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THE CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR TOPIC

By the Rev. Charles E. Schaeffer, D. D.

September 4th—The Use and Abuse of the Tongue. Jas. 3:1-18.

The tongue is a very little member of the human body. In comparison with the arm or leg it is small indeed. Moreover, it is a hidden member—only physicians are supposed to see it. It registers not only the condition of the body, but of the mind and soul as well. When the body is ill one of the first places where such illness shows itself is on the tongue. It must, therefore, be a very sensitive organ. It can detect the most delicate shades of taste. Likewise the thoughts of one's mind find expression through the tongue. It is the organ of speech. While other animals have tongues and can utter sounds, man alone employs his tongue in sensible speech. The tongue, therefore, puts a man into a class all by himself and lifts him above the lower creation. It is fraught with tremendous possibilities. It has untold powers for good or evil. There is much account taken of it in the Bible. St. James wrote an epistle on the tongue, its uses and abuses. At least four of the ten commandments have reference to the tongue. Jesus Himself made occasional reference to it. He said that we had to give account for every idle word we would speak. The Book of Proverbs recognizes its good and also its evil qualities. St. James speaks of it as "a fire." A fire is started from a little spark but it can do untold mischief. It can destroy cities and lay into ruins the most precious things of man. It can sweep with a fierce roar over prairies and endanger property and life. The description of the tongue as "a fire" is very expressive and none too strong. Fire is a good thing. It can be put to great use; if properly controlled it is one of the most useful and most indispensable things of man, but if uncontrolled it is the most destructive and most terrible thing in the world. So the tongue is at once the best and the worst thing.

I. The use of the tongue. Speech is a wonderful gift. It lies at the basis of human civilization. It makes communication possible and is the vehicle of thought and purpose. It unites the human race into one great family. Through it we share each others' lives. It is the medium for our communion with God. We sing His praise, and talk to Him in prayer and preach His gospel to all mankind. The tongue enables us to speak kind words, words of life and beauty, of gentleness, of encouragement, of comfort and cheer. "Kind words can never die." We should cultivate the art of speaking. Many people can talk, but talking and speaking are not exactly the same thing. Speaking is an art. This statement applies to private conversation as well as to public speech. Speech reveals the character, the nature of the individual. "Thy speech betrayeth thee." Speech helps us to clarify and confirm our thoughts and feelings. When we give expression to an idea it is formed more clearly and more convincingly in our minds. An impression without a corresponding expression is soon lost. Speak it out, "let the redeemed of the Lord say so." "Tell it out among the nations that the Lord is King, tell it out." When the Holy Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost, He manifested His power in "cloven tongues as of fire." The early Church had what is known as "the gifts of tongues." It is by "the foolishness of preaching" that the gospel is to be carried to the ends of the world and sinners saved from their sin. The tongue, therefore, has wondrous uses and possibilities and we should seek to cultivate and apply the same.

II. The abuse of the tongue. The more useful a thing can be the more dangerous it can also be. The height and the depth correspond. The tongue may be put to very bad use and then great harm can come by it. We hear much about different kinds of tongues, such as the idle tongue, the loose tongue, the lying tongue, the evil tongue. There is much of idle talk in the world. Many people talk but they say nothing. They are mere babblers. We are never heard either by God or by man by our "much speaking." God gave us two eyes and two ears, but only one tongue, which seems to imply that we should see and hear twice as much as we say. Many people talk too much, too loud, too long. They speak before they have given the matter any thought at all. It is a form of nervousness. Nerves show themselves in the fidgety hands and restless feet, but especially in the tongue. When we speak we ought to say something. We must exercise great self-control in our speech. "Study to be quiet." Do not talk a lot of foolish, senseless stuff. It is a great art to sit still for a while and not talk. The Quakers know that secret. Idle words are like clouds without water, a mere bag of wind.

Then there is the loose tongue—the gossip. The idle tongue talks but says nothing; the loose tongue talks and says a lot of things that should remain unsaid. There is the talebearer, the news-vender who knows everybody's business but his own and retails the same to others. The man with the loose tongue has no deep secret places in his soul. He is superficial; Mr. Talkative is his name. He talks too much. "Did you hear about this?" "Don't say anything, but—', are some of his familiar phrases. He would talk about his most intimate friend, and usually it is the thing of "evil report" which he delights to spread abroad. Usually he puts a little spice to it, exaggerates, and is very fond of adjectives. The man who is given to the use of many adjectives scarcely ever abides by the truth. "Let your speech be yea, yea, nay, nay," saith the Lord.

Then there is the lying tongue—the Liar. The Bible hates a lie and lying lips. Everyone who speaks or lives a lie shall be excluded from the Kingdom of God. Lying is at once an individual and a social sin. There are some sins which we may commit and we are alone to suffer, but the sin of lying involves our fellowmen, and the world cannot exist on falsehood. The whole social fabric will crumble if men continually lie to each other. God is truth, and the Universe is built on it, and when a man lies he sets himself against the whole universe. But let him speak the truth and all things animate and inanimate will bear him witness. There is nothing that so deteriorates the human soul as to be constantly lying either in word or deed. Now the tongue can work great harm by allowing itself to be a lying tongue.

Then there is the evil tongue—the foulmouthed. Much mischief is wrought by the evil tongue. This indulges in all sorts of lewd and salacious and smutty talk. It besmirches the mind and violates some of the most sacred relations in life. Suggestions to evil, stirring of the imagination to foulness, and the lowering of the ideals and standards in life are some of the bad results of the evil tongue.

One of our own American poets has spoken of the influence and power of a spoken word. He says that boys flying kites into the air can call them back at will, but a word once uttered can never be recalled. It will fly on and on through time and eternity and has the power to bless or blight. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver," but an evil tongue my soul hateth.

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Lesson for September 4

SOLOMON'S WISE CHOICE

LESSON TEXT—I Kings 3:4-15.

GOLDEN TEXT—Happy is the man who findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding.

PRIMARY TOPIC—Solomon's Wise Choice.

JUNIOR TOPIC—A Young Man's Wise Choice.

INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—Choosing Things Worth While.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—The Best Things in Life.

Following the death of David, Solomon was anointed king (I Kings 1:5-40). David had failed to show the people who should be king after him (v. 20). Though an old man, he is stirred into action by the combined appeals of Bathsheba and Nathan. He immediately sent for the faithful three—Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah, and commanded them to anoint Solomon king.

I. God's Gracious Offer (vv. 4-15).

Solomon made a lavish sacrifice to the Lord. The magnitude of the offering shows that he had strong impulses toward God and that he was unwilling to hold anything back from God. Following the sacrifice, the Lord made to him this gracious offer. This offer was not on the basis that the Lord cared for the number of animals, but the attitude of the man's heart toward him. "Ask what I shall give thee." placed very wide possibilities before the king. God, as it were, signed blank checks and turned them over to Solomon to fill in any amount that his heart desired. This was not a reckless act on the part of God, for He foreknew what was in Solomon's heart to ask. This offer to Solomon is no exceptional one, for opportunities equally limitless are placed before us. God is saying to every one of His children, "Ask and it shall be given you." The matter with its limitations is placed before us in John 15:7. "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." These unlimited offers are open to those who abide in Christ and let His words abide in them.

II. Solomon's Wise Choice (vv. 6-9).

The Lord's gracious offer brought the king face to face with the responsibility of making a choice. There was no middle course open to him. God deals with all His children in such a way that a choice must be made by them. Solomon was keenly aware of the difficulty and responsibility of his position. David was a great king. For a young man to take up the work of an illustrious father and push it to completion is a most difficult task. Comparatively few ever succeed. Besides this, he had to deal with the disturbing elements which had been set in motion by the usurper, Adonijah. Being made to shoulder so great a responsibility so suddenly, brought him to keenly feel his insufficiency. In his reply to God he pleaded that his being king was not of his own choice but an act of God's loving kindness. He argued that, since God had made him king, He was bound to qualify him to fill the place. All who have been called of God to fill positions of honor and trust can surely exercise that same boldness of faith. When called to positions of honor and trust we should humbly present ourselves before God for help. To feel ourselves unworthy and unfit for great and responsibile work and to cast ourselves upon God for help is not cowardice, but a good sign that we shall not fail at the critical moment. Solomon's object in asking for wisdom was not for display but for the good of others.

III. God's Unstinted Gift (vv. 10-15).

Solomon's speech pleased the Lord. God gave him more than he asked. Because he put wisdom first, God saw that he could be trusted with material good also. Christ saw the same thing when He said. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). He who puts God and spiritual things first in time and importance can be trusted with temporal things. That which God promised him above what he asked was riches, honor and length of days. All who feel the lack of wisdom can go to God with confidence (Jas. 1:5). God blessed Solomon with a singularly comprehensive mind (I Kings 4:29-34). He was a botanist, zoologist, architect, poet and moral philosopher.

Christian Life

"The perfection of the Christian life is to lose sight of oneself completely and to make everything of Christ."

No Man His Own Master

No man is his own master; he is either governed by Christ or governed by Satan.—Echoes.

God Is Faithful

God is faithful, and He can never allow anyone to be empty in His blessed presence.—Echoes.

Humility

Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self.—Spurgeon.

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