

Out of the Heart



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:37).

WE TALK ABOUT OUR SINS being forgiven by the Lord, but do we understand what that means? It means that we, who once were alienated from God (Col. 1:21), are now reconciled to Him through the death of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:18). It means that we, who were once condemned because of our sins (John 3:18), no longer need to fear any condemnation from them (Rom. 8:1). It means that we, who were facing eternal death (Eph. 2:1), now have the promise of eternal life (1 John 5:12).

Thus, the question is, How can we who (though once alienated from God) are now reconciled to the Lord, who (though once condemned) are now pardoned, and who (though once facing death) now have eternal life, have all these great things happen to us and not be changed, even radically?

We can't. We are born again, new creatures in Christ. And, among the many different ways we manifest this change in our lives, what we say and what we think are among the most important.

No doubt that's why the Bible has so much to say, not only about our words but about our thoughts, as well.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What does James have to say about the power of words? Why does he paint such a negative picture? How does the Bible depict Satan's use of words? Why would God even care what we think?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 14.

THE POWER OF WORDS.

“The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. . . . Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men. . . . Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing” (James 3:6, 9, 10).

Read the entire passage (James 3:2-13). What James says about words is true not only of the spoken but also of the printed word. How many people have been destroyed by words, either spoken or written; at the same time, how many have been strengthened and encouraged by words, written or spoken? Whether transmitted by light (written) or air (sound), either way, words are a powerful force, either for good or for evil.

Notice the images and metaphors James uses to describe the impact of words. Each is listed below. On the line next to them, write out what point James was making with the image he used:

Bits in horses' mouths (vs. 3) _____

Ships (vss. 4, 5) _____

Fire (vss. 5-7) _____

Animals (vss. 7, 8) _____

Springs of water (vss. 11, 12) _____

Trees and vines (vs. 12) _____

In essence, James is saying that the tongue (a symbol for words, speech), though small, has a lot of influence and that its potential for evil is great.

In fact, notice the negativity all through this section. In one place, he even calls the tongue “an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (vs. 8). Obviously, aware of what words can do, he's telling them to remember that because they are Christians they need to act as Christians (see James 2:14-26), and that includes guarding the tongue.

What pain have you felt from someone using harsh or unkind words? At the same time, what joy and happiness have you felt from someone speaking kindly to you? Dwell on these examples (and if you are willing, share them with the class) until you can see, clearly, the power for good or evil in words. Also, why do you think words come so heavy-laden with power?

LOUD-MOUTH (Lev. 19:16).

The verse for today shows that even back in Moses' day, God's people needed to guard their mouths. The word translated "talebearer" here comes from a Hebrew word that means "to go about" as a slanderer, a gossip, or even a traitor.

What's fascinating is that this word appears (in a slightly different form) in Ezekiel 28:5, when—using an earthly potentate as a symbol of Satan—the Lord says: "By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: Therefore thus saith the Lord God; because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God . . ." (Ezek. 28:5, 6). The word *traffick* there comes from the same root word translated "talebearer" in Leviticus 19:16. Without pushing the link too far, it's not hard to see that slander, gossip, and talebearing are all attributes of Satan, unquestionably the greatest slanderer, liar, and talebearer in all creation.

Look up these verses. In each case, what do they all reveal to us about Satan?

Gen. 3:1-4 _____

Job 1:9-11 _____

Zech. 3:1 _____

John 8:44 _____

Rev. 12:10 _____

There's no question: Satan is a loud-mouth, a gossip, a talebearer, and one who traffics in lies, in slander, and in accusations. Thus, when we do the same, even a little, we are reflecting his attributes, not God's. No wonder the Bible puts such an emphasis on words. No wonder that we, who have been redeemed by Christ, who have been forgiven all the things that Satan (or others) could use to make accusations against us, should, of all people, be careful what we say when talking about other people.

At the same time, how do we deal with someone whom we know is doing wrong, especially to someone else? Do we say nothing while harm is happening? How do we remain faithful to the Lord while at the same time not standing idly by as evil unfolds?

HISTORY OF LIES, WORDS OF TRUTH.

The Bible presents a long, tragic history of untruthfulness. It can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The original lie was an outright contradiction of what God had said, directly challenging both His divine authority and His perfect integrity (Gen. 3:16).
2. Early in the history of the race, it became evident that by believing Satan's lie humans became foreigners to the truth and came to reflect the enemy's untruthfulness and deceitfulness in their own fallen nature (Gen. 4:8, 9; 12:10-20; 27:6-24).
3. Jesus indicated that lying and deception were to play an ever-increasing role in the enemy's bid to gain control of the human race (Matt. 7:15; 24:23, 24).
4. Satan's campaign of deception will intensify as time draws to a close (2 Thess. 2:9-12).
5. At last, the tragic history of lying and deception will come to an end (Rev. 21:27; 22:15).

Look up the following text: Ephesians 4:15, 25, 29. Summarize in your own words what Paul is saying here. Notice his emphasis on what we say. What reasons does he give for admonishing us in how we use our words? What does Paul mean when he says that through what we say we may "minister grace unto the hearers"? How do you understand what Paul says here in contrast to the sad, sordid history presented above?

Perhaps there's so much in the Bible about being careful with words, because they come so easy. All we have to do is speak. Imagine, if every time we opened our mouths, bullets, instead of words, flew out. We would, of course, give very careful and thoughtful consideration before we spread our lips. Words, however, can be almost as devastating. Thus, how crucial that we watch them carefully. At the same time, as Paul wrote in Ephesians, words have the potential to do good, as well.

In Ephesians 4:15, Paul talks about speaking the truth "in love." What does that mean? In what ways is not only what we say but how we say it, or even why we say it, crucial?

THOUGHT CRIME.

“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Matt. 12:35).

In 1948, Englishman George Orwell wrote a classic story, *1984*, his vision of a world so tightly controlled by the state that even wrong thoughts were punishable as crimes.

Of course, 1984 has come and gone, and most governments, even today, don’t really desire to control what you think; it’s only what you say or do that concerns them.

Nevertheless, the Bible is clear that God does care about what we think, not just what we say or do.

Read the following texts and then summarize the essence of what they are saying: Exod. 20:17; Deut. 10:16; 1 Sam. 16:7; Matt. 5:8; 12:35; Eph. 5:3.

Though a lot can be derived from these texts, it’s clear that God does care about our thoughts, our motives, our hearts. And the reason is not hard to find: What we think, what’s in our heart, directly impacts what we say or do. Words and actions, either for good or for bad, stem from what Jesus said (Matthew 12) were either the evil or the good treasure stored up in our hearts.

Also, none of us lives in a vacuum; what we say and what we do impacts others, either for good or evil, and what we say and do comes directly from what we think. If we think good, pure thoughts, then, more than likely, good and pure words and acts will follow; if we think evil thoughts, then more than likely evil words and actions will follow.

Numerous times the New Testament, not just the Old, warns about covetousness. In fact, that’s the one sin listed in the Ten Commandments that deals specifically, and solely, with thought alone. Why is covetousness deemed so evil by the Lord that it’s listed right there along with murder and adultery? What’s so bad about coveting, also deemed idolatry? (Col. 3:5). What other evils arise directly from covetousness?

THINK ON THESE THINGS. . . .

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

If, as we saw in an earlier lesson, words come easy, what about thoughts? Words require at least that we open our mouths; thoughts don’t even require that. All they need is consciousness. Thoughts arise without any effort on our part; indeed, they often come whether we want them or not. Thus, if we are told we need to control them, the big question is How? Compared to taming thought, taming the tongue is easy.

The first thing we must remember is that thoughts, however spontaneous, don’t arise in a vacuum. What we focus our minds on, what we read, what we talk about, and what we do all impact what we think. Even as born-again Christians, we can’t begin to get victory over our thoughts until we claim the grace and power of God.

Look at the verse for today. What are the things Paul tells us to think on? What things are pure, true, honest, just, lovely, and so forth? Make a list of those characteristics and write next to each one of them whatever you believe fits in that category. Look at the list; dwell on it; pray over it (it might even be interesting to share it with the class).

Nothing, of course, is more pure, lovely, true, and just than Jesus. As sinful, fallen beings, we have access to nothing, either in heaven or earth, that reveals to us these traits as perfectly as Christ. If, through daily surrender, we spend time focusing upon Him (2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 2:5), on His character, His words, His actions, His love, His mercy, His compassion, and His obedience, we will have more victories in all areas of our life.

No wonder, then, that personal devotional time is so important. If we can begin each day reading in the Bible, praying, and studying, we can get a good head start on the daily battle to control our minds and our words and even our actions, as well.

Look at your own life. Look at your thoughts. What do you spend your time looking at, thinking of, and reading about?

What changes do you need to make?

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Talents" (Speech), p. 337.

It will do you good, and our ministers generally, to frequently review the closing scenes in the life of our Redeemer. Here, beset with temptations as He was, we may all learn lessons of the utmost importance to us. It would be well to spend a thoughtful hour each day reviewing the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. We should take it point by point and let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life. By thus contemplating His teachings and sufferings, and the infinite sacrifice made by Him for the redemption of the race, we may strengthen our faith, quicken our love, and become more deeply imbued with the spirit which sustained our Saviour."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 374.

"There are many to whom life is a painful struggle; they feel their deficiencies, and are miserable and unbelieving; they think they have nothing for which to be grateful. Kind words, looks of sympathy, expressions of appreciation, would be to many a struggling and lonely one as the cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. A word of sympathy, an act of kindness, would lift burdens that rest heavily upon weary shoulders. And every word or deed of unselfish kindness is an expression of the love of Christ for lost humanity."—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 23.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus said: "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37). What do you think He meant by that?
2. Why does Paul in Colossians 3:5 equate covetousness with idolatry?
3. Think about the importance of our devotional life. Using the basis of this week's lesson as the starting point, what reasons can you give for having a strong, consistent devotional life?
4. What other steps can you take to help guard your thoughts and your words?



The Robber's Unexpected Treasure

Dorothy Eaton Watts

Drick stood in the shadows watching traffic crawl by. A truck loaded with passengers approached, and Drick's eyes focused on a man carrying a hand bag. Waving a gun, he jumped out of the shadows, snatched the bag from the man, and disappeared before anyone could stop him.

The bag was heavy and fat. "It must be full of bank notes," Drick told his friend as they made their escape. "This should keep us going for a while!" When the men were sure that no one was following them, they stopped to open the bag. "What? Is this all I got?" Drick cried in disgust as he pulled a large black book from the bag. He lit a match and held it close to read the title on the cover: B-I-B-L-E. "This is of no use to me!" he grunted, and he touched the match to the book.

"Don't burn it!" his friend warned. "Maybe there's something valuable inside."

Drick shoved the book into the bag and started for home. When he arrived, he tossed the Bible onto a shelf and quickly forgot about it.

One night he returned home and found his wife reading the black book. "Listen to this," she told him. "This is really interesting."

Drick frowned as his wife began reading from John 3. The words caught his attention. They spoke of God's love. *Does God really love me, a thief?* he wondered. He could not forget the words his wife had read, *God let His son die for me? If I believe in Him, I will not die?* He pondered the thought.

Stirred by God's love, Drick asked several pastors to explain the Bible to him. But always he felt thirsty to know more.

One day he heard about a man named Sen Marak, who knew his Bible. He visited Sen and asked many questions. Sen offered to study the Bible with him, and Drick agreed. As the men studied together, Drick had the feeling that he had seen Sen somewhere before. But where? Suddenly he remembered—Drick had robbed this man. It was Sen's Bible that had led him on his quest for God.

Drick recalled his friend's words when he was going to burn the Bible. The Bible had contained something valuable; it contained a great treasure that changed Drick's life forever.

Drick and his wife have been baptized. Now instead of a gun, Drick carries a Bible; instead of robbing people, he shares God's love with anyone who will listen.

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