

THE USE OF THE TONGUE

THE tongue of man is a very small member of the human body but what is in its power is great. It can be a source of blessing, spiritually or materially, and contrariwise, the same tongue is able to set the whole body on fire or trouble that is beyond human control.

We know very well that the tongue is a fleshy movable organ in the mouth, used in, talking, tasting, licking and so on. In this sermon we are concentrating on the aspect of its use in regard to talking because herein lies its power – good or bad.

The way many people talk glibly now-a-days without caring a damn gives the impression that some – and they are great in number – do not know how to use the tongue aright.

There is no one who loves righteousness or who has developed a taste for decency that cannot be overwhelmed with a feeling of revulsion when he finds himself in the company of some people. All sorts of loose talks and perverse words come out of their mouths. At motor parks, in hotels, pubs, and even in some offices or when travelling in lorries, buses and so forth, men and women engage freely in irresponsible and indecorous talks. No word is considered too indecent or filthy for them to utter.

All these bespeak how far away from righteousness or how corrupt men's minds are. They make us cast our minds in retrospect to the events that led to the utter destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by God in the days of old. But Lot, the nephew of Abraham, who kept himself away from the immorality of the Sodomites was saved. The Bible states that when he was in the midst of the ungodly, he was always vexed with the filthy conversations of the people. And St. Peter, in a really passionate vein, wrote in his epistle about this aspect of the experience of Lot thus: "For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." – 2 Peter 2: 7. 8.

Corrupt Communication

You may come across a man – call him a gentleman – who is well dressed and who appears sophisticated, walking in a way that commands dignity. But let him utter a word and you will be amazed to find that he is not better than a brute. Invite him into a conversation for a moment, you will be more astonished to notice that though the "gentleman" has gained mastery of all the grammar one can find in the text books, he has not the sense to distinguish between "holy conversation" and "profane language".

By the utterances of a person one can judge the sort of character he is. "For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat." Some people who like to talk much pour out most of the time words of no wisdom or profit, and thus they make themselves a laughing-stock before others. It is good to learn how to talk, when to talk, where and what to talk. There is a worldly saying that "he knows most who speaks least". And the Scriptures put it in a clearer light: "He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise; and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." – Proverbs 17: 27,28.

Christians are warned against inconvenient jesting, foolish talks and unwholesome words. In Ephesians 4: 29, St. Paul admonished: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Furthermore, he said: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no

whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the; kingdom of Christ and of God.” – Ephesians 5: 3-7.

Do some who call themselves Christians not indulge in these things? Let them judge themselves and repent so that they may be at peace with God.

False Witness

There are some people who use their tongues in telling lies, either in preaching the word of God or in bearing false witness against their neighbours, thus putting innocent people in trouble. Some liars have the devilish boldness to appear even in the law courts to swear on the Holy Bible in the name of God. But the first sentences from their mouths in evidence are but a bundle of lies! They do not fear God, yet they swear in His name. , Except such ones repent and put a stop to their ungodly acts, God’s fiery judgment is certainly awaiting them for taking His name in vain. – Exodus 20: 7; Leviticus 19: 12; James 5: 12.

In the days of Jeremiah the prophet there existed such treacherous fellows and he bewailed their sins because he knew that the Lord of hosts would certainly punish them. Concerning the liars, the prophet wrote: “And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord...And they will deceive everyone his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity...” – Jeremiah 9: 3-9.

Dangerous Rumours

By a mischievous use of the tongue some have inflamed the passions of others and led them into war resulting in the loss of thousands of souls. The misuse of the tongues of men has caused separation between brothers, sisters and friends, and has also led to the breaking of matrimonial homes.

There are good reasons why governments do not tolerate spreading of false rumours. In a broadcast to the nation on national security in July, 1967, the Nigerian Inspector-General of Police, Alhaji Kam Selem, said: “Do not assist in spreading false and dangerous rumours. Report all peddlers of such rumours and all acts of intimidation and threat to the Police at once.” This is so because false rumours, being an abuse of the tongue, are dangerous and can lead to death.

People who cannot bridle their tongues but will go about opening their mouths wide in lying and in loose talks must get into trouble. David the prophet, knowing the danger of a bad use of the tongue and how unruly it is, said that he would be careful in what he did so that he might not sin with his tongue, and that he would keep his mouth with a bridle. (Psalm 39:1) “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue,” said King Solomon, “keepeth his soul from troubles.” – Proverbs 21: 23.

To use the tongue to backbite or slander or in any other evil way against people is wickedness. It is never well with those who engage in such bad things. David, in his prayer to the Almighty God, said: “Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers: of iniquity: who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: that they may shoot in secret at the perfect... They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them?...But ‘God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they the wounded...” – Psalm 64: 2-9.

These things are happening in our time. It is the understanding of this wonderful knowledge of the Bible that sometimes make us of the GKS pay deaf ears to the reproaches, abuses or

revilings and misrepresentations of our detractors. Despite their machinations and slander, the Lord's work continues to flourish, by His grace, while, spiritually, they are dwindling. We do not wish them evil; rather we pray that they should repent so that God may forgive them. But if they will not repent, God's punishment for slanderers awaits them. – Psalm 50: 19-23.

Grave Consequences

We must seize this opportunity to warn people against using their tongues in uttering blasphemies. For irreverent talks about God and sacred things will but incur grave consequences which they cannot stand or bear. The tongue must not be used in any evil way. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof." (Proverbs 18: 21).

And Jesus Christ declared: "...Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." – Matthew 12: 36, 37.

James the apostle of Christ gave an intelligible description of the tongue, showing how hard it is to control and the fruits of it. He stated: "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body...Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasted great things. Behold, how great matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." – James 3: 2-6.

The apostle went on: "For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be...Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." – James 3: 7-13.

The Lip of Truth

Although the tongue is difficult to control, Christians must endeavour to use theirs properly. St. James himself also said: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." – James 1: 26.

If we can learn to use our tongue aright the Lord will bless us and we will also command the respect of responsible people in society. We should use our tongues in confessing or in preaching the truth of God's word in order to impart His saving knowledge to others; to sing praises to God and glorify His holy name. (Psalm 35: 28; 71: 15-19,23, 24) We can use our tongues to condemn evil, to expose lies, and to comfort the afflicted and exhort the feeble minded ones. Solomon also said: "There is that speaketh like the piercing of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health. The lip of truth shall be established forever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment." – Proverbs 12: 18, 19; see also Proverbs 15:4; 17:20.

Finally, let us always bear in mind St. Peter's admonition, to wit: "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good: let him seek peace, and ensue it." – 1 Peter 3: 10, 11.