

The Power of the Tongue

by J.R. Miller

The power of the tongue is a powerful tool that can give either pleasure or pain, and Christians should strive to use their words to build up and minister blessing to others.

Scripture: Proverbs 18:21, Ephesians 4:29, James 3:5

Topics: "The Power of Words", "Christian Communication"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound impact of our words, illustrating that the tongue holds the power of life and death. He urges Christians to recognize the potential of their speech to either uplift or harm others, advocating for a transformation of our conversation to reflect Christ's love and grace. Miller challenges believers to evaluate their daily speech, encouraging them to speak words that edify and inspire rather than gossip or criticize. He highlights the importance of purity and grace in our communication, suggesting that every interaction is an opportunity to bless others. Ultimately, he calls for a conscious effort to use our tongues for good, leaving a positive mark on those we encounter.

Transcript

"Death and life," says the wise man's proverb, "are in the power of the tongue!" Words seem little things, so fleeting and evanescent, that apparently it cannot matter much, of what sort they are. They are so easily spoken--that we forget what power they have to give either pleasure or pain. They seem so swiftly gone after they have passed the door of our lips, and to have so utterly vanished away--that we forget they do not really go away at all--but linger, either like barbed arrows in the heart where they struck--or, like fragrant flowers, distilling perfume.

'Words' seem to us, as we carelessly speak them--to be insignificant, and powerless for good or bad. We do not stop to think, that, as they fly out of our mouths--that they either tear down or build up fair fabrics of joy and peace in the souls of those to whom we speak. There have been words quietly spoken--which have broken like the lightning-flash, bearing sad desolation on their blighting wings, which years could not repair. On the other hand, there have been simple words which, treasured in memory--have hung like bright stars of joy and cheer in long, dark nights of sorrow and trial.

The tongue's power to do good, is simply incalculable! It can impart valuable knowledge; it can speak words that will shine like lamps in darkened hearts; it can pronounce kindly sentences that will comfort sorrow, or cheer despondency; it can breathe thoughts which will arouse, inspire, and quicken heedless souls, and even whisper the divine secret of life-giving energy to dead souls. What good we could do with

our tongues, if we would use them to the full limit of their power for good--no one can compute. And these opportunities do not lie alone in formal speech, as in the sermon or the lesson, or in the occasional serious talk--but they come in all conversation, even in the most casual greeting on the street.

But are these fine possibilities of speech realized by most people? Is the daily talk, even of Christian men and women--a ministry of blessing and good to those on whose ears it falls? What is the staple of conversation among average Christians? Let us listen for a day, and make careful note of all we hear. How much of it is worth recording? How many sentences are spiritually helpful, calculated to kindle higher aspirations, or start upward impulses? How much of it is utterly empty, mere chaff, that feeds no heart-hunger, kindles no joy, and helps no one to live better? How much is careless gossip, unjust and injurious criticism of the absent? How much is hypocritical and insincere?

It is startling to think what Christian conversation might be, of what it ought to be, and then of what it is. Why should such a power for good be wasted, or far worse than wasted? Why should our Christian development be retarded, by the misuse of the marvelous gift of speech? It were far better that one were born dumb, than that, having a tongue--one should use it to scatter evil and sorrow, or to sow the seeds of bitterness and pain! Our Lord said we must give account of every idle word; and, if accountable for the idle words, how much more for the words that stain and injure, or fall as a destructive blight into other hearts and lives!

When we give ourselves to Christ--we ought to give him our tongues; when we are regenerated, our tongues ought to be regenerated. It was not without significance, that, when the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost, the manifestation was in "tongues like as of fire." One of the first results, too, of this heavenly baptism was that the disciples spoke with other tongues. It is not a mere fanciful interpretation that sees in all this an intimation that true conversation transforms the speech, and that a Christian should speak with a new Christian tongue.

There are many suggestions in the Scriptures as to the kind of words a Christian tongue should speak. For example; "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may give grace to those who listen." Ephesians 4:29.

Two essential features of Christian speech are here touched upon. One is purity: no unwholesome talk should ever fall from a consecrated tongue--yet there is much impurity in the speech of some professing Christians. Filthy stories are told, and there are vile allusions and innuendoes which stain the lips that utter them--and the heart which hears them. Christian conversation should be as clean and white as snow. Nothing should be spoken in any company, which could not be spoken in the presence of the most refined ladies. Will our every-day speech stand this test?

The other quality indicated in this quotation is edification and the imparting of grace. Purity is only negative, that which does not stain and soil; but more is required. No sentence should be spoken which is not good for edifying, which does not minister grace. Every word should be fitted in some way to build up character, and add to its beauty.

The geologist will take you to what was once the shore of an ancient sea, and show you the marks made by the patter of the raindrops on the soft sand, or the lines left by the wash of the waves. A leaf fluttered down from a tree, and fell there, imprinting its delicate figure. Ages have passed since that time--but every trace remains as perfect as when it was first made; the wash of the surf, the indentations made by the pattering raindrops, the minutest lines, the leaf's skeleton--there they are, preserved through millenniums

of years. So it is, that words fall upon a human heart.

Our gentle poet's thought is no idle fancy that 'the song he sings, he will find again long, long afterward, in the heart of his friend'. Words uttered, fall and are forgotten as their echoes die away--but they leave their mark; they either beautify or mar; they either make the life brighter, or they sully it; they either build up, or they tear down what before was built. A warm breath upon the frost-work on the window-pane on a winter's morning, causes all the splendor to vanish. Just so, before the breath of impure words--the soul's glory melts into ruin. The Christian's speech should always edify, and give grace; yet on how many lips, now garrulous with flippant words, would this test lay the finger of silence!

This does not imply that only grave and solemn words may be spoken. There is nothing gloomy about the religion of Christ. You look in vain through our Lord's own conversation for one gloomy sentence; he scattered only sunshine. But all his words were fitted to be helpful words. He sought to leave some gift or blessing, with everyone he met. He spoke words which made the careless thoughtful, which kindled hope in despairing souls, which left lights burning where all was dark before, which comforted the sorrowing, and cheered the despairing. For everyone he met--he had some message; yet there was no mere cant in his speech. He did not go about with a sad face, uttering his messages in sanctimonious tone and phrase; his speech, like all his life, was sunny.

He is to be our model. The affectation of devoutness never ministers grace; it only caricatures religion. We are not to fill our speech with solemn phrases, and deal them out to everyone we meet. Yet with Christ in our hearts, we are to seek to impart something of Christ to everyone with whom we converse. There are a thousand ways of giving help. There are times when refined humor ministers grace, when the truest Christian help for a man is to make him laugh. Infinite are the necessities of human lives. Our feeling toward others, is ever to be a strong desire to do them good. We have an errand to each one with whom we are permitted to hold even the briefest and most casual conversation. What it is, we may not know; but, if the desire is in our heart, God will use us to minister blessing in some way.

Opportunities for such ministry are occurring continually. In a morning's greeting, we may put so much heart and so much Christ into phrase and tone, as to make our neighbor happier all the day. In the few moments conversation by the wayside, or during the formal call, or in the midst of the day's heat and strife, we may drop the word which will lift a burden, or strengthen a fainting heart, or inspire a new hope, or give warning of danger. We should certainly not be always flippant, talking only of trifles. There are some who never say a serious or thoughtful word. We may never see our friend again, and any passing conversation with him may be the last that we shall ever have. We should not fail, then, even in our briefest and idlest talk, to let fall at least one inspiring and helpful sentence, which may prove a blessing to the one who listens to us.

So we may leave blessings at every step of our way. Our words in season, throbbing with love, and wafted by the breath of silent prayer--shall be medicine to every heart--into which any simplest sentence of our speech may fall.

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