

The Matter of Conversation.

by J.R. Miller

Our speech is a gift from God, and we should use it wisely to bless the world and build others up.

Scripture: Psalm 19:14, Proverbs 10:19, Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 16:24, Proverbs 18:21, Ecclesiastes 3:4, Matthew 12:34, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 4:6, James 1:19

Topics: "The Power of Words", "Communication in the Christian Life"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the significance of our speech, urging that every word should be gracious and beneficial, as our manner of speaking can greatly influence how our message is received. He highlights the importance of both the manner and matter of conversation, noting that a pure heart is essential for speaking wholesome words. Miller warns against idle talk and encourages believers to use their speech to uplift and inspire others, reflecting Christ's love and grace. He also stresses the role of the home in shaping our speech habits, advocating for a nurturing environment that fosters kind and respectful communication. Ultimately, he calls for a mindful approach to conversation, where even light-hearted exchanges can carry a meaningful message.

Transcript

Most young people can talk. They begin it quite early. One of the first things a baby does, is to learn a language, meanwhile acquiring the use of its vocal organs. From that time, until the voice is silenced in death -- the talking goes on. Some people even talk in their sleep, so strong is the force of habit upon them.

If every word that is spoken were only a gracious word -- then what an incalculable ministry of blessing would there be in a lifetime of speech! But too much of it is only idle words -- and too much of it is not pure, wholesome, and sweet. The subject of our speech is worthy of very earnest, serious thought. We should not be willing to misuse our gift of speech, or to fail to use it to bless the world.

"Plant blessings -- and blessings will bloom,

Plant hate -- and hate will grow;

You can sow today -- and tomorrow shall bring

The bloom that shows what sort of a thing

Is the seed -- the seed that you sow."

There should be great care taken, first of all, with the MANNER of speech. Many people speak important words, words full of wisdom -- and yet utter them in such a manner that they make almost no impression. Their voice is harsh and unmusical, or their grammar or pronunciation is defective, or they speak indistinctly. In some way, at least, the faultiness or ungracefulness of their speech mars, sometimes almost destroys, the value of what they say.

On the other hand, there are some people whose manner of speech is so graceful and winning, that even their most commonplace words fall like music on the listener's ear. Young people cannot give too much attention to voice-culture, and to the whole matter of expression. Manner is more than one-half in speech!

MATTER is also important, however. We must have something to say, or the most musical tones will soon fail to please and bless. Jesus said that, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." Matthew 12:34. Hence we must get our heart right -- if we would speak words that are Christlike. A bitter heart cannot give out sweet words, nor can an impure heart speak wholesome, pure words.

It is an interesting fact that on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came in the form of tongues of fire, resting on the heads of the disciples, and that one of the first manifestations of the Spirit was in a new gift of speech -- immediately they spoke with new tongues. This was all supernatural; but it is true evermore that, when one becomes a Christian, one gets a new tongue!

We can gather from the Bible many counsels about speech. Jesus spoke of IDLE words, saying that even for these we must give account. Idle words are those that are empty -- empty of love and of good, words of no value. There are many such words spoken. They may appear harmless; and yet they are useless -- and uselessness always disappoints the Master. They give no comfort, they put no cheer into any heart, they inspire nothing beautiful in any soul. Too much of the common conversation of the parlor, of the wayside, of the table, is of this vapid and empty order -- talk about merest nothings, inane, without thought, without sense, without meaning. How it must astonish the angels to hear immortal beings use their marvelous gift of speech in such a trivial, idle way!

We have suggestions also in the New Testament as to the kind of speech that is worthy of a redeemed life. Paul has some very plain words on the subject. "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 impart grace to the hearers." Ephesians 4:29. That is, no word should be spoken which does not help to build up character and to make those who hear it better, which does not inspire some good thought, some holy feeling, some kindly act, or put some touch of beauty upon the life.

A Christian's words should also "impart grace to the hearers." That is, they should impart blessing in some way. We all know people whose words have this quality. They are not always exhorting, preaching, or talking religiously; and yet we never speak with them five minutes without being the better for it. Their simplest words do us good. They give cheer, courage, and hope. We feel braver and stronger after a little conversation with them, even after a moment's greeting on the street.

In another place Paul says, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." Colossians 4:6. This means graceful speech, not merely as to its manner -- but also as to its quality. It must be speech such as Christ himself would use if he were in our place, and we know that every word of his was a holy seed. Our speech should be seasoned with salt, that

is, should be pure and clean. Salt preserves from decay and putridity. The Christian's speech should have in it the divine quality of holiness, and its effect should be cleansing and purifying. Someone speaks of the words of Jesus himself as a handful of spices cast into this world's bitter waters to sweeten them. Every Christian's words should have like influence in society, wherever they are spoken.

This does not imply that all a Christian's words must be devout words, such as would be spoken in a prayer-meeting or in a church service. Sometimes they may be full of humor; fun may be as wholesome in its place, as prayer in its place. There is a time to laugh and to make others laugh. We must not suppose that all bright, merry words are wrong, that we are not pleasing our Master unless we are talking on some distinctively religious subject; we are to talk of many things that are not definitely connected with a religious life. We are to talk about business, about the happenings of the day, about the books we have been reading; and at proper times we are to talk of things that amuse. Often the divinest service we can render to another, is to make him laugh. "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh" Ecclesiastes 3:4.

Yet all the while our speech is to be with grace; it is to be true, reverent, helpful, inspiring. The seasoning is important; it is to be "seasoned with salt." Love is salt. Truth is salt. Our speech should be always kindly. It should be without bitterness, without malice, without unlovingness in any form. The seasoning should be salt. Some people use pepper instead -- and pepper is sharp, biting, pungent. Their speech is full of sarcasm, of censure, of bitterness, of words that hurt and burn. This is not Christlike speech.

We learn most of our lessons at HOME. The household life leaves its stamp on the character and the habits of each member of the family. We learn to talk at home. Defects of speech, mispronunciations, misuse of words, peculiarities of phrase, modes of expression, and all the vocal mannerisms of the common home conversation -- reappear in the speech of the members of the family.

It is very important, therefore, that in the daily life of the household, the most careful watch shall be kept over all the habits of speech. The tones of the voice should be cultivated so that they shall be always pleasing. Attention should be given to pronunciation, that it shall always be correct. A good dictionary is important in every house. The spirit of the conversation should be guarded -- that it be gentle, kindly, patient, and true. Bickering, strife, contention, and wrangling should have no place in the talk of the home.

In too many families, the household life is marred by harsh words, which are spoken too freely in the common fellowship. Sometimes it is a habit of contradicting and disputing, which has been allowed to grow until it has become inveterate. Usually the questions wrangled over are of no importance whatever. One says it happened at two o'clock -- and another says it happened at quarter past two; and they grow hot in contention over it. One says it was on last Wednesday -- another claims that it was last Thursday; and the miserable strife spoils a meal for all that family. Some young people will never answer a question asked at home -- but in a gruff, discourteous way -- as if the asking for information were an impertinence. There are families in which gentle and kindly speech is the exception; the staple talk is ill-tempered, dictatorial, or unloving.

There is a great deal of hasty speech in some homes. We hurt our dearest ones most, by our hot words. We dare not speak petulantly and angrily outside the home, for our neighbors would resent such language. But in the inner circle of love we remove the restraint, and our words too often cut deep into tender hearts. We should remember that, though love forgives hasty speech -- the wounds remain! We should always hold back the word of anger.

Such unwholesome home habits in conversation do not prepare one for congenial and helpful fellowship with others, when one goes out into the world. The loved ones of our own family are very patient with us in our unlovableness; but other people will not brook our rude manners, our discourteous retorts, our gruff talk. If young people would be ready for living in friendly relations with those they meet outside -- they must learn to control their speech in the freedom of their own home, and must train themselves there, into whatever things are lovely both in manner and matter of conversation.

Too much stress cannot be put upon this subject. Speech is golden in its opportunities; it is a pity that a grain of the precious gold should ever be thrown away.

Most of us talk too much. Silence is better far than idle, sinful, or foolish speech. Yet there may be idle silence too; our gift of speech was given to us to be used -- but it must be used with wisdom. We should never be content to talk even five minutes with another, without saying at least a word or two that may do good, that may give a helpful impulse or kindle an upward aspiration. Even in the lightest, most playful conversation, there may be an opportunity before closing, to drop a serious word that may be remembered.

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