

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?

Key Text: Matthew 12:37.

Teachers Aim:

1. To show that, through Jesus, our words and thoughts can be a blessing.
2. To convey the power of words for good or for evil.
3. To help the class recognize that what our mind focuses on impacts our thoughts.

Lesson Outline:

I. Words Are Powerful! (Rev. 12:10).

- A. Out of the heart the mouth speaks.
- B. Printed or spoken words are a powerful force for good or for evil.
- C. Satan is a slanderer, gossipier, liar, and talebearer.
- D. Satan wants us to be just like him.

II. A Sad History (Gen. 3:4).

- A. Satan lied in heaven and in Eden.
- B. People have believed Satan’s lies and have become as deceitful as he is.
- C. God cares about our thoughts.

III. Think Good Thoughts (Phil. 4:8).

- A. Thoughts are harder to control than words.
- B. Thinking about the lovely and pure Jesus will result in more victorious Christian living.
- C. Begin the day with Bible study and prayer for help in controlling your mind and words.

Summary: Proverbs 23:7 in the King James, says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Today’s English Version says, “What he thinks is what he really is.” To be as Christ is, we must think about Him—how He lived on earth, what He did for us on the cross, and His present work for us in heaven.

Commentary.

Out of the Heart.

As we study the concept of forgiveness and how forgiveness manifests itself in our lives, the power of words becomes apparent. Through

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

our words, we have the opportunity to wound or heal. Though small and seemingly innocent, our words can be our greatest weapon, either for good or evil. Thus it is that words play an enormous role in our relationships with each other and with God. "The course of an individual's life, or that of the church, is often set aflame by anger and ill-chosen words. . . . The 'tongue' that destroys harmony, peace, and friendship is motivated by a will that is under the control of Satan."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 526.

Misuse of the tongue arises from a heart and mind that are not in sync with God's plan. "Foul speech is the sign of a corrupt heart, 'for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh' (Matt. 12:34). Profanity and obscene jests and songs, even the frivolous and insipid conversation, have no place in the Christian's life; indeed, they are the hallmark of the unregenerate spirit."—Volume 6, p. 1028.

If we have not turned our tongue over to God, we have given it to Satan's use. Ellen White states that "we need especially to guard against having a tongue that is sanctified to Satan. The tongue that God has given is to be used to glorify Him in speech. Unless it is, we shall be standing directly in the way of God's work in this world, and the judgments of heaven will surely fall upon us."—Volume 5, p. 1093.

She urges us to keep "the tongue sanctified unto God. Refrain from saying anything that might detract from the influence of another; for by indulging in these words of criticism, you blaspheme God's holy name as verily as you would were you to swear."—Page 1093.

It would be wise for us to review this last quote from time to time. How easy it is to remember not to swear; but how easy it is to forget that swearing is not the only way we can blaspheme God's name!

Lying is another destructive way of misusing the tongue. When we lie, we place ourselves in Satan's camp, because he is the originator of the practice (Gen. 3:1-5). "Truth and Satan have nothing in common. . . . It is his nature to lie. . . . As a liar Satan was expelled from heaven and will never regain residence there. Neither will his children."—Page 992. Clearly, the penalty for erring in the use of the tongue can be severe.

There are, of course, more immediate penalties for lying. "Deceit brings its own disintegration of soul to the deceiver, often hurting him more than the deceived. . . . Lying tends to break down the unity of brotherhood; deceit sets one member against another."—Volume 6, p. 1027.

Fortunately, there is a way to manage the tongue: "Notwithstanding the difficulty of taming the tongue, the Lord will work for us if we yield our will to Him. Actually, the thoughts must first be subdued before the tongue is tamed . . . , but to control the thoughts a man must first yield his heart to God."—Volume 7, p. 527. "Through the help that Christ can give, we shall be able to learn to bridle the tongue."—Ellen G. White Comments, p. 936.

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

We need to be extremely careful about what we feed our minds, because “the mind is the central, directive faculty of a rational being. . . . As a man thinks, so will he act (cf. Prov 23:7). It is impossible for a wicked mind to do other than produce wicked works.”—Page 194.

“Everyone who will enter the kingdom of God will develop a character that is the counterpart of the character of God. . . .

“We do not think one noble thought that does not come from Him. . . .

“Intellect ennobled, purified, heaven directed, is the universal power to build up the kingdom of God. Intellect perverted, has exactly the opposite influence; it is a corrupting of the human power given in trust to be multiplied in earnest labor for good.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1105.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Matthew 12:30-37; John 3:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:25-32; Philippians 4:8, 9; James 3:2-13.

1. Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus, “ “You must be born again” ” (John 3:7, NIV), must have left Nicodemus totally shocked. Yet, Jesus was talking about a spiritual rebirth as a totally new way of relating to God and to each other. Ask your class members to share ways in which a new relationship with Christ radically changed the way they view others. Be prepared to share examples from your own life.
2. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Identify: (1) the means God uses to rescue us from our former way of living, (2) the evil we were rescued from, and (3) the positive, wholesome way of life God intends for all those who are loyal to Him.

3. “If you can’t say anything nice about someone, don’t say anything at all.” That statement, although not found in the Bible, is one way to keep from using the tongue as an instrument of cruelty and gossip and reserve it wholly for praising God and preaching the good news of Jesus’ coming. What biblical texts reinforce the above statement?
4. Following Paul’s counsel in Philippians 4:8 about the things Christians should train their minds to focus on is this rather odd piece of instruction: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice” (vs. 9). Do you think Paul really meant to offer himself as an example of Christian living? Could we—should we—make the same offer to other Christians?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

We can choose to fill our minds with uplifting ideas that will translate into loving, Christian actions, or we can choose to fill them with worldly concepts and ideas that will find their expression in ways that make Satan glad. Ellen White reminds us that “Satan cannot touch the mind or intellect unless we yield it to him.”—Page 1105. He will not be shy about using “your mind if you give it to him.”—Page 1105.

“If we will live right, we must think right. The development of Christian character requires right thinking.”—Volume 7, p. 177.

WITNESSING

Lynn could still feel the sharpness of the words spoken to her by a woman who should have been one of her mentors: “You will never amount to anything!” The cold words cut into her soul like a knife. But what Lynn really couldn’t understand was why this woman, who was one of the leaders in the church, would even speak to a young person in this way. Even though she *was* a stubborn teenager, determined to have her own way, Lynn expected to hear something very different, perhaps more encouraging from an adult, especially a Christian. But however harsh those words may have been, that statement was the turning point in young Lynn’s life. From that moment on she was determined to make something out of her life. And she did.

Twenty years later, Lynn was a successful doctor.

Although Lynn’s story has a happy ending, there are many people who do not respond so triumphantly to harsh words. Many have been wounded by gossip, lies, or slanderous words. Conversely, many souls have been won to Christ by kind words, words of encouragement, or words of love and forbearance.

The Bible tells us “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). When the heart (mind) is filled with envy, deceit, gossip, contention, and the like, the mouth will utter these things in conversation. God’s people should instead speak words of life, words that would be uplifting, words that would point the listener toward heaven.

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?

LIFE-A PPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Sing aloud or read as a voice choir with study partners all five verses of “Redeemed! How I Love to Proclaim It” (*Church Hymnal*, no. 635). Or, if necessary, use “Redeemed!” (*Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 337 or number 338), adding these words that are omitted from no. 338: “Redeemed! and so happy in Jesus! No language my rapture can tell; I know that the light of His presence with me doth continually dwell.”

Thought Questions:

1. What role does trust play in heart maintenance? Christ has absolute confidence that by His Spirit He can help you develop into a glorious reflector of the Father’s love who bears all the fruit of the Spirit. Do you entrust your heart to Him?
2. Sweet and sour pickles have the same base—cucumbers. The juice with which the vegetables are saturated makes the difference. With what do you saturate your heart? How can the heart be sweetened or made sour? Review the heart-care instructions given in Proverbs 4.

Application Questions:

1. React to this comment by William Backus and Marie Chapien, authors of *Telling Yourself the Truth* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Publishing, 1980): “D. L. Moody once said that the best way to show that a stick is crooked is not to argue about it or to spend time denouncing it, but to lay a straight stick alongside it. “The straight stick in the lives of Christians is the lovely and indestructible love of Christ! When our eyes lose sight of this dazzling truth, there remains only shadows to stare at. Shadows such as envy, jealousy, or comparing ourselves with others.”—Page 31. By what do you measure the health of your heart?
2. What is the biblical support for the song “Redeemed!”? What can we learn from the song about how to care for our heart? The song suggests a heart overflowing with gratitude: “No language my rapture can tell.” What is the difference in the lifestyle and motivation when thanksgiving overflows the heart? What does the song suggest will be the results?

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?**