

Your Speech Betrays You

By Mark Mayberry

7/29/2007

Introduction

During the days of Jephthah, internecine war raged between the tribes of Ephraim and Gilead. After Ephraim was defeated, the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan. Fugitives of Ephraim, attempting to cross over were forced to say, "Shibboleth." However, the Ephraimite's inability to correctly pronounce this word led to their identification and slaughter (Judges 12:1-7).

After returning from Babylonian captivity, the Jews began marrying the women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. The resulting loss of cultural, ethnic and religious heritage was reflected by their children who spoke a mongrel tongue: "half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people" (Nehemiah 13:23-31).

After Jesus was taken captive, Peter found himself alone in the courtyard of Caiaphas, surrounded by adversaries and challenged by accusers, who said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." Despite his repeated denials, the bystanders said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you" (Matthew 26:69-75). From the parallel accounts, this referred to his distinctive Galilian accent (Mark 14:70-71; Luke 22:59-60). In response, Peter began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" His speech again betrayed him.

In like manner, our speech sometimes betrays us. Jesus himself said, "For 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" (Matthew 12:33-37).

Rebuking the tradition-bound scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said, "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man... For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man" (Matthew 15:10-20; cf. Mark 7:14-23).

Denominational Jargon

Does your conversation reflect denominational jargon? Do you say, "My pastor," when referring to a local evangelist who only serves in the capacity of a preacher? Do you say, "My church," when referring to that precious body of believers for which Christ died? Do you say, "Accept Jesus as your personal Savior!" without offering a corresponding explanation of the terms of pardon set forth in His Word?

In years past, in another location, one of the men of the congregation offered a Wednesday evening invitation in which he ridiculed “Five Steppers,” i.e., those of us who emphasize the necessity of hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized. Yet, spiritual reality is this: men must hear the word of God (Romans 10:17). We must believe the gospel of Christ (John 8:24). All are commanded to repent (Acts 17:30-31). We must confess that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9-10). Penitent believers must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Furthermore, Christians must also remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10).

Many devour the ecumenical writings of Max Lucado, Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, etc. Such authors would not be so popular if they, like the apostle Paul, preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:17-32). Instead, they are ear-tickling men-pleasers, who turn away from divinely inspired truth unto humanly devised myths (2 Timothy 4:1-8).

God rebuked apostates of old by saying, “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:9-13). Those who turn aside to denominational dogma incur the same guilt. Hosea’s warning, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,” has modern relevance and application (Hosea 4:1-6).

Cursing and Profanity

Is your speech marked by cursing and profanity? Man’s fallen state is betrayed by the tongue: “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Romans 3:9-18). Concerning the wicked, the Psalmist declared “There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue” (Psalm 5:8-10). Again, “His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is mischief and wickedness” (Psalm 10:3-11).

Cursing is disrespectful. It takes things that are celestial (i.e., God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, heaven, and all that is high and holy) and drags them down to a terrestrial (i.e., earthly) plane. It takes things that are private (i.e., routine bodily functions) and drags them into public view. It takes things that are special (i.e., a loving sexual relationship shared between husband and wife), and treats them as common and base. It takes things that are serious (i.e., hell, eternal punishment, damnation, etc.) and treats them as trivial.

Let us avoid, not only explicit language, but also euphemisms. “Gosh” and “golly” are substitutes for “God.” “Egad,” used as an interjection is probably a euphemism for “Oh God!” “Gee” and “jeepers” are contractions of “Jesus.” “Cripes” and “crikey” are euphemisms of “Christ.” “Lordy” is just another way of taking the Lord’s name in vain “Doggoned” is a euphemism for “God damn.” “Dang” and “Darn” are watered-down versions of “damn.” “Tarnation” is an alteration of damnation, which is euphemism for “damnation.” “Heck” is an exclamation used in place of “hell.”

Heed the warning of Jesus, who said, “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for 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). Consider the counsel

of Paul who said, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...” (Romans 12:14-21). Remember James’ teaching on the tongue (James 3:6-12).

Selfishness

Is selfishness seen in your speech? Do you monologue conversations? Do you talk interminably about your own problems, but turn a deaf ear to the trials of others?

Consider the rich fool, who could only think of himself, who spoke of “my crops,” “my barns,” “my grain,” “my goods,” and my soul” (Luke 12:15-21). Why was his soul summarily required? He was unfaithful, bowing before mammon rather than God (Matthew 6:24); he was unthankful, never acknowledging the Source of his bounty (1 Timothy 4:4-5); he was unhelpful, hoarding his wealth, and never offering assistance to others (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Even after he died and was in torment, the rich man selfishly thought of Lazarus as a subordinate servant: “Father Abraham, send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.” Again, “I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house — for I have five brothers — in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment” (Luke 16:19-31).

In contrast, let us cultivate the spirit of Jesus, who said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:33-35). Manifesting the mind of Christ, may we selflessly serve others (Philippians 2:1-8), meeting the needs of our brethren (Matthew 25:34-40; Romans 12:10-13), ministering to those who are less fortunate (Luke 14:12-14; Hebrews 13:16).

Conclusion

Are you guarding your mouth and bridling your tongue (Proverbs 21:23; James 3:1-5)? Is your speech marked by the gospel’s gracious influence (Colossians 4:5-6)? Do your words minister grace to the hearers, and is your life a source of blessing (Ephesians 4:29-32)? May our prayer be like that of the Psalmist: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).