

# The Fountain of The Heart

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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# **The Fountain Of The Heart**

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life"

– (Proverbs 4:23)

1

## **The Fountain**

*"What is in the well of the heart will come up in the bucket of speech."*

I had my first experience with lithia water when I was in high school. A band festival had been organized for bands from various Oregon schools, and our band from Coquille High School was invited. The event was held in Ashland.

During a break in the competition, a group of us from Coquille walked down Siskiyou Boulevard toward the plaza. On the way I glanced at a window that read "Memory Lane Studio." Unbeknown to me at the time, my future bride was working there.

One of the features in the plaza is a drinking fountain where lithia water has been flowing for nobody knows how long. Of course, I had to sample it. To me, lithia water tastes like a glass of water with as many tablets of Alka Seltzer dissolved in it as it will hold. In spite of its purportedly healthful properties, that fountain must be one of the most "spitting places" on earth.

I met my future bride later in Bible school. During our courtship and subsequent married life I had many occasions to be in Ashland. Sometimes when I happened to be in the plaza, I paused to taste the lithia water. It was the same old stuff. So far as I know, it still is.

Lithia water flows from a huge underground mineral deposit somewhere in the area. The fountain in the plaza does not make the lithia water. The mineral deposit makes it. What comes out of the fountain originates at its source. The fountain only provides an outlet for it.

The same is true with the human mouth. The mouth does not create what comes out of it. The heart – the mind and will – creates it. What comes out of the mouth originates in the choices, impulses and actions of the heart. Thoughts and words are in the mind before they are in the mouth. The will opens the treasures of the mind. The mouth only provides an outlet for them.

Jesus said so.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:34 - 37; also Luke 6:45).

"Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man..." (Matthew 15:11). "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the

heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things that defile a man..." (verses 18 - 20).

This is sometimes referred to as "the unity of moral action." The heart (the mind and will) will not and therefore cannot *knowingly* choose against its own moral character, that is, against the "ultimate end" (supreme purpose and motive) it has set itself on and is living for. It will not and therefore cannot choose an end and at the same time knowingly choose means to the opposite end. Therefore, it is supremely loyal either to God or to self. These are the only two ultimate moral choices, and they are mutually exclusive and mutually hostile. While the will is committed to either supreme loyalty, it will not knowingly choose contrary to that loyalty. It cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13).

What is in our heart will come out in our lifestyle and behavior, especially in our speech. If our heart is wrong, wrong things will come out of our mouth. If our heart is right, right things will come out of our mouth. *If* out of the same mouth proceed both blessing (to God) and cursing (to men), "these things ought not to be so" (James 3:10). In such a case, either both the heart and mind are evil, or the heart is good but the mind is ignorant. The heart needs to be converted or the mind needs to be educated, or both. In any case, both the heart and mind need a sanctifying work of divine grace.

The mouth is not like a yogurt machine that mixes vanilla and chocolate. It is impossible to pollute only one half of an open swimming pool. It is impossible to fill an empty quart jar with half muddy water and half fresh water. A pure heart produces a pure fountain; a polluted heart produces a polluted fountain. "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?" (James 3:11). The answer, of course, is no.

Some time ago a pastor met a guest at the airport. As they were driving to the guest's motel, another car suddenly cut them off in traffic. Instantly the guest uttered an expletive. Embarrassed, he muttered, "Where did *that* come from?" The pastor replied quietly, "It came from your heart."

The story is told of a lady in a pentecostal church who was seeking and praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Someone asked her, "Sister, are you seeking tongues?" "No," she replied, "I want to get rid of forty feet of the one I have."

Speech begins in the mind. First, we *think* something. It might be a deliberate thought process or a sudden thought triggered by a person, place or situation. Speech is thought before it becomes words. That is, it is mental before it becomes verbal. Words form in the mind before they form in the mouth. Also, many thoughts remain in the mind without ever being expressed verbally. "As he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Hannah, the future mother of the prophet Samuel, was praying earnestly. She "spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard" (1 Samuel 1:13).

In Jesus' Parable Of The Rich Fool, the man in the parable "thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry"'" (Luke 12:17 - 19).

The psalmist prayed, "let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

Next, we *feel* something. Thoughts usually generate feelings. The thoughts might range anywhere from a sudden awareness that stimulates intense and impulsive feelings, to well-processed deliberations that produce a settled and sustained mental and emotional state.

Third, we *say* something. Thoughts become speech – spoken, written, texted, tweeted, emailed, keyed in, put on Facebook. Any accompanying feelings usually condition the nature of the speech. Many times the words are driven more by the feelings themselves than by the thoughts that produced the feelings. At times we do not think carefully before we speak. We merely react mentally, emotionally and verbally. As the saying goes, "Be sure your mind is 'turning over' before you put your mouth in gear." (Also, keep your "foot" off the accelerator).

Feelings can either reinforce the thought-speech process or interrupt and distort the process. The entire process must be kept under submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ and disciplined by the Holy Spirit in conformity to reason informed and enlightened by the word of God.

God endowed us with the faculty of speech. He holds us responsible for how we use it. We are thankful that He has instructed us how to use it properly.

## 2

### The Divine Endowment

*"Lord, fill my mouth with worthwhile stuff, and nudge me when I've said enough."*

God created Man (male and female) in His image and according to His likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27). At the highest level of that *imago Dei* is intelligent verbal expression. Intelligent speech is an endowment unique to Man (human beings) among God's living creatures on earth.

Inanimate objects make sounds that we – and even animals – associate with specific situations and activities. "Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:7, 8).

We hear thunder, a siren, an engine start, glass break, the howling of the wind. These and many other sounds have meaning to us, but they are not speech.

The same is true of animal sounds. When I was growing up, my parents raised chickens. As do other animals, chickens associate specific sounds with specific situations. One sound is associated with food, another with danger, another with contentment. I became familiar with these sounds and was able to imitate them. If I turned over a board in the chicken yard and exposed a number of bugs, I could make the "food" sound and the chickens came running. If I wanted to tease them, I made the "danger" sound, and they looked up suddenly and began to scatter.

Was I "talking" to the chickens? No, of course not. There was no vocabulary, no parts of speech, no syntax – just stimulus-response associations.

Birds chirp; owls hoot; dogs growl, bark and make other sounds; kittens mew; cows moo; turkeys gobble; monkeys shriek. All of these and many other animal sounds are associated with events and moods. But none of these subhuman vocalizations comes anywhere close to intelligent verbal expression. *That* is unique to Man. No animal, no family pet can sit down and have a reasoned discussion with a human being on any subject. That is possible only between human being and human being, and between human beings and divine beings (God and angels), and among divine beings themselves.

In his rebellious pride Man refuses to acknowledge the authority of his Creator. "They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things, who have said, 'With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?'" (Psalm 12:2 - 4).

"They have closed up their fat hearts; with their mouths they speak proudly" (Psalm 17:10).

So Man boasts, "Our lips are our own." This is in direct opposition to what God said to Moses: "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind?"

Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (Exodus 4:11, 12).

Intelligent verbal expression is a God-given ability, and with *ability* comes *responsibility*. We are accountable – and will be held accountable to God – for how we use this unique *imago Dei* endowment.

We remember what Jesus said: "Every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36, 37).

That is a sobering statement. It means that of all the words that have been spoken throughout human history, including the trillions of words that are spoken throughout the world each day, every word that reveals a person's moral motives and moral character will stand as a witness either for or against that person at the judgment and will weigh toward the divine verdict for that person.

For example, Jesus said, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

So then, one of the most dangerous things that we human beings can do is to *open our mouth!* The principle applies also to all other forms of personal communication, including writing and modern electronic communication (yes, God knows everything on Facebook and Twitter!). If we live in the healthy fear of God, this should make us think before we speak. It should put an end to mindless chatter, trifling drivel and careless talk.

"In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19).



"Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: 'Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?'" (Job 38:1 - 2).

"Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). "Do not let your mouth cause you to sin" (verse 6).

After pronouncing six woes on the nation of Judah, the prophet Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." No wonder he pronounced the seventh woe on himself: "woe is me, for I am undone [ruined]! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

Isaiah was a prophet of God, who spoke the word of God. To our knowledge, he did not violate his conscience in how he spoke in his daily conversations. However, when he received a revelation of the majesty and holiness of God, he realized how unworthy, how unclean, his own speech was in contrast to Him who speaks from heaven.

May such a realization of the majesty and holiness of God have the same sobering and sanctifying effect on each of us!

About the time we think we are doing quite well, God gives us a greater realization of His majesty and holiness that sends us to the altar for a fresh, purifying "coal of fire" for our lips.

Words are powerful.

"The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook" (Proverbs 18:4).

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21).

"What's the matter with you? Can't you do anything right? You're just plain stupid!" "You'll never amount to anything! You're just like your father. He was a no good drunk, and you'll end up just like him!" "I wish you'd never been born!"

Vicious, cruel words like that wound. They destroy. They *kill*.

"God created you in His image. He loves you. He has gifted you. If you will develop the gifts and talents He has given you, you will succeed. He has a plan for you; and as you walk with Him day by day, that plan will unfold. He knows how to make you happy and to help you become all you're meant to be."

Sincere, affirming, validating words like that heal. They bring hope. They bring *life*.

"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence" (Proverbs 10:11 NASB).

"The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered. When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 11:9 - 11).

"There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment" (Proverbs 12:18, 19).

"Also the schemes of the schemer are evil; he devises wicked plans to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaks justice. But a generous man devises generous things, and by generosity he shall stand" (Isaiah 32:7, 8).

"The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary" (Isaiah 50:4).

### Words Are Creative.

God is *the* creative verbal communicator. "The word of the Lord endures forever" (Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25). Because His words activate His power, when God speaks, it happens. What He speaks comes into existence. God said, "Let there be...," and there it is! The Holy Spirit carried out the creative word of God through Jesus Christ.

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3).

"For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water" (2 Peter 3:5).

Even in His incarnation, during the days He was here on earth in the flesh, the word of Jesus Christ was creative. For example, consider the creative action involved when Jesus turned the water into wine (John, Chapter 2). This was not merely a transformative process where certain elements already present in some form were reconstituted. None of the elements of wine were in the water. For the water to be changed into wine, new elements had to be created.

Consider what other creative actions must have taken place among the other miracles of Jesus. Essentially, healing the sick involves restoring what is already there to a healthy, functioning state. However, we cannot rule out divine creative activity in some of the miracles. Lazarus had been dead four days and his body was decomposing (John 11:39). Did raising Lazarus from the dead necessitate creating elements in his body that had already been lost in the process of

decomposition? When Jesus healed those who were "maimed," what is the likelihood that at least some of them had been amputees? (See Matthew 15:30, 31; 18:8).

*Words spoken in faith with divine authority are effective.*

Consider the prophet Samuel. "So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground" (1 Samuel 3:19). God validated what Samuel said and made it happen.

Elijah the prophet stood before Ahab, king of Israel, and declared with divine authority, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word" (1 Kings 17:1).

Think of it! Here were two men of God, Samuel and Elijah, who knew God, knew where they stood with God, and lived in such close communion with God that they knew the mind and will of God. They knew that God would back up whatever they said because they knew that whatever they said would be something God could and *would* back up.

What kind of a person would stand up before a king and assert boldly that it would not rain unless and until he said so? It would be like Elijah walking into the main studios of the Weather Channel and declaring to an international audience, "Forget all the satellite images. Forget the computer models. Forget what the meteorologists are telling you. As the LORD God lives before whom I stand, it will not rain unless I say so." He might be hauled off in handcuffs and end up in a psychiatric ward.

What kind of a man could *truly* do that? A man of God who knew God, knew where he stood with God, and spoke in faith and confidence in the authority he was given by God!

Jesus Christ.

Psalm 45 is a Messianic psalm. In the psalm, Solomon is spoken of as a type of Christ. Verse 2 says, "Grace is poured into Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever." This was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When our Lord taught the people, "all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:22).

After they heard Him, the officers who had been sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Jesus returned by themselves. When asked by their superiors why they did not arrest and bring Jesus, they remarked, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (John 7:46).

Jesus spoke with divine authority. He declared, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Luke 21:33).

The people of Capernaum "were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority" (Luke 4:32). They exclaimed, "What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out" (verse 36).

With one word – *go!* – He commanded six thousand demons to leave a man of Gadara whom they had been tormenting, and they left immediately (Matthew 8; Mark 5; Luke 8).

Jesus announced to the nobleman, "Your son lives," and at that moment the child began to recover (John 4:46 - 54).

When Jesus rebuked her fever, Peter's mother-in-law was healed instantly (Matthew 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29 - 31; Luke 4:38, 39).

He commanded the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." Immediately the man got up and went home (Matthew 9:2 - 8; Mark 2:2 - 12; Luke 5:18 - 26).

He said to the lame man by the pool of Bethesda, "Take up your bed and walk." The man was healed immediately and walked right out of there (John 5:2 - 9).

In the synagogue, He ordered a man who had a withered hand to stretch it out. The man did, and his hand was restored (Matthew 12:9 - 13; Mark 3:1 - 6; Luke 6:6 - 11).

In response to a Roman centurion's amazing faith, Jesus said to him, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done to you." At that moment the centurion's servant was healed (Matthew 8:5 - 13; Luke 7:1 - 10).

To the two blind men who were crying out to Him Jesus said, "According to your faith let it be to you," and their eyes were opened (Matthew 9:27 - 31).

Jesus put His fingers into the ears of a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; then Jesus spit, touched the man's tongue, looked up to heaven and commanded: "Be opened." Immediately his ears were opened and his speech was restored (Mark 7:31 - 37).

He declared to a woman who had been doubled over by the devil for eighteen years, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity," and immediately she straightened up and glorified God (Luke 13:10 - 17).

He instructed the ten lepers who met Him on his way to Jerusalem, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." As they went, they were healed (Luke 17:11 - 19).

To blind Bartimaeus and his friend Jesus said, "Receive your sight," and they were healed (Matthew 20:29 - 43; Mark 10:46 - 52; Luke 18:35 - 43).

Jesus raised the dead by His creative word. At Nain, He said to the dead son of a widow, "Young man, I say to you, arise." He rose up immediately and started to talk (Luke 7:11 - 15).

He said to Jairus's dead daughter, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Immediately she arose and walked (Mark 5:41, 42).

He shouted into Lazarus's opened tomb, "Lazarus, come forth!" – and out he came! (John 11:43, 44).

Our Lord commanded the wind and the waves, "Peace, be still." Immediately the sea became completely calm (Mark 4:39).

He said to the Syro-phoenecian woman, "The devil is gone out of your daughter," and the demon was evicted before it knew what had hit it (Mark 7:24 - 30).

### Believers.

Jesus declared that God will perform the words of believers spoken in faith according to His will. "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20; Mark 11:23).

This does not mean that God wants believers to throw mountains around. If they did so, they would mess things up and kill a lot of people. The mountains are where the providence of God has placed them. By this statement Jesus emphasized the potential of speaking and acting out of faith in God, even to the moving of mountains. Mountain-moving faith will accomplish the impossible because God will confirm it. With God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26); therefore, all things are possible to the one who believes (Mark 9:23). Yes, that includes moving a literal mountain if moving it would be a good thing.

So Peter said to the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." With a hand-up from Peter the man obeyed and walked" (Acts 3:6).

When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, Ananias dropped dead. About three hours later, Peter said to Sapphira, "How is it that you have agreed to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at Peter's feet and died (Acts 5).

Later, at Joppa the same apostle said to dead Dorcas, "Tabitha, arise." Immediately she opened her eyes and sat up (Acts 9:40).

On the island of Cyprus, when Elymas the sorcerer withstood Saul (Paul) and Barnabas, Paul rebuked him: "the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." Immediately a "dark mist" fell on him and he groped around for someone to lead him by the hand (Acts 13:8 - 12).

When Paul saw that the lame man at Lystra had faith to be healed, he commanded him to stand up straight on his feet, and the man leaped and walked (Acts 14:8 - 10).

God backs up words spoken in faith, according to His will. God did it then; He will do it now. The implications of this are truly awesome, both in its potential and in its prerequisites. If we want God to back up what we say, we must be careful how we talk.

So, let's believe and obey, and see what God will do.



### **Hung By The Tongue**

*"Let us be careful what we say, for we speak for all eternity."*

All of us – no exceptions – all of us need to sit down and let James give us some sobering straight talk from God about the tongue. We need to listen carefully and prayerfully to what he has to say. We might not enjoy it. It does not tickle our ears or create "warm fuzzies." Rather, it should make us squirm.

It is painful. We would rather be blessed than blistered. Nevertheless, it is vital information that we ignore or neglect at our peril. It is also life giving and liberating. Let's listen carefully.

"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26).

There it is. Simple. Clear. Basic. Essential.

Our church ties and preferences. Our religious habits and performances. Our Bible knowledge. What we *assume* about faith. Our religious feelings and experiences. All of this is vain – useless, worthless – *if we do not bridle our tongue.*

True, James was addressing people whose religious background and experience were made up largely of regulations and rituals. Nevertheless, the principle is universal and timeless in its operation and applicability. The word of the Lord by James speaks to us today.

This principle is the compelling consideration behind our present research and study. It is vital, timely, urgent. We must give ourselves to a compact yet comprehensive exploration of what The Scriptures say about our speech, that is, our intelligent verbal expression, and the character of the inner source from where it proceeds.

His first statement is just the beginning of what James has to say to us about our speech. Let's listen to something else he is telling us.

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man [*teleios* – of spiritual and moral integrity and maturity], able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring can yield both salt water and fresh" (James 3:1 - 12). Here again the Bible teaches the unity of moral action.

"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (James 4:11, 12).

"Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5:9).

I think it was Will Rogers who said that all of us are ignorant, just on different subjects. So here is the problem: in our human weakness and in our limited knowledge and understanding we all trip and stumble in many things. This becomes most obvious when we open our mouth. So then, whenever we are tempted to throw in our "two cents worth," we would be wise to stop and ask ourselves, "What do I know about it?"

Proverbs 17:27, 28 says, "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm [literally, cool] spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive." Sometimes silence improves our reputation, even if we do not deserve it.

Because of this common condition, James says that most believers should not be eager to become biblical and spiritual teachers. A teacher of the word of God has a high calling. That high calling presumes a greater knowledge of the word. The presumption of greater knowledge makes the teacher responsible for what he or she knows, *professes to know*, and how that affects those who are being taught. That holds the teacher to a higher standard and stricter accountability.

The person who does not stumble in word is a perfect [*teleios* – fully mature] person. He or she is in command of the whole body. The person who can control the tongue can control all the rest. To control the tongue, control the mind; to control the mind, control the tongue. They are mutual reinforcers.

A small bit in a horse's mouth controls the horse. A small rudder directs the course of the ship. Though it is small, the tongue talks big. It is arrogant, egotistic, boastful. It is usually *in* control when it ought to be *under* control. At times it is in the driver's seat when it ought to be in the trunk!

The Bible likens the tongue to a whip. Job 5:17 says that the person who has been successfully corrected by God will be protected "from the scourge [whip] of the tongue." Almost all of us at one time or another have felt the sting of a "tongue-lashing."

The Bible likens the tongue to a sword. The psalmist said, "My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Psalm 57:4). "Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked, from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity, who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows – bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the blameless; suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear" (Psalm 64:1 - 4). "There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health" (Proverbs 12:18).

The Bible likens the tongue to a snake. The psalmist prayed to be delivered from evil and violent men, who "sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips" (Psalm 140:3).

In describing the total moral depravity of unregenerate humanity, the apostle Paul quoted Psalm 140:3 and verses from two other psalms (5:9 and 10:7): "'Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit'; 'the poison of asps is under their lips': 'whose mouth is fully of cursing and bitterness'" (Romans 3:13, 14). "Garbage mouth" is an appropriate way to describe people like that.

The Bible likens the tongue to a bow and to arrows. The prophet Jeremiah longed to get far away from his nation. "Like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies.... Their tongue is an arrow shot out" (Jeremiah 9:3, 8). The psalmist said the same thing in Psalm 64, as we just read.

The Bible likens the tongue to fire. We read in Proverbs 16:27, "An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire." We remember also James's vivid description of the tongue. It is like a small flame that can kindle a fire that burns down a forest. A spark can set a vast prairie on fire. So it is with the tongue. Its evil influence saturates the whole human world. It controls and corrupts the whole body and sets on fire the entire "wheel" (cycle) of human life and activity (James 3:6).

What sets the tongue on fire? Where did its consuming flame come from? Hell itself – *gehenna*. Satan stimulates the tongue to speak evil, and foolish people willingly and impulsively respond. Thinking is short-circuited. Reason offers little or no resistance and is quickly subdued.

Humanity has tamed the animal kingdom and much of nature. No one can tame the tongue. It is an unruly, restless evil, full of deadly poison that corrupts and kills everything. Only when we surrender in faith to Jesus Christ and bring everything under obedience to Him and to the liberating control of the Holy Spirit – then and only then will our tongue be tamed.

Therefore, as believers, let us "so speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:12).

### The Misuse of Speech.

The Bible tells us the ways speech is misused and gives us some interesting and instructive examples.

Solomon said, "Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard. Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools" (Ecclesiastes 9:16, 17).

Our culture tells the senior citizens with older and wiser heads to go out and play; then it asks the young, the immature, and the rich but shallow celebrities how to live our lives and how to run the nation.

Nevertheless, it remains true, as Solomon also said, "Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool" (Proverbs 19:1).

One way or another, we all "eat" our words. Again, we listen to the wisdom of Solomon. "A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth, and from the produce of his lips he shall be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:20, 21).

We get in full measure what our mouth produces, whether good or bad, and we live by its results. The potential for both death and life are in our tongue. Our tongue is a high voltage line that can electrocute or bring power and light. It is a sharp knife that in the hand of a murderer or a careless person can wound or kill, or in the hand of a skilled surgeon can excise a cancer and help save a life. It is a powerful vehicle that a reckless driver can misuse to injure, kill and destroy, or that a careful driver can use for business, profit and pleasure. It is a sharp razor that can cut a throat or deliver a clean, smooth shave.

Let's categorize some of the ways that people misuse our unique, God-given ability of speech.

### *Flattery.*

Flattery is "smooth talking" a person for a selfish purpose. It is insincere, excessive and undue praise.

In Psalm 5:9 David said this about his (and God's) enemies: "... there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue." Paul quotes this indictment in his letter to the Romans (Romans 3:13).

"He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it will be counted a curse to him" (Proverbs 27:14). Be careful of people who want to "schmooze" you around other people.

Flattery is a "come on" skillfully used by immoral women.

"Hello, handsome. You look lonesome. Want some company? You say your wife doesn't appreciate you? Tell me about it. I understand. You deserve better treatment. Come to my house this evening and we'll talk about it some more."

Man, do what Joseph did. *RUN!* (Genesis 39:12). *It's run or ruin!*

Discretion and understanding will protect you "to deliver you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God" (Proverbs 2:16, 17).

"My son, pay attention to my wisdom; lend your ear to my understanding, that you may preserve discretion, and that your lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword" (Proverbs 5:1 - 4).

"For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress" (Proverbs 6:23, 24).

"My son, keep my words ... that they may keep you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words" (Proverbs 7:1 - 5).

"With her enticing speech she caused him to yield; with her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter..." (Proverbs 7:21, 22).

"The mouth of an immoral woman is a deep pit; he who is abhorred of the LORD will fall there" (Proverbs 22:14).

The word of God has more to say about flattery.

"He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips" (Proverbs 20:19). The gossip will flatter people in order to entice them to give him or her a juicy mouthful. Gossip and flattery go together. *Stay away!*

"A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering tongue works ruin" (Proverbs 26:28).

"He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue" (Proverbs 28:23).

Ministers of the gospel must remain completely honest and sincere at all times and with all people. The apostle Paul reminded the church in Thessalonica that when he and his companions came to preach the gospel to them, they did so out of sincere love. "For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloke for covetousness – God is witness" (1 Thessalonians 2:5).

### *Insincerity.*

The Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, "Inasmuch as these people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the wisdom of their prudent men will be hidden" (Isaiah 29:13, 14).

God said to the prophet Ezekiel that his countrymen were hypocrites. They enjoyed hearing Ezekiel's words but refused to obey them. "So they come to you as people do; they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain" (Ezekiel 33:31). This describes many people today who are merely hearers of the word, but not doers (James 1:22 - 25).



The prophet Malachi had a similar problem with the insincerity of his generation. He said to the priests of his day, "You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, 'In what way have we wearied Him?' In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them.' Or, 'Where is the God of justice?'" (Malachi 2:17). Antinomianism has a long history; so also does questioning God's justice.

Long before this Solomon warned, "Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2).

### *Impulsiveness.*

"Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 29:20).

Strong words, yet true. Even Moses fell into this trap. We read about it in Numbers chapter 20, verses 1 - 13. The children of Israel came into the Wilderness of Zin. Because there was no water, the people rose up in protest against Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron went to the door of the tabernacle and fell on their faces before God. The glory of the Lord appeared to them and the Lord commanded Moses to speak to a certain rock and assured him that water would flow from the rock. So when Moses and Aaron gathered the people together before the rock, Moses yelled at them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" Then, in disobedience to God's instructions, Moses struck the rock twice. God gave water, but Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land because by his impulsive words and actions he did not honor God.

True, the people had outraged God by their unbelief; nevertheless, Moses was held accountable for his impulsive reaction. "It went ill with Moses on account of them, because they rebelled against His Spirit, so that he [Moses] spoke rashly with his lips" (Psalm 106:32, 33).

On an earlier occasion when the people needed water, God told Moses to strike the rock with his rod (see Exodus 17:1 - 7). Moses did so and God gave water. This provided a type of Christ, the true Rock, who would be "smitten" (crucified) for us. On this later occasion, recorded in Numbers, God told Moses to *speak* to the rock. Moses was angry; so instead of speaking to the rock, he struck the rock. This ruined the type of Christ. Christ was smitten, crucified, once for all. Now all we need to do is to *speak* to the Rock Christ Jesus and receive the living water.

Epigram: "Speak when you are angry and you will deliver the best speech you will ever regret."

### *Talkativeness.*

Talkative people feel a strong compulsion to say something, even when they do not have anything worth saying. Talkativeness is the verbal outflow of the person's undisciplined spirit. When talkative people get together, they "feed" off each other's common compulsion to "shoot the breeze." They feel frustrated if they are unable to "get a word in edgewise." Talkativeness and garrulousness go beyond a lively, thought-driven exchange of ideas.

Talkativeness is a road sown with verbal "land mines." Proverbs 10:18 - 21 is about our speech. Verse 18 says, "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise."

Proverbs 13:3 presents a contrast: "He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction."

So does Proverbs 15:2: "The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness." Verse 28 says, "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil." Think how often we see and hear a withering "machine gun" cross-fire of words intended to defeat each one's opponent by the mere force of a verbal barrage. It might impress the shallow mind, but it is offensive to thoughtful people.

"Silent sense is better than fluent folly."

"Like the legs of the lame that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of fools" (Proverbs 26:7).  
"Like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools" (verse 9).

"A fool's voice is known by his many words" (Ecclesiastes 5:3). The saying goes, "I would rather remain silent and be thought a fool, than to open my mouth and leave no doubt."

"In the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God" (verse 7). The fear of God is the perfect "squelcher." It certainly was for Job. When God spoke, Job repented in dust and ashes for uttering things he did not understand (Job 42:1 - 6). The more we are impressed with the awesome majesty of God, the less we want to say.

"Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for He is aroused from His holy habitation" (Zechariah 2:13).

*"Word fights."*

The apostle Paul instructed young Timothy concerning what he was to teach and exhort the believers who were under his ministry. Then he wrote, "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent 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 is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words,..." (1 Timothy 6:3, 4).

Again, in his second epistle to Timothy, Paul wrote: "Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers" (2 Timothy 2:14).

Only God knows how many people have been "messed up" spiritually and in other ways in life because they listened to people – some of them very influential – who sounded knowledgeable

and authoritative but who were far from the truth and who led them far from the truth, with disastrous consequences.

### *Deception.*

The following is an article that was first published in The Pentecostal Evangel, January 20, 1991. This version is a revision and expansion of the original.

## The Deception Of Empty Words

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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The war is on. Battles are being fought everywhere – in the media, in classrooms, in personal conversations. It is a life-and-death struggle for the human mind and soul.

The weapons?

*Words.*

Words are powerful weapons. They can conquer nations and change societies.

Words are precision tools. They can shape thinking and behavior for either good or evil.

These weapons – these tools – are being skillfully employed both in the promotion of truth and in the spread of error.

From the beginning, Satan has used words to deceive. "He is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). He lied to himself (Isaiah 14:13,14), to the angels, and to Eve. He is the instigator of all error. He is the chief promoter of rationalizations, the master architect of every structure of falsehood – every "high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NKJV).

He deceives in order to destroy, and he has enlisted the skills of his gifted but deluded followers to carry out his purpose. He has an effective force of skilled word-crafters. These mind molders have bought his ideas because they appeal to their own pride and passions. They are committed to promoting his ideology because they want to build a society structured after their own desires.

It is a known fact that whoever controls the language controls the culture. "Secularists" (unbelievers) have co-opted our language and are using it vigorously in an attempt to erase biblical principles from the minds of the young and to demolish the Judeo-Christian foundations of our society. They begin with a false premise and follow it "logically" to its false, empty, and dehumanizing conclusions. They "trade reality for words, and then talk about the words." They engage in the "deconstruction of language, with disregard for facts and accurate definitions."

Empty words are "the skin of reason stuffed with a lie." Skilled wordcrafters seize positive words and misuse them to create empty euphemisms, thus prostituting the language for the purpose of deception.

"Marriage equality" is the term specifically created for the massive propaganda campaign to manipulate the public mind into accepting so-called "same-sex 'marriage'." The assumption is that most people think only on the surface and prefer short slogans to serious thought.

Yes, people are "deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13), and words are the instruments being used to promote the deceptions.

Usually the process is not high-pressure brain-washing but subtle mind-bending. Words and phrases are "spun" and "massaged," then repeated persistently until the terminology is accepted as the proper embodiment and expression of the "correct" idea.

Young people who commit fornication are said to be "sexually active" and "sexually experienced." These are considered to be morally neutral terms. But what teenager under peer pressure wants to be considered "inactive" and "inexperienced"? No, such language is not neutral. By design its slant is morally negative. Its purpose is to obscure the immorality of such behavior in order to make it acceptable.

Notorious examples of word twisting are found in the adamant defense of abortion. An unborn human being is persistently termed a *fetus* in the effort to rob it of its personhood in the public mind. Positive words such as *choice* and *rights* are drained of any real content so their empty semantic shell can be used as a

respectable container for brutal barbarism. The word "choice" says nothing in itself. The question is, choice to do *what*?

Instead of "proabortion," we hear "abortion *rights*," as though abortion existed as a right in itself apart from its mere legalization. People who oppose abortion are called "anti-choice" and "anti-women's rights." The words are carefully chosen for their propaganda effect. It is the language of violence. It has been said that the greatest tyranny is deliberately to declare a whole class of human beings as "non-persons" for the express purpose of taking their lives.

Empty words can and probably will be used to defend bigamy, polygamy and other perversions, including possibly even incest. The words are ready-made and available for mass dissemination. One can almost hear the arguments: "monogamy is only a religious dictum; why shouldn't Muslim men have the right to marry up to four wives?" "Marriage is about more than procreation; it is about love. Why shouldn't a 44 year old man have the right to marry his 21 year old daughter? How much more love will they have when they add the love of husband and wife to the love of father and daughter?"

If *that* begins to sound plausible, we are in real trouble.

Empty words *could* be used to defend even cannibalism. If enough people were to develop a taste for human flesh, we would hear it all over again: "Keep your laws off my body. If people decide to donate their bodies to the food supply, that is their right. After all, whose body is it, anyway? I defend dietary rights. My diet is pro-choice. I prefer it, and I have a right to eat it. I'm not going to let some religious fundamentalists tell me what I can and can't eat in the privacy of my own home."

Bizarre? Yes, in all the above cases. In fact, the latter case sounds like something the cannibals could have said to the missionaries!

Why are these and other empty words and slogans wrong? Because they are not realistic. *They do not address the nature of the relationships. They have nothing to do with reality!*

Remember: "The unthinkable first becomes controversial; then it finally becomes unquestionable." To paraphrase Richard John Neuhaus, our society is going from the unthinkable, to the debatable, to the justifiable, to the usual.

Darwinists favor the word *primitive* because it reinforces the chosen conclusion, apart from the scientific process itself. The value of human life becomes relative through the use of the phrase "quality of life." The fact that human life has its own God-given intrinsic quality is thus avoided.

Everyone who has AIDS is a "victim" (and, yes, there are true AIDS victims). But we do not hear of AIDS *spreaders*. The word is censored out of the sterilized public vocabulary. "Lifestyle" is the politically correct euphemism used to defend the popular evils.

*Orientation* is another word that has been given a new made-to-order definition. Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary defines *orientation* as "a usual or general or lasting direction of thought, inclination, or interest." That established definition and such words as "attraction" and "preference" are rejected because they imply a *choice*, an implication homosexual activism refuses to accept or even tolerate.

*Discrimination* is the universal word used to condemn any opposition to perverted behavior, and "hate" is automatically assumed to be the criminal motive in spite of the fact that Christian opposition to the behavior is motivated by a concern for the well-being of the person.

"Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20).

If a person is "offended" by someone's statement opposing homosexual behavior and the homosexual lifestyle, that is becoming grounds for action against the "offending" person, particularly an evangelical Christian. Thus opposing homosexual behavior becomes an "offence" and the believer is judged to be an "offender." Along with this comes the censure of the "offender's" biblical faith.

On it goes. Language continues to change, not only by usage but also by manipulation. *Literate* and *literacy* used to mean simply the ability to read and write and have a knowledge of literature. Now in some cases these words mean to make sure people, especially students, become "politically correct" in their thinking. The traditional term is *brainwashing*.

For the unconverted to be deceived by empty words is tragic enough. When deception invades the Church, it attacks the very "pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15 NIV).

The apostle Peter warned of false teachers who through covetousness "will exploit you with deceptive words" (2 Peter 2:3). In verse 18 he goes on to say, "For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error."

Paul wrote, "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18). *Simple* means naive and unsuspecting.

The Church has suffered from those who teach that, because believers are under grace, how a "believer" lives does not affect his or her eternal destiny. Against this pernicious error the inspired apostle sternly warns, "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know that no fornicator, unclean person, or covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them" (Ephesians 5:3 - 7). Again, in a different context, Paul wrote, "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (Colossians 2:4).

As believers our security is in abiding (remaining) in the Son and the Father. "Therefore let that abide [remain] in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and the Father" (1 John 2:24).

At the other extreme is the equally deadly error that we can be saved by our own works. This widely assumed notion is destroying millions in spite of the clear statement, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9 NASB). Being "good" will get no one to heaven. We are saved only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

One of the most destructive influences within Christianity has been the rise of liberal theology. This, too, has been advanced by the crafty use of words. In this case they are called "connotation words," words that have a solid biblical meaning in the minds of the listeners but are deliberately used in a non-biblical sense by the speaker. The speaker deceptively insinuates something into the words that is not part of their true meaning. This is done to instill the speaker's ideas into the minds of the hearers by expressing them in words familiar and acceptable to the people. Thus the speaker dishonestly takes advantage of the people's trust and betrays it.

An example of this is claiming to believe in the "literal" resurrection of Jesus Christ but denying that this has anything to do with His body coming out of the tomb.

What should we do when we encounter verbal mind-bending? For one thing, we must be careful that we ourselves do not unwittingly adopt the terminology of deception. When we hear it, we should ask ourselves, "is that true?" Challenge it.



If it is contrary to the word of God, expose it. Use the terminology of reality. Use Bible words with Bible meanings. Call things what God calls them. It is adultery, not "an affair." It is a practice against nature and nature's God, not "an alternate lifestyle."

When someone who is not evangelical uses biblical words such as *salvation* and *redemption*, or says that Jesus is "the Christ," ask what the speaker means by those words. Insist that the person be specific. We must not let anyone deceive us by the mere mouthing of Bible words.

Truth is the only effective defense against deception – real truth, truth in the form of God's words. God uses real words to combat empty words.

In the life-and-death struggle for our minds and souls, it is absolutely essential that we be "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:6). We must speak "not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:13 NIV). We must agree to "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 6:3). Paul wrote, "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13 NASB).

So, study your Bible as though your very life depended on it. *It does.*

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"Whoever controls the language controls the culture." This is true whether for good or for evil, for enlightenment or for deception. On the one hand, skilled "wordsmiths" have inspired people to act intelligently in noble causes. On the other hand, demagogues have employed their wordcraft to lure and lead people to follow them irrationally to their own and others' destruction. For example, consider the contrast between the encouraging speeches of Winston Churchill and the deceptive diatribes of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi propaganda machine.

Euphemisms are pretty words that replace facts and hide ugly realities. "I decided not to continue my pregnancy" really means "I had my unborn baby killed."

Again, "discrimination" is the word of choice to categorize and even criminalize and punish godly people who oppose behaviors that God Himself opposes in His word. This outrage is finding its way into the legal codes of previously spiritually and morally enlightened societies.

Again, "marriage equality" is another bogus euphemism. It and others like it are bogus because they are detached from reality. When adopted and implemented, they produce societies that live contrary to reality, with all the resulting problems that characterize much of contemporary life.

We encounter the devious manipulation of speech daily in the various institutions of society: the media; entertainment; education; government; and, in its deadliest of all consequences, in religion.

Remember, "The simple believes every word, but the prudent man considers well his steps" (Proverbs 14:15).

"Now I urge you, brothers, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17, 18).

It all started in the Garden of Eden, when Satan – that master deceiver who was able to persuade a host of angels to follow him into demonhood – said to our first mother: "has God said...?" (Genesis 3:1).

Satan has spawned generations of deceivers.

The psalmist David prayed, "Do not take me away with the wicked and with the workers of iniquity, who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts" (Psalm 28:3).

Concerning the wicked, David said, "The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit" (Psalm 36:3). "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords" (Psalm 55:21).

The apostle Peter warns us: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Peter 2:1 - 3).

The apostle Paul assured the church at Corinth that his speech and his preaching "were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4). He went on to write, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (verses 12, 13).

Later, in his epistle to the Colossians, Paul wrote, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles [elements] of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

Much of the gentile church exempted Plato and neoplatonism from Paul's warning, and the Church and the gospel itself have suffered as a consequence. We do not need Greek philosophy to systematize and "intellectualize" the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament. Scripture itself is sufficient to interpret and systematize Scripture accurately. A confusing Greek/ontological mindset has clouded the clear Hebrew/moral perspective of the prophets and of Christ and His apostles.

One major result of this is the ancient error of "original sin," rooted in Plato's "fall of the soul" and brought into the Christian hermeneutic by some of the Church fathers, including Origen and Augustine.

If a man convicted of a crime said to the judge, "But your honor, I was born with this sinful nature and I am not able to repent," the judge might cite him for contempt of court and remind him that such nonsense is allowable only in seminary and behind the pulpit.

In many cases innocent people are being led into deception and falsehood without realizing what is being done to them. On the other hand, many are led into deception willingly. They are not honest with themselves. For them, false thinking begins with a false heart, that is, a willingness to go against the truth in behavior and therefore in thinking.

"An evildoer gives heed to false lips; a liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue" (Proverbs 17:4). When the heart gets right, the thinking straightens out; so does the talking.

*Many troubles.*

So we keep going back to Proverbs, the "get smart" book.

Before signing anything, first read Proverbs 6:1 - 5. "My son, if you are become surety for your friend, if you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, you are snared by the words of your own mouth; you are taken by the words of your mouth. So do this, my son, and deliver yourself, for you have come into the hand of your friend: go and humble yourself; plead with your friend. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids. Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, and like a bird from the hand of the fowler."

On the subject of co-signing, we read also the following warnings. "He who is surety for a stranger will suffer for it, but one who hates being surety is secure" (Proverbs 11:15). "A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge, and becomes surety for his friend" (Proverbs 17:18.)

Proverbs 11:11 says, "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked."

What is happening in *your* city?

"In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter [literally, the talk of the lips] leads only to poverty" (Proverbs 14:23). Most of us at times have had to listen to people who want to tell us how much they know, what great plans they have, and how much money they are going to make. Usually they have a lot of time on their hands. Some of them are real "go-getters" – they take her to work in the morning and go get her at night. They are mostly talk with little action. They talk rich but live poor. The solution: *stop talking and find a job*.

If an able-bodied man is out of work, his full-time job is looking for a job. Instead of sitting on the shore, waiting for his "ship" to come in, he should find a "boat," get in it, and "paddle" with all his might. He should act as though the unemployment check in his hand is his last. It might be.

"A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows. A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul" (Proverbs 18:6, 7).

We all have emotional "hot buttons." A wise person keeps them in check by refusing to react verbally or otherwise when someone or something pushes them.

I heard of a businessman who had been recently converted to Christ. Before his conversion he had an untamed and explosive temper. One day, shortly after he had come to Christ, he and his Christian wife were standing on a curb-side, waiting for the "walk" sign. It had been raining and a puddle of water was in front of them next to the curb. Suddenly a car came by and hit the puddle, sending a splash of water onto the man's suit. His wife whispered to him, "Control your temper, dear." Through gritted teeth her husband replied, "I have controlled more temper in the last ten seconds than you have in a lifetime."

A fool reacts thoughtlessly. A fool easily gets involved in an argument and a brawl. A fool "puts his mouth in gear before his brain is turning over." He habitually speaks before he thinks (if he even thinks at all). The three-fold consequences are: punishment, self-destruction, and the enslavement of his soul.

These are just some of the problems (potential and actual) that are associated with the misuse of human verbal expression. There exist whole categories of evils in addition to these. We will look at them in the next chapter.

Before ending this chapter, let us review a national tragedy that could have been avoided if just one man had spoken the right words – good words. It is recorded in the Bible in 1 Kings, Chapter 12 and also in 2 Chronicles, Chapters 10 and 11.

King Solomon had just died, and his son Rehoboam was prepared to ascend the throne of the nation of Israel. His father's long reign was characterized by the expansion of Israel's territorial control, major building projects (including the temple in Jerusalem), centralized government, and royal grandeur. This came at the cost of high taxation and conscripted labor.

For some time a major discontent had been seething. Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had become a leader in the growing opposition to Solomon's repressive measures. For that reason he fled to Egypt for safety.

Hearing that Solomon was dead and that Rehoboam was about to be crowned king of Israel, Jeroboam returned from Egypt and went up to Shechem, in the northern part of Israel, where the coronation of Rehoboam was to take place.

Jeroboam had consolidated his support and leadership status among the people, particularly among Israel's northern tribes. Ten tribes were ready to revolt – to renounce their allegiance to the royal line of David and form a separate nation that would retain the national name, Israel.

Jeroboam became the spokesperson for the group that had assembled at Shechem to do the business of the kingdom. Here was their ultimatum to Rehoboam: "Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you" (1 Kings 12:4; 2 Chronicles 10:4).

Having grown up in the rarefied atmosphere of royalty, Rehoboam was out of touch with the people. Thus he seemed to be blind to the crisis that was looming right in front of his face.

Rehoboam told Jereboam and the people to come back in three days for his answer. That gave Jereboam and his supporters three critical days to plan their options. The situation was a tinderbox. The outcome depended on the answer of the new king.

Rehoboam's advisers who had served under Solomon advised him, "If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever" (1 Kings 12:7; also 2 Chronicles 10:7).

Instead, Rehoboam took the advice of the spoiled courtiers with whom he had grown up and foolishly announced that he would increase the already repressive burdens on the people. He said, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!" (1 Kings 12:14; 2 Chronicles 10:14).

The outcome was entirely predictable. Israel split into two nations. The division weakened God's covenant people and made them vulnerable. The northern kingdom under Jereboam went into sin and became a "back door" of temptation to the spiritually and morally superior southern kingdom of Judah.

It all happened because of *words* – arrogant words, harsh words, reckless words, divisive words, alienating words, destructive words. What a difference kind words, pleasant words, servant words, *good* words would have made for the future of the nation. But the moment of opportunity and destiny was lost, squandered by a foolish man who had spoken foolish words out of a foolish heart.

### **A World Of Iniquity**

*"The mouth is the grocer's friend, the dentist's fortune, and the fool's trap."*

We remember what James said: "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell" (James 3:6).

"Iniquity" means unrighteousness, injustice, wrong.

It has been said that a tongue three inches long can ruin a man six feet tall.

God does not play word games to appease unbelievers and make them feel good in their sins. Instead of covering ugly realities with conscience-numbing euphemisms, the Bible faithfully calls things what they really are. This includes sins involving our speech.

"A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; the babbler is no different. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; the words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk is raving madness. A fool also multiplies words" (Ecclesiastes 10:11 - 14).



The first several chapters of Proverbs contain a number of references to perverse speech. Perverse means crooked, distorted, false and fraudulent. It is translated "froward" in the King James Version. Here they are.

"When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things" (Proverbs 2:10 - 12).

"Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you" (Proverbs 4:24).

"A worthless person, a wicked man, walks with a perverse mouth" (Proverbs 6:12).

"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate" (Proverbs 8:13). "I" here refers to wisdom personified.

"Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips" (Proverbs 24:28 NASB).

"The mouth of the wise brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out" (Proverbs 10:31).

"Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking" (Proverbs 24:1, 2)

*Lying.*

The story is told of a Sunday School boy who became confused when reciting his memory verses. When asked to recite, he said, "A lie is an abomination to the Lord, and a very present help in trouble."

When people's lies get them into trouble, they usually try to cover themselves by telling more lies. That gets them into even deeper trouble.

Even so-called "little white lies" are a violation of one's integrity and credibility. The story is told about a Christian couple who kept their children in church, taught them the Bible and Christian values, and led them to faith in Christ. When their children were very young, the parents also led them to believe in Santa Claus. When the oldest child found out that there really is not a Santa Claus, he said, "Maybe I should look into this Jesus business, too."

Santa Claus. The Easter bunny. The great pumpkin. The tooth fairy. These and others are cute little fictions and fairy tales that children enjoy. It is all right to tell children about them if parents and other adults make it clear that they are not real. Keep fact and fiction clearly distinct and separate in their minds. Never undermine their faith in truth *or in your own truthfulness* by "innocent" falsehoods. As parents and other adults in their lives, our integrity before them is priceless and must never be compromised in their minds.

Lying began when Satan lied to himself that he would "be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:12 - 15). He convinced a significant number of angels to follow him (2 Peter 2:4). He lied to Eve, our first mother, brazenly contradicting what God had plainly said (Genesis 3:1 - 5). Jesus said that Satan "is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). Satan told the *big* lie (independence from God), and every lie since then is in some way the offspring of that original lie.

"The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies" (Psalm 58:3). Of course, no new-born baby gets up and walks around the maternity ward telling lies to the nurses and the other infants. This passage emphasizes the fact that the personal history of the wicked can be traced back to the very beginning of their moral agency. Their pattern of falsehood began as soon as they recognized truth from falsehood, and chose falsehood against truth.

The prophet Isaiah said, "The foolish person will speak foolishness, and his heart will work iniquity: to practice ungodliness, to utter error against the LORD, to keep the hungry unsatisfied, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. Also, the schemes of the schemer are evil; he devises wicked plans to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaks justice" (Isaiah 32:6, 7).

In confessing the sins of the nation, Isaiah included "transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood" (Isaiah 59:13).

If we are ever tempted to lie in order to get ahead financially, we should remember Proverbs 19:22, "A poor man is better than a liar."

In the word of the Lord, the prophet Jeremiah leveled this charge against the ungodly of his day: "Like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me', says the LORD. Everyone take heed to his neighbor, and do not trust any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanderers. Everyone will deceive his neighbor, and will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity" (Jeremiah 9:3 - 5). "Their tongue is an arrow shot out; it speaks deceit; one speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but in his heart he lies in wait" (verse 8).

Earlier, the psalmist David wrote concerning Doeg the Edomite (as a representative of all people of his character): "Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, and lying rather than speaking righteousness. You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue" (Psalm 52:1 - 4).

David prayed, "Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked, from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity, who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows – bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the blameless; suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear" (Psalm 64:2 - 4).

"An evildoer gives heed to false lips; a liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue" (Proverbs 17:4).

"Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool, much less lying lips to a prince" (Proverbs 17:7).

God is true and a God of truth (Deuteronomy 32:4). God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Jesus Christ is the truth (John 14:6). Lying and falsehood are completely and eternally opposite and contrary to the nature and character of God. Lying stands condemned before the God of truth.

The word of God speaks clearly and forcefully about the sin of lying.

"These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16 - 19).

"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD" (Proverbs 12:22).

Because lying is so totally contrary to the truth and such a destructive evil, God hates it and has inveighed against it in the most serious terms.

"Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous" (Psalm 31:18).

"The mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped" (Psalm 63:11).

"Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given to you, or what shall be done to you, you false tongue? Sharp arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree!" (Psalm 120:2 - 4).

"A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape" (Proverbs 19:5). "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish" (verse 9).

"A false witness shall perish" (Proverbs 21:28).

"But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

*Gossip and slander.*

These are siblings of lying. They include talebearing and also false accusations, especially in criminal and legal proceedings. They are an ancient evil. In the Mosaic Law, God sternly commanded, "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16).

In Proverbs 14:25 we read, "A true witness delivers souls, but a deceitful witness speaks lies."

"The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered" (Proverbs 11:9).

When the soldiers who came to be baptized asked John the Baptist, "What shall we do?" he replied, "Do not intimidate anyone or accused falsely, and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14).

Any attempt to create a false negative impression about someone is slander, even if the words themselves are true. The story is told of a ship captain who deeply disliked his first mate and wanted to get him into trouble. So every three or four days the captain wrote in the ship's log:

"The first mate was sober today." In fact, the first mate was sober every day; yet the captain deliberately left the impression that the first mate had been drunk the other days. The captain told the truth in order to create a vicious lie.

"Do not malign a servant to his master, lest he curse you, and you be found guilty" (Proverbs 30:10).

Among the perpetrators of the ancient evils that characterize the gentile world, we find "whisperers," and "backbiters" (Romans 1:29, 30).

To the wicked God says, "You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son" (Psalm 50:19, 20).

Without doubt the easiest, most casual and stubbornly defended sin is *gossip*.

"Oh, but it's true!"

That is what makes it gossip. If it were *not* true, it would not be gossip; it would be *slander*. The two go together, and gossip leads directly to slander. "He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip" (Proverbs 20:19 NASB). Notice the connection between the two.

"The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body" (Proverbs 18:8; 26:22 NASB). Stay away from gossip and the gossiper, no matter how "tasty" the "tidbits" might be.

"An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire. A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 16:27, 28).

"He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 17:9).

"A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Proverbs 11:13).

"Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool" (Proverbs 10:18).

Remember this three-fold test: (1) is it true; (2) is it necessary; (3) is it helpful.

In 2 Timothy 3:1 - 5, the apostle Paul describes what people will become in the last days. Slanderers are included in the indictment. The entire passage describes contemporary society apart from Christ. These are truly "the last days."

Gossip, talebearing, backbiting, slander – these and the like have no place among believers. None. Paul was deeply concerned over the church at Corinth. In his second epistle he wrote, "For I fear, lest when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults" (2 Corinthians 12:20).

These are the features of Hell. They have no place in Heaven; therefore they have no place in the Church.

Paul instructed Timothy not to include younger widows among those receiving assistance from the church because with it they will "learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not." Instead, they are to marry godly men and become godly homemakers (1 Timothy 5:13, 14).

He also instructed Titus to teach the older women, "that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers,..." (Titus 2:3).

Slander has consequences, both to the people who are being slandered and also to the people who are doing the slandering.

"A north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue an angry countenance" (Proverbs 25:23). "Countenance" here is in the plural in Hebrew. A backbiter will make a lot of people angry at him or her. A backbiter will provoke a "rainstorm" on himself or herself. There is something to be said also for the King James version of this verse: "The north wind drives away rain; so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue." One of the best ways to squelch gossipers is to look them straight in the eye with a stern look that says, "What you are saying is making me angry." When gossip loses its perverse pleasure, it stops. When gossip loses its audience, it stops.

Of the many consequences of slander, the worst by far are eternal. The psalmist David was speaking both for himself and for God when he said, "Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy" (Psalm 101:5).

" LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow man..." (Psalm 15:1 - 3 NIV).

*Scorning.*

Scorn includes scoffing and mockery. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for it is *luwts* (pronounced "loots"). It means "to make mouths." It is verbal abuse. In the New Testament the Greek word for it is *empaiktes* (pronounced "em-pike'-tays"). It is a prominent feature of the last days. The apostle Peter writes, "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" (2



Peter 3:3 KJV). Jude refers to this apostolic warning in his epistle. "They told you there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts" (Jude 18).

Scoffers are everywhere: the local bar, the home, the classroom where instructors bully Christian students, entertainment, the media. Atheism has become bold. Books by atheists sell in the millions. Unbelievers want to be told what they want to hear. They want someone to make unbelief sound plausible. "For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh..." (2 Peter 2:18).

"Scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge" (Proverbs 1:22).

"Surely He [God] scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34).

"He who reproves a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man gets himself a blemish. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:7, 8). Verse 12 says, "If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you alone will bear it."

"A wise son hears his father's instructions, but a scorner does not hear rebukes" (Proverbs 13:1).

"A scorner seeks wisdom, and finds it not" (Proverbs 14:6). "Fools mock at sin" (verse 9).

"A scorner does not love the one who reproves him; neither will he go to the wise" (Proverbs 15:12).

"Flog a mocker, and the simple will learn prudence" (Proverbs 19:25 NIV). "When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise" (Proverbs 21:11). When a mocker is punished, the naive will be wary. They suddenly realize that he isn't so smart after all. In fact he isn't smart *at all*.

"Judgments are prepared for scoffers" (Proverbs 19:29). An example of this is found in Acts 13:6 - 12. When Saul (later named Paul) and Barnabas were in Cyprus on their first missionary journey, they were invited by Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul, to share the word of God with him. With the proconsul was a sorcerer, a false prophet, by the name of Elymas. Elymas opposed the apostles in an effort to turn the proconsul away from faith in Christ. Saul (Paul) became "fed up" with his interference. Full of the Holy Spirit, Paul confronted the sorcerer and pronounced temporary blindness on him. It happened immediately. It also had an immediate and profound effect on the proconsul, who was converted on the spot.

"Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave. Yes, strife and reproach will cease" (Proverbs 22:10).

"Scoffers ensnare a city, but wise men turn away wrath" (Proverbs 29:8). Hotheads and big-mouths are dangerous. They have no place in diplomacy, international and otherwise.

"Men detest a mocker" (Proverbs 24:9 NIV).

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" (Psalm 1:1). In The Message, Eugene H. Peterson paraphrases the last part of the verse this way: "You don't go to Smart-Mouth College."

*Cursing, bitterness, and blasphemy.*

We come now to some of the ugliest and most offensive perversions of speech. Cursing and bitterness are a direct verbal assault on another human being, who by virtue of that person's humanity is created in the image of God. Thus it is an implied blasphemy against God Himself. We remember James 3:8 - 10, "But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, *who have been made in the similitude of God* [emphasis added]. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so." This is why blasphemy is included in this category.

The psalmist David prayed, "Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; preserve me from violent men, who plan evil things in their hearts; they continually gather together for war. They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips" (Psalm 140:1 - 3). Psalm 10:7 says concerning the wicked, "His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is oppression and iniquity." The apostle Paul quotes from both of these passages in his composite indictment of the gentile world (Romans 3:10 - 18).

David prayed that God would defeat and scatter his enemies. "For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be taken in their pride, and for the cursing and lying which they speak" (Psalm 59:11, 12).

Under the Law Of Moses, given directly by God Himself, anyone who cursed his father or his mother incurred the death penalty. "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:17). "Everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him" (Leviticus 20:9). Also, Proverbs 20:20 warns, "Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness."

If God pronounces capital punishment on an offense, that offense must be a capital offense and therefore merit capital punishment. The penalty demonstrates the harm done by the offense, the corresponding guilt of the crime, and the seriousness of the Lawgiver in dealing with it. With such a penalty attached to cursing one's father or mother, perhaps it very seldom had to be carried out.

Lest we dismiss this as only a part of the Law of Moses, let us look at what Jesus said. Jesus Himself expanded this to include the hatred expressed in bitter anger and verbal contempt toward others as human beings. "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca' [an Aramaic term of contempt] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool' [as a form of verbal abuse] shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:22). Jesus made it clear that God is just as serious about verbal abuse today as He was back during the Old Testament.

The apostle Paul wrote that believers are not to associate with so-called "believers" who use reviling, abusive, slandering language (1 Corinthians 5:11). He also stated that such people shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10).

The highest and most sinful verbal act of all is blasphemy. Blasphemy is speaking evil or irreverently of God Himself. It includes claiming deity for oneself. In the Old Testament, this was punishable by death. "Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death" (Leviticus 24:16).

These offences still incur the same guilt and the guilty will be held accountable. At present, under God's forbearance, these penalties have been deferred until the judgment in order to give people opportunity to repent and be forgiven through faith in Christ.

The prophet Isaiah answered the blasphemy of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, by this stern word from the Lord: "Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice, and lifted up your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel" (2 Kings 19:22).

The wicked "set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth" (Psalm 73:9).

Through the prophet Malachi, God said to the people of Judah, "Your words have been harsh against Me" (Malachi 3:13).

Jesus included blasphemy among the things that come out of the heart of man (Mark 7:22).

Jesus specifically warned about speaking against and blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:32; Luke 12:10).

In 2 Timothy 3:1 - 5, the apostle Paul foretold what people would become in the perilous times of the last days. "Blasphemers" is one of them. This is clearly demonstrated in the insulting and false charges that modern atheists level against God. Because they are atheists, they do not even believe in the existence of the God they malign. They fabricate their imaginary "god" out of false attributes and then fulminate against it, erroneously assuming that they are bringing valid charges against God Himself, whom they do not know and whose character, moral authority and responsibilities, and wise and benevolent purposes they completely misunderstand.

Jude affirms what Enoch prophesied: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14, 15).

### *Consequences.*

Every misuse of speech is a perversion of the God-given purpose of intelligent verbal communication. By its very nature and consequences, every misuse of speech is harmful. Its direct tendency is destructive.

King David said concerning his enemies, "Swords are in their lips" (Psalm 59:7). We remember Proverbs 16:27 and 28: "An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire. A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends."

The enemies of the prophet Jeremiah said, "Come and let us attack him with the tongue" (Jeremiah 18:18). The tongue is an effective and destructive attack weapon in the mouth of the ungodly.

The consequences of perverted speech often fall right back on the one doing the talking. Proverbs 10:14 warns, "The mouth of the foolish is near destruction." Also, Proverbs 13:3 says, "He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction." And Proverbs 17:20 states, "He who has a perverse tongue falls into evil."

The psalmist prayed, "Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous" (Psalm 31:18). "Let not a slanderer be established in the earth" (Psalm 140:11).

God Himself "overthrows the words of the faithless" (Proverbs 22:12). God opposes evil and works to frustrate those who do evil, including those who speak evil.

Their mouths must be stopped. Paul wrote to Titus that even in their time, there were "many insubordinate [rebellious], both idle talkers and deceivers, especially of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain" (Titus 1:10, 11).

Sooner or later it will happen. The misuse of speech will come to an end. God Himself will put an end to it at the judgment. The psalmist David said confidently, "The mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped" (Psalm 63:11).

The inspired apostle stated clearly, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Romans 3:19).

**Is Anyone in Control?**

*"One minute of keeping your mouth shut is worth more than an hour of explanations"*

"Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

"He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction" (Proverbs 13:3).

One of the most important prayers I have ever prayed is: "Dear Lord, help me to keep my big mouth shut."

It is said that the first screw that works loose in a person's head is the one that hold the tongue in place.

Remember James? He is the one who wrote the Bible verse that says, "No man can tame the tongue" (James 3:8). So, the question is this: how can we control the humanly uncontrollable? It comes back to the heart. If the heart is out of control, the rest is out of control. The heart is out of control if it is following its own desires in opposition to reason and divine revelation. So then, no one can control the tongue as long as the heart is out of control. The tongue can be controlled only if the heart is perfect – that is, if the heart is surrendered to God and one is following His word with all the light one has. If we live and walk in the Spirit, we are controlled by the Spirit. That includes our tongue. A Spirit-controlled person should have a Spirit-controlled tongue.

Essential to this process is a thorough knowledge of the Bible's instructions concerning the discipline of our tongue, coupled with a resolute commitment to follow those instructions

diligently out of love for God and for others, and also out of a proper regard for our own well-being.

The basic rule of verbal control is *restraint*. This includes thinking before we speak, keeping our emotions from driving our responses, and being selective in our words.

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness" (Proverbs 15:1, 2).

"He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm [literally, cool] spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive" (Proverbs 17:27, 28).

In other words, *chill out*.

When I was a child, I noticed a poem that hung on the wall of my father's business establishment. It read:

"The wise old owl is a wise old bird;  
The less he spoke, the more he heard;  
The more he heard, the less he spoke.  
Why can't we be like that wise old bird?"

This principle has been expressed in the following ways:

"Blessed are those who say nothing when there is nothing to be said."



"Wise is the person who knows what not to say, and remembers not to say it."

"Some people speak as they think, and some more often."

"When your mind goes blank, be sure to turn off the sound."

"When you are in deep water, be sure to keep your mouth closed."

Sometimes restraint means simply refusing to say something evil. Job resolved, "My lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit" (Job 27:4).

The psalmist David wrote, "I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress" (Psalm 17:3). "I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle while the wicked are before me" (Psalm 39:1).

In Psalm 15 he asks, "LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" The answer: "He who walks uprightly and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend ..."

We are specifically commanded not to speak evil of any kind. God commanded Israel through Moses, "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice" (Exodus 23:1, 2). Remember that on this basis, John the Baptist instructed the soldiers who came to be baptized, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely..." (Luke 3:14). Paul wrote, "Speak evil of no one" (Titus 3:1).

"Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you" (Proverbs 4:24).

The apostle Paul commanded believers, "Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). He continues, "Let no corrupt [*sapros*, rotten] communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (verses 29 - 31).

This is repeated in Colossians 3:8, "But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth."

Get rid of it. Haul it off. Good riddance. I have never seen anyone running after a garbage truck pleading, "Oh, please, can't I keep at least *some* of my garbage? It's been such a part of me for so long, it's hard to let go of all at once. Next week I'll let you have the rest. I promise. Oh, please. *Please!*" Anyone who would do that needs help.

We remember what James wrote by the Spirit: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law" (James 4:11). "Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged" (James 5:9 NIV).

The apostle Peter commands us to lay aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking (1 Peter 2:1). We are not to return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, because (quoting from Psalm 34) "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile [deceit]" (1 Peter 3:9, 10).

### *Political Speech.*

The heat of a political campaign tends to fire people up, including Christians. Important issues are at stake: morality, economics, freedom, human rights, national security, justice, the environment, to name just a few. Although these are on-going concerns, decision times such as

elections bring them to a high level of awareness, passion and involvement. These are also times of intemperate and even ugly speech.

Christians are (or should be) people of clear convictions. We know (or should know) what is at stake. We know what is being threatened, the source of the threat, and who is doing the threatening. We are people of action. We (like others) are also verbal – at times *very* verbal. We try to stay informed and to inform others of the issues. We are advocates, endeavoring to persuade others. In the process we find ourselves caught up in the ideological, emotional and verbal momentum. At times the compulsion to speak is all that even very disciplined believers can handle, and more than most people do. Nevertheless, discipline ourselves we must. It is the command of God. We must not allow ourselves to sin with our tongue. We must not ruin our witness before the world. For example, an angry Christian looks ugly on TV.

God said through Moses, "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people" (Exodus 23:28). We must use our civil rights in a civil way. Speak the truth. Point out the facts. Support good people and good policies; oppose those that are not good. In doing so, always respect the person and the office he or she holds. No personal attacks or demeaning remarks.

Paul quoted the above words of God to Moses in his apology to Ananias, the high priest (Acts 23:5). For some reason Paul was not aware that the person who gave the command to hit him in the face was the current high priest, Ananias the son of Nebedeus. Paul reacted by calling him a "whitewashed wall." From what we know about this Ananias, Paul's accusation was very true; nevertheless, Paul apologized to him out of respect for the office he held.

"Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter" (Ecclesiastes 10:20). From this comes the saying, "a little birdie told me."

*Speaking In God's Presence.*

Everything we say is said in God's presence. It is impossible to talk "behind God's back." Every curse word, every profanity, every casual and disrespectful use of His holy name is spoken right in His face.

The psalmist acknowledged, "There is not a word on my tongue, but, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether" (Psalm 139:4).

Here are the words of the Preacher: "Walk prudently when you go into the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2).

This passage of Scripture is about making rash vows before God, particularly under the statutes of the Old Covenant that regulated vows. Nonetheless, it contains a core principle that applies to us today. We must be careful what we say in God's presence.

When all of Job's wordiness had finally run its course, suddenly, "the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: 'Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me' (Job 38:1 - 3).

*(Gulp!)*

At times our only appropriate response is to keep silent before the Majesty On High.

In the days of King Josiah, the prophet Zechariah urged the nation of Judah, "Be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD; for the day of the LORD is at hand, for the LORD has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests" (Zechariah 1:7).

*A Time To Keep Silent.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1 - 8 says that there is a time for everything, including a time to keep silent as well as a time to speak.

A well known saying reminds us that sometimes "silence is golden." That adage finds its roots in the word of God.

"He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his peace. A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Proverbs 11:12, 13).

"A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness" (Proverbs 12:23).

These biblical injunctions refer to those times when telling what we know will do harm rather than good. Is it necessary or even helpful to harm that person? Will sharing that bit of information help bring healing, reconciliation, wholeness? If not, keep it to yourself.

Here are some more biblical instructions:

"Do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant curse you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others" (Ecclesiastes 7:21, 22).

"He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction" (Proverbs 13:3).

We remember Proverbs 17:27, 28, "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive."

"Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23).

In the word of the Lord, the prophet Amos listed the many sins of the northern kingdom of Israel. They were about to suffer the providential judgment of God [in 722-721 BC] by the hands of the invading Assyrians. The prophet advised, "Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time" (Amos 5:13).

Some things are just not to be said. Period.

"Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words" (Proverbs 23:9).

"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes" (Proverbs 26:4, 5). In other words, do not answer a fool *in the same manner* (words and attitude) as his folly, but answer him *to the extent of* his folly, exposing it directly and pointedly.

"Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips" (Proverbs 27:2). To praise yourself is pride. On the other hand, it is false humility to reject the honest and appreciative praise of others. It is all right to let people know that they have encouraged you. Just say "thank you."

"Do not say, 'Why were the former days better than these?' For you do not inquire wisely concerning this" (Ecclesiastes 7:10). Ah, yes, "the good old days." Selective memory.

When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, Jeremiah pleaded, "Ah, Lord GOD! I cannot speak, for I am a youth." The Lord reprimanded him, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak" (Jeremiah 1:6, 7).

### *Paul's Injunction To Women To Keep Silent.*

In 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35, Paul says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church."

Later, Paul wrote to Timothy, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2:11 - 14).

In some places The Scriptures set down specific rules that apply to specific conditions. Whenever and wherever those conditions exist, the biblical rules apply. If the conditions no longer exist, the rules are no longer needed. For example, where slavery no longer exists, the biblical rules that define the obligations of slaves and that protect their rights are no longer operative. The Bible did not create slavery; society did. The application of biblical principles eventually did away with slavery in enlightened societies; however, while slavery still existed in those societies, Christian principles were needed to help people deal with it.

In the cultural milieu of the Greco/Roman world, the average woman was uneducated. In the church these women wanted to learn, to enjoy their equal rights with men in the liberating freedom of the gospel. In fact, Paul wrote to Timothy, "Let the women learn." The problem arose when in their eagerness to learn, they would ask their husbands questions during the church meetings. This was disruptive. The logical solution: listen in church; ask questions at home. This enriched their marriage and home life. Before "hubby" was converted, he might not have cared if his wife was ignorant. He could control her better. Now that he is saved, his heart is changed. He loves his wife and wants the best for her. As he answered her questions, he watched her grow in the knowledge and understanding of the word God. This brought her more into his world and he into hers. They were happier and their "coupleness" grew.

In 1 Timothy 2:11 - 14, another principle is also operating – the order of creation. Adam was created first, then Eve. With priority came headship, that is, executive responsibilities and giftings. Women do not respect men who are not mature enough to step up and make the difficult decisions. They usually admire the men who are.

*In general*, men are made for executive authority; women are made for administrative authority. The husband is the head of the house. The wife is the manager of the house. He is "waffle" (in one square at a time); she is "spaghetti." She can sit in the kitchen with the TV on and supper cooking, monitor the children playing outside, and balance the checkbook – all at the same time. He would become confused and frustrated if he tried to do all that. So, let her "guide the house" (1 Timothy 5:14). Give her a helping hand (especially if she has an "outside job"); take the garbage out; fix the screen door. That is *servant headship*. Be there for the big decisions. But don't frustrate her by trying to micromanage her or the home. That is her place, her authority, her gifting.

Adam was made from the dust – refined. Eve came from Adam's side – twice refined. Man tends to be more cerebral, goal-oriented, decisive. If two men have a disagreement, they tend to sit down, lay it all out "on the table," settle it, shake hands, and go have coffee. It's over. Women tend to be more emotional, more sensitive. Things are not resolved until they "feel" it. A husband and wife have a disagreement. He hurts her feelings. He apologizes to her. Half an hour later she brings it up again. He says, "I thought we had settled that. I *told* you I was sorry." He is thinking like a man. But for her, it is not over until she *feels* like it is over. So, hold her and give her honest reassurances until you hear the "kitten" purring again. So, husbands, "live with your wives in an understanding way" (1 Peter 3:7 NASB).

In general, women are more spiritually sensitive. They tend to be more open to the Holy Spirit. They also tend to be more open to all kinds of "new age" and other kinds of so-called "spirituality." Women tend to base their spiritual life less on concrete doctrine and more on inner feelings and experiences. That is why Paul did not allow women to have doctrinal authority over men, especially in the cultural conditions mentioned previously where women were kept in ignorance. Men tend to think more concretely, and concrete propositional truth is what sustains the church and the believer.



A wife will have no problem submitting to her own husband as the church is subject to Christ if the husband will love her just as Christ loves the church, and they do so in mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21 - 33).

### *Oaths and Inappropriate Language.*

In the Sermon On The Mount Jesus instructed believers not to swear oaths.

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:33 - 37).

James echoes our Lord's command. "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth, or with any other oath. But let your 'Yes.' be 'Yes' and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment" (James 5:12).

On another subject, the apostle Paul warns, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (Ephesians 5:11, 12).

The prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles and others in the New Testament are very explicit in identifying and naming specific sins. Yet some of those sins are so perverse that it is shameful to describe them in all their sordid details. Expose them, but avoid the lurid descriptions.

Ephesians 5:4 names foolish [silly and mindless] talking and coarse jesting among the things that are not fitting for believers' speech.

### *Speak Cautiously.*

Ecclesiastes 3:7 says that there is a time to speak. When we are called upon to confess Christ, when the truth must be told, when the truth must be defended, when harm must be prevented, silence is not "golden." It is just plain "yellow."

We find an example of this in the Book Of Esther. Because of a situation described in Esther, Chapter 3, all Jews in the Persian Empire were placed under a death sentence. Esther, a Jew, was queen. Mordecai, her uncle, sent a message to her. "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13, 14).

This was Esther's reply: "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" (Esther 4:15, 16).

What happened is also recorded in the Book Of Esther. Esther fasted and prayed. She formed a plan. She was courageous. She took action. Esther had to speak up, even though it meant putting her life on the line to rescue her fellow Jews. In doing so, Esther spoke to the king very cautiously and with diplomatic skill. God honored her courageous faith, and the Jews were spared.

*What* we say is very important. Of equal importance are *when* we say it and *how* it is said. Remember, it is the soft answer that turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1).

Remember, "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perspective" (Proverbs 17:27, 28).

"He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Proverbs 18:3).

"By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone" (Proverbs 25:15).

"A fool vents all his feelings [spirit], but a wise man holds them back" (Proverbs 29:11).

"Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 29:20).

Remember James 1:19, 20 – "Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

Ecclesiastes 9:17 says, "The words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools." This is a good thing to keep in mind whenever we hear demagogues endeavoring to sway the masses by their rhetoric.

We are living in a time when many act as though they can get their point across by out-talking others. How often we have seen (and been verbally inundated by) people who try to win by burying their opponent(s) under an avalanche of words. They seize the discourse, monopolize it, control it, and dominate it. When it is over, they smugly assume that they have conquered. They assume that they are smart and right, and their unthinking admirers think so, too.

"A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; the babbler is no different. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; the words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk is raving madness. A fool also multiplies words" (Ecclesiastes 10:11 - 14a).

The wise avoid mindless verbal conflict, particularly group conflict where at times people only share their mutual ignorance. *Eris* (strive, "debate") is listed among the sins of the Gentiles in Romans 1:28 - 32. It was one of the evils that Paul feared that he might find in the church at Corinth when he arrived (2 Corinthians 12:20).

"But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility [gentleness, mildness, meekness] correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:23 - 26).

Remember, it is the words of the wise, spoken quietly, that should be heard (Ecclesiastes 9:17). If you are looking for someone from whom you can really learn something, it will probably be the person who is not always shooting off his mouth.

Let us pray as did the psalmist David: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

Here is a prayer we all could pray: "Lord, put your arm around my shoulder, and your hand over my mouth."

Amen!

**Sweet Water**

*"As we grow older, we tend to talk less and say more."*

We have endeavored to be thorough, to dig deeply and search out what God says in His word about the obvious realities of the misuse of the God-given endowment of intelligent verbal communication. We waded through the polluted sloughs and backwaters of corrupted human speech.

Now we come to a refreshing oasis. What a relief! Here the water is what it is intended to be, pure and life-giving. This fountain does not and cannot send out at the same place both sweet and bitter water (James 3:11). Its stream is not mixed, because evil mixed with good would pollute what is good and thus corrupt it.

*Metaphors and Similes.*

The Bible describes good speech by several metaphors and similes.

"The mouth of the righteous is a well of life" (Proverbs 10:11a).

"The tongue of the righteous is choice silver" (Proverbs 10:20a).

"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life" (Proverbs 15:4a).

"Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24).

"The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook" (Proverbs 18:4).

"The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel" (Proverbs 20:15).

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprove to an obedient ear" (Proverbs 25:11, 12).

"The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars [literally, masters of the assemblies] are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd" (Ecclesiastes 12:11).

### *Biblical Examples.*

Job was "full of words," as we noted before. He "darkened counsel by words without knowledge" (Job 38:2). Nevertheless, "in all this Job did not sin with his lips" (Job 2:10). Talking a lot increases the danger of sinning, but talking a lot is not sinful in itself. On one occasion, Paul preached until midnight. Afterward, he continued talking until daybreak (Acts 19:6 – 11).

Moses was "mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22).

God was with Samuel "and let none of his words fall to the ground" (1 Samuel 3:19).

Proverbs 31:10 - 31 describes the virtuous woman. One of her qualities is described in verse 26: "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness."

The prophet Zephaniah prophesied, "The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth" (Zephaniah 3:13).

When Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, "the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, 'Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.' But He answered and said to them, 'I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out'" (Luke 19:37 - 40).

No rock is going to praise God in my place! No rock is getting ready to praise Him because I remain silent! In the words of the song:

"Before the rocks cry out, I just have to praise Him.

I just have to thank Him for all that He's done.

"Before all nature rises up to shout,

I just have to praise Him for all that He's done for me."

[Before The Rocks Cry Out. Authors: Rich Cook / David Feit. Copyright © 1977 John T. Benson Publishing Company (ASCAP) / Benson Music Group, Inc.]

Stephen, one of the first deacons, preached the gospel with "great wonders and signs." Some members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia) rose up and disputed with him. "And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:8 - 10).

Paul's speech and preaching "were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4). Spirit-directed and Spirit-confirmed words are powerful.

While Peter was in the act of preaching the gospel to Cornelius the centurion and his household, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word" (Acts 10:44).

Apollos was "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24).

In Revelation 14:1 - 5 we see a picture of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb (Jesus Christ) on Mount Zion. Verse 5 says "in their mouth was found no guile [falsehood], for they are without fault before the throne of God."

#### *Blessings and Benefits Of Godly Speech.*

"The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide" (Psalm 37:30, 31).

"Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding, but a rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding" (Proverbs 10:13).

"The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom" (Proverbs 10:21).

"The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse" (Proverbs 10:31, 32).



"There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health" (Proverbs 12:18).

"The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness" (Proverbs 15:2).

"The lips of the wise disperse knowledge" (Proverbs 15:7a).

"A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23).

"The words of the pure are pleasant" (Proverbs 15:26b).

"The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning" (Proverbs 16:21).

*Speak Truth To Others.*

Speaking truth to others includes more than just making sure that what we say to them is factual. Being true to the facts as we know them is essential, of course. The broader principle includes sharing truth itself with others.

"He who speaks truth declares righteousness" (Proverbs 12:17).

"The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice" (Psalm 37:30)

"My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall bring understanding" (Psalm 49:3).

The prophet Ezekiel received a sobering message from the Lord concerning his solemn obligation to warn the wicked. It is recorded in the book of his prophecy for all who know the truth in order to remind us of our same solemn obligation.

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; also you will have also delivered your soul" (Ezekiel 3:17 - 21).

Regarding our obligation to be truthful in what we say to others, the Lord said through the prophet Zechariah, "Speak each man the truth to his neighbor" (Zechariah 8:16). The apostle Paul quoted this very command in Ephesians 4:25, reaffirming that it is a permanent universal moral obligation.

In Ephesians 5:18 - 21 Paul instructs believers, "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God."

The obligation to speak truth implies a corresponding obligation to listen to the truth. "Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge; for it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you; let them all be fixed upon your lips, so that your trust may be in the LORD" (Proverbs 22:17 - 19).

"Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge" (Proverbs 23:12).

Sometimes we are advised to "listen to your heart." That is good advice *if the heart is right with God and established in the truth*. Proverbs 16:23 says "The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips."

The apostle Paul wrote, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). We all have opinions on matters of faith and practice. It has been said that in some cases, "when you get two Christians together, you will get three opinions." When it comes to faith and practice, whatever our differences and preferences on the details might be, we are all to support corporate belief and conduct. This unifies our teaching in the church and our witness before the world. "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be likeminded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5, 6).

Believers are instructed to share their faith with others. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one (Colossians 4:6). The right amount of salt flavors, but too much salt ruins the flavor. Christians must not have sharp, "salty" tongues. Peter instructs us, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, *with meekness and fear* [NIV: gentleness and respect]" (1 Peter 3:15, emphasis added).

*Speak God's Word.*

If worship and praise to God is the highest use of human speech, speaking God's word to others is next in order of importance.

In Exodus 13 God commanded Israel to keep the Feast Of Unleavened Bread. One purpose was to make sure that future generations would remember that God had brought them as a nation out of Egypt. "And you shall tell your son in that day, 'This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8, 9).

Later, Moses said to a new generation of Israelites, "For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:11 - 14).

In Romans 10:6 - 10 the apostle Paul quoted from this passage in support of justification by faith, confessed by our mouth. He shows how this is fulfilled in believers as we receive the word of faith. "But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead), But what does it say? 'The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach); that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation."

The psalmist declared, "My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know their limits" (Psalm 71:15). "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

God's word is the grand theme of Psalm 119. In it the psalmist affirms his resolve to be faithful to speak the word of God to others. "With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth" (verse 13). "I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed" (verse 46). "My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness" (verse 172).

We sense the urgency in Jesus' command: "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops" (Matthew 10:27).

An angel said to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:13, 14). The angel could have spoken the words of salvation, but God gave that task and privilege to believers. Peter followed through on his assignment. God honored the message of the gospel. "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word" (Acts 10:44). Peter reported this to the elders of the church at Jerusalem: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as upon us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15).

God uses *the word* to save people and establish them in the faith.

Paul wrote to Titus, "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

So, "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so" (Psalm 107:2).

*Speaking The Truth Encourages and Benefits Others.*

In contrast to the false accusations that his "comforters" were heaping on him, Job said that if the situation were reversed, his words to them would be motivated by a desire to do them good. "I also could speak as you do, if your soul were in my soul's place. I could heap up words against you, and shake my head at you; but I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the comfort of my lips would relieve your grief" (Job 16:4, 5).

"The words of the wicked are, 'Lie in wait for blood,' but the mouth of the upright will deliver them" (Proverbs 12:6). Verse 25 reads, "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad."

In a prophecy that referred ahead to Jesus in His earthly ministry and mission, the pre-incarnate Messiah affirmed, "The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary" (Isaiah 50:4). This He most certainly did when He came from Heaven at His first advent.

After the apostle Paul by the Spirit stated the sequence of events when Christ returns, he urged us to "comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

In Ephesians 4:14 - 32, Paul by the Spirit laid down basic principles on how believers are to live our "heavenly life" right now here on earth. As we noted earlier, some of these principles have to do with our speech, both how we are *not* to speak and how we *are* to speak. In verse 29 He writes, "Let no corrupt communication [rotten talk] proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

Paul's instructions to Titus included this: "...in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you" (Titus 2:7, 8). This goes right along with what Paul wrote in Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

We are to speak words that bless people, and that includes blessing even our enemies. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Paul wrote, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14). Only people who are motivated by the love of God can and will do this. Paul himself obeyed the

divine commands that he gave to other believers. He wrote, "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it" (1 Corinthians 4:12).

Peter likewise wrote, "...not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but contrariwise blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

### *Sound Speech Brings Good To Ourselves.*

Have you noticed how often we come back to Proverbs, chapter 12? It has much to say about our speech. Verse 14 says, "A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth, and the recompense of a man's hands will be rendered to him."

Let us go on and see what else Proverbs says about the benefits and blessings that we ourselves receive as a result of sound speech.

"A man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth, but the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence. He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction" (Proverbs 13:2, 3).

"In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, but the lips of the wise will preserve them" (Proverbs 14:3).

"The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips. Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:2, 3).

"A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth, and from the produce of his lips he shall be filled" (Proverbs 18:20).

"Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23).

"He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend" (Proverbs 22:11).

### *Spirit-controlled and Spirit-directed Speech.*

Sound speech is not merely a "do-it-yourself" assignment. If we were left to ourselves, we all would fail (and have failed). Remember, "no man can tame the tongue" (James 3:8).

It seems that where we need grace the most is in the discipline of our speech. So it is a great encouragement to us to know that where we need grace the most is where the most grace is provided for us. It is not a coincidence that James also says that God gives more grace (James 4:8). James follows this by quoting Proverbs 3:34, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Then James goes on to say, "Therefore submit to God" (verse 7). That is the key. *God's grace controls in us what and only what we submit to Him, and only so long as we continue to submit it and ourselves to Him.* By submitting our tongue to God, we open up to His "taming grace." After all, God created our tongue; it belongs to Him; He knows how to control it as we submit to His Spirit.

When God called Moses, Israel's future leader began "begging off," pleading his lack of eloquence. "So the LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say'" (Exodus 4:11, 12).

God's promise to Moses is a promise to every communicator of the word of God. It strengthened and encouraged them in the beginning of their ministry as they started out with a sense of human inadequacy to follow God's call. It helped to sustain them at times when they stepped down from the pulpit so discouraged over their sermon that they felt embarrassed to greet the people as they left the service. It reassured the Sunday School teacher that what he



or she said to that class of hard to manage children would in some way reach their minds and hearts. It has given courage to believers who struggle with what to say to someone who is not saved, whether it be friend, family member, teacher, employer.

God will be with our mouth and teach us what to say. It is His promise.

"The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD" (Proverbs 16:1).

"No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me, says the LORD" (Isaiah 54:17).

Jesus said, "And you will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (Matthew 10:18 - 20). "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist" (Luke 21:15).

So, "go, stand ... and speak to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:20).

### *Tongues And Prophecy.*

Speaking in tongues and prophetic utterances are a unique function of intelligent verbal communication. The tongues themselves are intelligent speech, just not *intelligible to the speaker*, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:14, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." They are intelligible speech to God, to angels, and to people who might be familiar with the language spoken, as was the case on the Day Of Pentecost when the people heard the 120 Galilean disciples in the upper room speaking in their native languages (Acts 2:5 - 11).

We are familiar with the Spirit-inspired utterances and writings of the Old Testament prophets. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The same applies to the writings of the New Testament.

Although tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy in the church (1 Corinthians 12:10) are given by the Holy Spirit, they are *not* inspired Scripture and they are not equal with or supplementary to inspired Scripture. In fact, they are to be judged by The Scriptures. Paul's inspired and authoritative teachings and instructions on speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophetic utterances are found in 1 Corinthians, chapters 12 through 14.

Although these utterances come under the subject of human speech, we will not consider them here. I address them in my book, [What You Should Know About The Holy Spirit](#). Many others also have written on the subject.

### *Praise And Worship.*

Praise and worship to God is the highest form and purpose of intelligent verbal expression and communication. It is going on continuously in God's presence in Heaven and in the heavenlies. It is the incense that arises from the hearts and voices of true worshippers, as Jesus defined them. "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23, 24).

The psalms overflow with praises to God. For example, David said, "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psalm 34:1).

David expressed the same purpose in Psalm 35:28, "My tongue shall speak of Your righteousness and of Your praise all the day long."

In Psalm 40:3 David declared, "He has put a new song in my mouth – praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD."

In his penitential psalm David pleaded with God, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise" (Psalm 51:14, 15).

David wrote Psalm 63 when he was in the wilderness of Judea. In that psalm he said to God, "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips" (Psalm 63:3 - 5).

Psalm 145 proclaims God's majesty and His love for His creatures, and how this inspires universal and never-ending praise to Him. The first part of the psalm is David's personal outpouring of worship and praise to the Lord. "I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness" (Psalm 145:1 - 7). Verse 21 climaxes the psalm with this declaration: "My mouth shall speak of the praise of the LORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever."

Because praise and worship to God is the highest form and purpose of intelligent verbal expression and communication, anyone who does not worship God in spirit and truth (as Jesus said) is neither exercising his or her highest verbal function and obligation nor living up to his or her highest verbal potential, no matter how verbally gifted that person might be. Writers, speakers, singers, artists who do not worship and glorify God are living and functioning far below their gifted ability and even their full humanity. The greatest literature, speeches, songs and art have been created by people who employed their genius to the glory and praise of God.

The eloquent; the wordcrafters; the masters of language, speech, literature, song and art; yes, the uneducated, the children, the "man on the street" and the person in the pew – "let the high praises of God be in their mouth!" (Psalm 149:6).

"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD" (Psalm 150:6).

Our approach to God, our fellowship and communion with Him, is exclusively through "the man Christ Jesus," our only Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5). "Therefore through Him [Christ] let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15).

The day will come, God declares, "that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (Isaiah 45:23). In Romans 14:11 the apostle Paul repeats these words of God: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9 - 11). This is the word of the Lord.

#### *A Propositional Revelation.*

The gospel of Jesus Christ is propositional – that is, it is set forth in a definite verbal statement. Although language is inadequate to describe the indescribable – "thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15), or search out the unsearchable: "how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33); and "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8) – language is nevertheless fully adequate to communicate everything we need to know and understand about faith and conduct. It is perfectly suited to communicate the gospel to *everyone* in each one's language and at each one's level of knowledge and comprehension.

Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Remember, an angel of God said to Cornelius, a Romans soldier, "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, and he will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:13, 14).

"The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart man believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame' [Isaiah 28:16]. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' [Joel 2:23]" (Romans 10:8 - 13).

"Take words with you, and return to the LORD" (Hosea 14:2).

### *The Talk Of Heaven.*

In his second epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul described the experience of a man he "knew in Christ" fourteen years previous to Paul's writing the epistle. In all probability he was speaking of himself and his own personal experience. He says, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know; God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:2 - 4).

The ultimate in intelligent verbal expression – worship, praise, the communication of the divine mysteries, the joy of the interpersonal communion and communication of believers – is out of this world. It is the talk of Heaven.

*Benediction.*

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17).

Amen.