

Exaggeration

by F.B. Meyer

Exaggeration is a form of lying and falsehood that can be overcome by being honest and accurate in our speech and seeking to glorify God in all that we do.

Scripture: Proverbs 12:22, Matthew 5:37, Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 3:9

Topics: "Truthfulness", "Integrity in Speech"

Description

F.B. Meyer addresses the issue of exaggeration, emphasizing that while there may be a kernel of truth in exaggerated statements, they ultimately fall under the category of lying. He cites Mr. Moody's advice to confront exaggeration as a form of deceit and encourages listeners to speak truthfully, as exaggeration can distort reality and lead to a lack of authenticity in communication. Meyer highlights how this habit permeates various aspects of life, including personal narratives, religious expressions, and even advertisements, urging individuals to cultivate honesty in their speech and thoughts. He calls for a return to simplicity and accuracy in communication, reminding us that God is always listening and that our words should reflect His truth. The sermon concludes with a plea for divine assistance in overcoming the temptation to exaggerate.

Transcript

BENEATH all exaggeration there is a basis of truth. When an American said that the whey which flowed from the making of a large cheese in his country was sufficient to run three sawmills; and when another affirmed that the soil of his farm was so prolific that the tendrils of the vine which he had just sown caught him up and entwined around his legs before he could get over the fence, there was no doubt some truth at the basis of their statements, though only as a drop of homeopathic medicine in a tumblerful of water. And it is this small residuum of truth that veils to the eyes of really good people the evil of this habit. There is no doubt that, in the last analysis, exaggeration must be classed under the head of lying and falsehood. Those that exaggerate are excommunicate from the Temple of Truth.

I heard Mr. Moody say the other day that a lady had come to him, asking how she might be delivered from the habit of exaggeration, to which she was very prone. "Call it lying, madam," was the uncompromising answer, "and deal with it as you would with any other temptation of the devil." A Greater has said, "Let your speech be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one."

We exaggerate in our narrations. When a little lad, I had been listening with amazement to the description, given by a lady, of some recent experiences, when my grandfather whispered to me slyly, "All her geese

are swans." The words have often come back to me. When mothers describe the excellences of their children, their wit, precocity, and beauty; when travellers narrate their hairbreadth escapes, their marvellous experiences by land or water, all of which end so neatly as to resemble the often polished deal; when ministers give themselves up to tell the story of the crowds they address, the magnitude of their church operations, or the deftness with which they have managed to get their own way,- one is inclined to think that, under the idealizing effect of a strong imagination, geese have become swans.

It seems almost impossible for some people to tell an unvarnished tale. The actual is not wonderful enough. They must gild the common sunlight, and paint the familiar petals of the flowers. They think that effect can be produced only by daubing their canvas with great masses of gaudy color. They forget that the quiet shining of the stars is more healthy and beneficent than the grandest display of fireworks that ever poured in cascades, flashed in wheels, or filled the sky with ten thousand vanishing fairy lights. For my part, I prefer the earlier paintings of Turner to the later, and the stories of George Eliot to those of Disraeli or Bulwer-Lytton; and I think that most ordinary people would concur in the judgment.

We exaggerate in our choice of words.

It is too terrible to hear the young ladies of the period discussing a panorama of Alps, a sunset at sea, a vision like that of Fountains or Clairvaux under the soft light of the moon. "Awful," "killing," "awfully jolly," "too, too, don't-ye-know," are quite the most refined and moderate that I need cite here; one has no desire to put more of this base coin into circulation. This pernicious habit arises in part from ignorance of the derivation, meaning, and value of words, but particularly from the desire to be conspicuous among the little group around them. Many people mistake bigness for greatness, bulk for value. They resemble the Chinamen in New York, who buy the largest boots procurable for their money, under the impression that in this way they can best obtain their money's worth. It is a cheap and easy manoeuvre to hide the paucity of your ideas beneath the vehemence and loudness of your speech. This accounts for a good deal of loudness in voice and extravagance in phrase.

We also exaggerate in our religious phraseology. In certain prayers we are wont to hear, there is gross exaggeration in the confessions of sin. If all that some men say of themselves in prayer be true, they certainly deserve to be put out of the church, or be interviewed by their ministers. But if you were to take them at their word, and refuse to allow your families to associate with theirs, or withdraw your custom from their stores, on the ground of their confessions of depravity, they would be very much surprised. Many a man would threaten to knock you down if you applied to him the epithets he applies to himself.

So with expressions of love and devotion to the Saviour. We often hear him addressed in prayer in the most familiar and luscious terms. The tenderest, loveliest names are addressed to him. Of course, where these are flowers gathered from the garden of a holy soul, they are fragrant and delightful, awakening the dull sense, and quickening the flagging zeal of all who hear; but where they are far in advance of the evident personal experience, and are contradicted by the behavior of the utterer, as he forces his way into the tram-car from the drenching shower in which the meeting closes,-you feel that there is an air of unreality and extravagance in the whole thing, which must have a terrible effect on him, while it reacts on others like the heavy air that has fanned acres of poppies.

Exaggeration infects all our life. The bride exaggerates the number and value of her presents. The tradesman's advertisements announce that he has 10,000 bedsteads on view, when he has only 1,000 at the most; that he can offer 1,000 cheeses to choose from, when, with great difficulty, he can get too into

his cellar; that he is selling off at an alarming sacrifice, when all in the trade know that he is making large profits.

The minister says there are hundreds in his congregation, when, if heads were reckoned, it would be found that there were only four or five score, of whom several were children. Most of us are adepts at drawing the longbow. We are not content with the reflection cast by events on the plain glass of truth, but distort them by the convex or the concave, like the two mirrors which are sometimes placed outside eating-houses to show the effect of a good meal on the face.

This habit may be traced to childhood. The simplicity and naturalness of babe-life is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. We force the growth of heaven's nurselings, encourage them in smartness and old-fashionedness, tell them extravagant fairy stories, rear them in artificial gaslight, and then complain that they have lost the sweet ingenuousness of youth, and grown into young men and women of the period before they have barely reached their teens. It is as if nature should rush into summer without a spring, or the day spring into the glare of noon without morning. We must begin building the Palace of Truth in the earliest impressions of the nursery.

We should accustom ourselves to think and speak accurately. Nothing so tests the quality of our minds as our use and choice of adjectives. When people know all your adjectives they have come to the end of your treasures. It is partly due to our slovenliness in observing and describing that we exaggerate in our speech; and the evil would be remedied if young people would read the best poetry with careful discrimination, asking why Browning or Tennyson uses such a word in such a connection. It is specially valuable, with this object, to translate some foreign author--Homer, Virgil, Dante, Racine, or Schiller finding an English equivalent for each word, though it consume an hour of thought and research.

Let us, also, in describing anything in which we have taken a part, remember that God is listening, and be on the watch against the natural tendency of our tongue to take its coloring matter from the gorgeous palette of the imagination rather than from the neutral tints of sober fact. Let us ask the Spirit of Truth to set a watch upon the door of our lips, allowing nothing to pass out on which he cannot set his seal. Whatever we do, in word as well as deed, let us do all in the name and for the glory of Jesus. Why should we seek to attract the attention of men to ourselves, when to do so may detract from the glory of his workmanship in our character? And if, in the heat of conversation, we are betrayed into exaggeration, and are reminded of it afterwards by the Holy Spirit, let us at once make application for cleansing in the precious blood, and confess to others the wrong we have done to the sacred majesty of Truth.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/fb-meyer/exaggeration/>

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