under a sense of sin; for this reason, that none of you have ever seen fully the plague of your own heart. There are chambers in your heart you have never yet seen into—there are caves in that ocean you have never fathomed—there are fountains of bitterness you have never tasted. When you have felt the wickedness of your heart to the uttermost, then lie down under this awful truth, that you have only seen a few yards into a pit that is bottomless—that you carry about with you a slumbering volcano—a heart whose wickedness you do not and cannot know.

2. The Witness of the Heart

(1) *“I, the Lord.”* We have seen that we do not know one another’s hearts; for “the heart is deceitful.” Man looketh on the outward appearance. We have seen that no man knows his own heart—that the most know nothing of what is there; and those who know most, see but a short way down. But here is an unerring witness. He that made man knows what is in man.

(2) *Observe what a strict witness He is:* “I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins.” It is not said, I *know* the heart—but, I *search* it. The heart of man is not one of the many objects upon which God turns His all-seeing eye, but it is one which He singles out for investigation: “I search the heart.” As the astronomer directs his telescope upon the very star he wishes to examine, and arranges all his lenses, that he may most perfectly look at it; so doth God’s calm eye pore upon the naked breast of every man. As the refiner of silver keeps his eye upon the firing-pot, watching every change in the boiling metal; so doth God’s eye watch every change in the bosom of man. Oh! natural man, can you bear this? How vain are all your pretences and coverings! God sees you as you are. You may deceive your neighbour, or your minister, or yourself—but you cannot deceive God.

(3) *Observe, He is a constant witness.* He does not say, I have searched, or I will do it—but, I search—I do it now, and always. Not a moment of our life but His pure, calm, searching eye has been gazing on the inmost recesses of our hearts. From childhood to old age His eye rests on us. The darkness hideth not from Him. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him (Psa 139:12).

(4) *Observe His end in searching:* “Even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (verse 10). In order to know the true value of an action, you must search the heart. Many a deed that is applauded by men, is abominable in the sight of God, who searches the heart. To give an alms to a poor man, may be an action either worthy of an eternal reward, or worthy of an eternal punishment. If it be done out of love to Christ—because the poor man is a disciple of Christ—it will in no wise lose its reward; Christ will say: “Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.” If it be done out of pride or self-righteousness, Christ will cast it from Him; He will say, “Depart, ye cursed; ye did it not to me” (Mat 25:40-41, 45). The reason, then, why Christ searches the heart is that He may judge uprightly in the judgment. Oh, sirs! How can you bear this, you that are Christless? How can you bear that eye on your heart all your days, and to be judged according to what His pure eye sees in you? Oh, do you not see it is a gone case with you? “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Psa 143:2). Oh, if your heart be desperately wicked, and His pure eye ever poring on it, what can you expect, but that He should cast you into hell? Oh, flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for shelter—for blood to blot out past sins, and righteousness to cover you. “See, God our shield” (Psa 84:9).

Learn the Amazing Love of Christ.

He was the only One that knew the wickedness of the beings for whom He died. He that searches the hearts of sinners died for them. His eye alone had searched their hearts; ay, was searching at the time. He came. He knew what was in men; yet, He did not abhor them on that account—He died for them. It was not for any

goodness in man that He died for man. He saw none. It was not that He saw little sin in the heart of man. He is the only being in the universe that saw all the sin that is in the unfathomable heart of man. He saw to the bottom of the volcano, and yet He came and died for man. Herein is love! (1Jo 4:10). When publicans and sinners came to Him on earth, He knew what was in their hearts, His eye had rested on their bosoms all their life—He had seen all the lusts and passions that had ever rankled there; yet in no wise did He cast them out. So with you. His eye hath seen all your sins—the vilest, darkest, blackest hours you have lived, His pure eye was resting on you; yet He died for such, and invites you to come to Him, and will in no wise cast you out (Joh 6:37). Amen.

From Palmerston Villa.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843): Scottish Presbyterian minister of St. Peter's Church Dundee. A godly evangelical pastor and evangelist with a great love for souls, whose ministry was marked by deep personal holiness, prayer, and powerful evangelical preaching. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

THE DEPTH AND CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

L.R. Shelton, Jr. (1923-2003)

PRAISE the Lord, that when He moved upon men to write the Holy Scriptures, He did not gloss over nor minimize the awful effect of sin upon man when he fell in Adam in the Garden of Eden. No, the Scriptures declare man to be a sinner, having come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), a sinner whose “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mar 7:21-22). All these evil things show that man’s fall in sin makes him a depraved creature before God. Every faculty of his being is in a state of enmity and active rebellion against God: he hates God, His Christ, His Word, holiness, and righteousness. Instead he loves every form of evil to the extent that he would rather be damned than give up his ways, his thoughts, and his “right” to do with himself as he pleases.

So every sinner outside of Christ is subject to the woes spoken of in Romans 1:24, 26-28, when mercy and divine patience are not acted upon in heartfelt repentance, and the heart is not moved to embrace Christ as the only Lord and Savior of the never-dying soul. Then the light goes out, and on the road to hell the soul is abandoned by God to uncleanness, vile affections, and a reprobate mind.

Let us look further at these verses to see what they teach us about the sad state of those who are given up and given over to their hearts’ desire to have their fill of sin. First, verse 24 reads, “Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves.” Another translation reads: “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their own hearts to sexual impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, abandoning them to the degrading power of sin.”

Since men choose to give up God and worship the creature, God does nothing more than give men up to the *control* of the sinful things they prefer above Him. You see, when men persist in following their totally depraved natures, God allows them free rein to do as they please in sin.

“Uncleanness through the Lusts”

Now the natural result of God’s giving man free rein to his lust leads to immorality of the vilest kind. The expression “God gave them up to *uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts*” means He gave them over to profligate living, that is, living which is described as being immoral, debauched, vicious, licentious, debased, corrupt, degenerate, wild, depraved, and evil. In other words, God abandons them to their own hearts’ desires and their passionate cravings. And sin does nothing but beget sin, so there is no limit to which they will go to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, to satisfy their passions and cravings.

In the last three decades we have seen this Scripture fulfilled before our very eyes. Men and women, young people, boys and girls, have been swept up in the so-called “sexual revolution,” and every moral restraint has been broken down. They have given themselves over to the lust of their own hearts in every type of sexual perversion: fornication among singles, adultery among the married, lesbianism among women, homosexuality among men, and sex orgies and parties among all age groups. Every damnable, lustful thing that could be imagined by man, given to him from the devil himself, pours forth from television, radio, movie theaters, the stage, rock music, magazines, books, and newspapers. Everything is calculated to appeal to the base lust of man; therefore, all of this has become the norm. Men no longer hold to anything decent; for chastity, modesty, morality, and marriage vows are laughed at, made fun of, and relegated to the scrap heap of oblivion, or to the “Puritan age.” The cry is, “We are free to do our own thing without the restraints of past generations!” But, oh, my dear reader, you are not free. You are only *a servant to sin*, shackled by Satan and “taken captive by him at his will” (2Ti 2:26)!

“Dishonor Their Own Bodies”

“To dishonor their own bodies between themselves” means that men are so given over to the lust of their hearts to “fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph 2:3), that they have become bestial—their animal passions have made them like beasts! You can’t pick up a newspaper today without reading reports of rape, incest, sex-related murders, cruelty, viciousness, and the brutality of men and women who have been given over to their depraved, lustful minds. They have become sadists. And when you add alcohol or drugs to this and stir up sexual desires by rock music, men become beasts. Brutality becomes the standard of the day.

This is awful, when men who are already depraved are given up by God to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts. But this is the day in which we are living, and men love it because they hate God, His holiness, His restraint, and His way of grace, which is the narrow way in Christ.

Not only is sexual filth and bestial behavior meant by the words “God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves,” but also the *filth of the tongue* that comes from the wicked heart—in the form of cursing, blasphemy, swearing, abusive and vile language, irreverence to God’s name, and the name of His blessed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The lust or desire of the heart in expressing itself does so in that which is unclean, impure, dirty, foul, polluted, filthy, lewd, and indecent. This describes the generation in which we are living. This describes the individuals who have been given up by God to their hearts’ desires, to live their lives as they please with no restraints. This is the road to hell, for Proverbs 14:12 tells us, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of *death*.”

You see, men think while going on in the lust and filth of their sins, giving vent to all the cravings of their passions, that all is well with their never-dying souls. They think they will surely go to heaven when they die. But they are deceived! All the time they are heading straight for the pit of hell! “Many will say to me [Christ] in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?...And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Mat 7:22-23).

Let me probe your heart. Are you saying, “Lord, Lord,” and all the while “living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Ti 3:3)? Are you saying, “Lord, Lord,” and all the while living in the lusts of your flesh, “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph 2:3)? Are you saying, “Lord, Lord,” and all the while living in subjection to your animal impulses: sexual vice, impurity, sensual appetites, unholy desires, greed, and covetousness? Then you are *deceived*, for covetousness and greed are idolatry, deifying self and other created things instead of God (Col 3:5).

Personal Application: Holiness

But the salvation that God gives in Christ is a *holy* salvation, for it is written that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). Holiness is worked in our hearts and lives by the *Holy* Spirit; we trust in a *holy* God who has called us with a *holy* calling to a life of *holiness*; and by the grace of God, we are going to a *holy* place called heaven, and nothing shall enter into that place that defiles or works abomination or makes a lie. Therefore, “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, *be ye holy; for I am holy*” (1Pe 1:15-16).

My dear reader, are you walking in a way of holiness, desiring to live a holy life in Christ? Or are you walking after the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind? Are you a child of wrath? We should think upon these things and make our calling and election sure (2Pe 1:10).

You may say, “But I don’t live like that! I am moral and upright and live a clean life. I wouldn’t think of living the way you have described today!” All right, then, let me ask another question: does the following verse apply to you? “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them *that do them*” (Rom 1:32). Do you take pleasure in the sins of others? Do you read the filthy things that are written about the lives of others and take pleasure in what they do? Do you read the things that are written about the debauched lives of rock stars and movie and TV stars and take pleasure in what they do? Do you sit and watch movies and TV with delight and pleasure? And are you taken up with the infidelity, fornication, whoremongering, lying, stealing, and everything else they portray? Then you are partakers with them, for you are putting your *stamp of approval* upon their lives and the lives of those they portray! If you like that kind of entertainment, if you like to eat that kind of garbage and to drink from those kinds of wells, you are really revealing your own heart! You are showing that you *approve of sin*: therefore, your heart is in the same condition as theirs. Deep down in your heart, you actually care nothing for true holiness and righteous living before God.

God help us to seek His face and turn by His grace from our wicked ways, confessing our sins and our need of Christ and His cleansing blood!

What a “Reprobate Mind” Is

We come now to verse 28 (Rom 1) in our study, and we find that God has given men and women over to a *reprobate mind*: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a *reprobate mind*, to do those things which are not convenient,” that is, to do those things which are indecent, improper, and loathsome, until they were filled—permeated and saturated—with every kind of sin (see Rom 1:29-31).

Here in this verse we have man given over by God to the depravity of his own heart, to work every evil imaginable, until he is so saturated with sin that he is like the devil himself, nothing but sin and wickedness personified! A literal translation of this verse is: “And so, since they did not see fit to acknowledge God or approve of Him or consider Him worth the knowing, God gave them over to a base and condemned mind to do things not proper or decent but loathsome.” Again, let us read it like this: “Moreover, since they considered themselves too high and mighty to acknowledge God, He allowed them to become the slaves of their degenerate minds, to perform unmentionable deeds.” Or, we can read it this way: “And even after putting God to the test for the purpose of approving Him should He meet their specifications, and finding that He did not, they disapproved of holding Him in their full and precise knowledge. God in turn gave them up to a mind that would not meet the test for that which a mind was meant, to practice those things which were not becoming or fitting.”

What these different translations bring out is this: The human race has put God to the test for the purpose of approving Him should He meet their specifications (which they have laid down for a God who would be to their liking). And finding that He did not meet those specifications, they refused to approve Him as the God to be worshiped, or to have Him in their knowledge. This is also true of man today: he has put God on trial and found that God is not a God to his liking, so he worships and serves himself, and turns to his own way, walking in the paths of darkness and depravity. Then, because man has rejected God after trial, God has *given him over* to a mind incapable of discharging the functions for which a mind is meant. The things of salvation and of God are foolishness to him.

Oh, how deep is the depravity of the human mind, affections, and will! So depraved is that which makes up man's soul—his understanding (his reasoning capacity), his affections (his loving capacity), and his will (his volitional capacity)—that the divine distinctions of right and wrong are confused and lost, so God's condemnation cannot but fall on him at last.

You can fight and argue all you want to about man's free will in salvation, but this verse of Scripture puts all your arguments to naught; for your will can only choose what your understanding and affections (your reasoning capacity and your loving capacity), tell you to choose. And since God has given you over to a depraved mind in the fall, you will only choose that which is sinful and evil every time! Apart from the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, no man would be saved. For by nature no man wants the God of the Bible to rule over him; much less does he want to fall down and worship that God. After all, this God does not meet man's specifications. Man wants to go to heaven and yet have his fill of sin while still on this earth.

This is the reason man hates the terms of God's narrow way in salvation, which is a complete surrender of the *whole* man to the *whole* Christ and bowing to Him as Lord. This is the reason man hates the terms of discipleship, which means forsaking all things and taking up the cross daily and following Christ (Luk 14:33; 9:23). This verse teaches that all men, in all ages and under all conditions, hate God and will not seek Him. They will not trust in Christ, nor bow to His Lordship, nor serve and worship Him daily apart from the operation of the mighty grace of God in their souls. The effectual work of the Holy Spirit enlightens and draws the soul to Christ in saving faith and repentance. In other words, every sinner is completely dependent upon God in the salvation of his soul.

The Effects

Now let us look at the effects of God's giving man over to a reprobate mind. When you understand what this word *reprobate* means, you can then fully understand its effects. It means that man has a mind that is depraved, corrupt, debauched, immoral, sinful, unprincipled, degenerate, evil, wicked, and

shameless. All of these things are seen in the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, men and women, young and old, those in high positions of society, and those in the low strata of society, people of all races, nations, and tongues. There is no difference—all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. These things are also found in those who profess religion without Christ, and in those who profess no religion at all.

Let us take the case of *abortion*. I ask, “Who has legalized the mass murder of our unborn babies? Who are they that would put their stamp of approval upon such evil, wicked, unprincipled, immoral, debauched, and shameless acts?” They are men and women who are in high office, who have great education, who for the most part are rich, and who pride themselves in being people of knowledge and having understanding of our times. They are men and women who sit in the highest courts of our land. Yet God has given them up to a reprobate and depraved mind to do those things which are not convenient.

Who carries out these acts of legalized abortion which the reprobate minds of the learned have ordered—the butchering of our unborn babies? It is some of our doctors and nurses who perform these shameless acts, who, because of their wicked, debauched, unprincipled, and covetous hearts and minds, do those things which are not convenient (that is, not decent), and have sold themselves to the devil to work these abominable deeds. Verse 28 reads that God has given them all over to a reprobate mind.

Another effect upon man today is in the craze for *drugs* of all types—especially cocaine. Why will doctors and lawyers and bankers—men of high education—sink so low as to be part of such a group that distributes mind-blinding, mind-ruining drugs which have blighted the lives of millions of our young people? It is because of the covetousness of their depraved hearts that they can commit such shameless acts, and have no concern for the welfare of the millions which they kill and deform! God has given them over to a reprobate mind “to do those things which are not convenient.”

Yet another effect upon man is found in the debauched, degenerate, wicked, unprincipled, and shameless writings and pictures called *pornography*, which have swept our land today, appealing to the base animal lusts and desires of men and women, young people, boys and girls. You see, the mind that stoops to such debauchery can be nothing less than a reprobate mind, given over by God to do those things which are not convenient. The people who write, photograph, print, and sell such material are only motivated by greed and covetousness; they care nothing for the souls of those whom they destroy!

All of this has led to the *worship of the human body*. All man can think of is that which is filthy and vile, evil and wicked. Especially the female body has been exposed, glorified, and made a national deity by our newspapers, magazines,

books, radios, televisions, stage and movie theaters. Our society bows down before her shrine in daily ritual, as the heathen nations did both before and after the time of our Lord.

Everywhere you turn today—drugstores, supermarkets, eating places, hotels and motels, and on the street—we see and read of the sex goddess, the sex god, until it is sickening. Men and women, to their own shame, have glorified and worshiped the naked body as a thing of beauty, which God says is an abomination in His sight. Our nakedness is our shame; it shows that we are sinners! God made clothes of animal skins for our first parents in the Garden of Eden; for after they had sinned, they found that they were naked. So to uncliothe our bodies and to parade them before man to be lusted after and worshiped is a slap in the face of God and openly says to Him, “I am *not* a sinner, and I defy You to punish me! I am going to walk as I please and do as I please, and You and Your Word *will not* tell me what to do!” So here again we see God giving men and women, young people, boys and girls over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient, which are not decent, but are corrupt, debauched and wicked.

There are many more effects of the expression “God gave them over to a reprobate mind,” but I will only mention one more now, which to me is the saddest of them all. It is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12:

“Then shall that Wicked be revealed...whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

This is the most awful effect of them all: when God gives people over to reprobate minds by allowing *false preachers* to fill their pulpits and false teachers to fill their seats of learning. Both the men who teach and their converts are sent a strong delusion that they should believe a lie and be damned. This is the effect in religion of God’s *giving men over* to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient. And what are these things? Men deny in word and deed the holiness of God. They deny the awfulness of sin that separates them from the holy God, and they deny the awful condition of their depravity. They deny the sovereignty of God, and they put the will of man upon a level with God. Man becomes his own savior and lives by his own laws and rules, which allow him to live in sin and rebellion against God.

Preaching and teaching that glorifies man’s will above God’s sovereignty in salvation, denies the one thing that man needs to know above all others to be saved: he is a radically depraved sinner, helpless and hopeless. He must have the gracious work of God’s Spirit in his soul to be saved; and he must trust the shed

blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone is our salvation. To miss this is to be deceived, to believe a lie, and to be damned!

God's Remedy: The Precious Blood of Jesus

Romans 3:24-26 tells us that the Gospel is the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that God has provided through the substitutionary work of His only begotten Son. The Gospel is the power of God that saves us from our sins. It glorifies and magnifies God's grace by revealing that He is just and the Justifier of all believing sinners.

The Precious Blood of Jesus

The power of God unto salvation to every one that believes is this: that Christ poured out His precious blood to pay the penalty for our sins—for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Heb 9:22). The Gospel consists in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1Co 15:1-4). God's Word declares that it is by the precious shed blood of Christ that atonement for sinful souls has been made and that sins of believing souls have been remitted and washed away.

From the beginning, the Bible puts great emphasis on the blood of God's appointed sacrifice as the means of His passing over or forgiving our sins. Look at it carefully again: “And without shedding of blood is no remission [of sins].” We cannot bypass the blood-shedding of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the heart of the Gospel. All the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were types¹ of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and the forgiveness of sinners' sin by faith in His precious blood. Hebrews 9:12-14 says,

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the

¹ **types** – comparisons and links made between persons, events, things, and institutions of one biblical period and those of another, especially between those of the OT and the NT. The term *typology*, and thus *types*, derives from the Greek word *typos*, meaning “impression, mark, image.” Biblical authors employed typology to reveal the connection between testaments and the outworking of God's plan of redemptive history. The *type* is the initial person, event, thing, or institution which corresponds with and is fulfilled by a later person, event, thing, or institution, which is called the antitype. For example, Paul portrays Christ as the antitype of Adam in Romans 5:12–21: “Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14). On a different level, Jesus Christ is the antitype of the animal sacrifices of the OT.

eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

The Gospel declares how “much more” the power of Christ’s blood will purge our conscience from dead works than the blood of animal sacrifices. His blood purges us from the guilt of sin, so that we might serve the true and living God, so that He might declare us justified by that blood, and so that we might be saved from God’s wrath.

We understand then, that the good news of the Gospel is that: 1) the blood-shedding of our Lord provides us with a righteousness by which God justifies us freely from all sins; 2) we stand in Christ where no condemnation can touch us; and 3) we receive this by faith in His precious blood.

Change in Our Lives

The first change we read about is found in Colossians 1:20:

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”

At the cross the Lord Jesus overcame that which takes away peace, and that is sin itself. By shedding His blood, He also overcame Satan, who robs us of our peace. Christ’s blood satisfied the justice of God, so that Christ becomes our peace. That is one of the benefits of the gospel of the grace of God, as He tells us in Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Christ’s great work of redemption, this shedding of His blood, has done something else. It has *opened the way back to the throne of God*. It is the theme of the New Testament. God has made a way through Christ’s blood that we could come into the very presence of God and gain entrance to His throne of grace. This is by that new and living way which Hebrews 10:19 describes: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.”

First John 1:7 declares another truth: through the blood of Christ, we who have believed in Christ *have been cleansed from all our sin*.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Ephesians 1:7 declares unto us the same thing: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

Also, in Romans 5:9 we are told that we, who have trusted our never-dying souls to Christ, have been justified by His blood before God, and are thereby *saved from God’s wrath through Christ*: “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”

We read in Hebrews 9:14 that *our conscience*, which is our innermost man, is

purged through the blood of the Lamb, because He gave Himself unto God for us as a Lamb without spot or blemish.

“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

This is grace! This is mercy! This is precious! Our consciences are purged from dead works that we might serve the living God!

Revelation 12:11 tells us that by the power of the blood of our crucified and risen Lord we are *able to overcome the wicked one*: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.” In fact, Acts 20:28 tells us that the whole living church of God has been purchased through and by the blood of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lamb of God and His precious blood are and ever shall be the song of heaven:

“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9-10).

Praise God for such a salvation! Praise God for the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation! Eternal redemption is ours through the blood-shedding of our blessed Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ! His blood alone breaks the power of sin and grants us entrance into the very presence of God!

Resting upon the blood of Christ for our cleansing and our righteous standing before God produces *a marked difference* between us and the world of unbelievers. Why? Because it brings us—*redeemed sinners*—into a holy relationship with a holy God based upon the holy sacrifice of our blessed and holy Savior by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we believe on Him, and when He cleanses and declares us righteous by faith in His blood, there is a marked difference between us and the world of unbelievers.

By the death and shed blood of Christ, we have been crucified unto the world and the world has been crucified unto us. The shedding of the precious blood of Christ means death to self, sin, and the flesh. The difference between the believer and the world of unbelievers is this: by faith the believer has been washed in the blood of Christ and has died to the world. He is no longer an unbelieving worldling: he has become a believer in Christ and belongs to another world. He has been crucified in Christ to the world; he has been buried with Christ in death. His “old man,” that is, his former life and ways, has been crucified with Christ. He has died to the power of indwelling sin because this is true of all who are Christ’s: they all have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.

This is the reason the Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to

every one that believeth.” For by the power of the Gospel we are *made free from the power of indwelling sin*, according to Romans 6:22, and are made free in Christ to follow and serve Him as His children. Christ delivers us from the power of the world and the power of the devil! God’s grace gives us the power to walk in newness of life. Second Corinthians 5:17 tells us that “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” We have been given new hearts and new natures—so we desire to please God, to follow after holiness, and to hate every evil and false way.

The blood of Christ has *secured the eternal damnation of Satan*, the accuser of the brethren (Rev 20:10). He will be cast into the lake of fire because our blessed Lord defeated him at the cross!

The blood of Christ has *secured the complete destruction of the power and presence of sin*. The day is coming when the plague of my heart will one day be left in the grave. The day is coming when I will be able to say because of the blood of Christ shed on my behalf, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ”! (1Co 15:55-57).

The blood of Christ has *secured for me a new body* wherein dwelleth righteousness, and I shall stand before God perfectly redeemed in spirit, soul, and body, made like my blessed Lord in holiness! Oh, I praise the Lord for this! This is real to my soul, and this is to me what the verses in our text teach: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

The Gospel Applied to the Heart

The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation because of substitution. Christ died in my place. His blood was shed for the remission of my sin, and as a poor, lost, hell-deserving sinner, I have been brought before God completely justified by faith in Him alone. My sins are blotted out *forever* and will never be remembered against me any more. This is the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is what it does in the hearts and lives of those whom He saves by His grace!

This work of Christ was not only for me, but for all those whom the Father had given to Him in electing love. By grace the Holy Spirit shows them that they are sinners, who deserve nothing but the wrath of God. Unto them He will have mercy, the Scriptures say (Rom 9:15). Who are they? No one knows except God, Who has written their names in “the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27). So the invitation goes forth: “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17).

Will you come and believe on Jesus Christ? Will you trust Him with your eternal soul? He alone can save by the power of His Gospel.

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This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, 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 4:17-32*