

Step 11 on Talkativeness and Silence.

by St. John Climacus

St. John Climacus emphasizes the dangers of talkativeness and the transformative power of silence in spiritual life.

Scripture: Psalm 141:3, Proverbs 10:19, Proverbs 17:28, Proverbs 21:23, Ecclesiastes 3:7, James 1:26

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Christian Silence"

Description

St. John Climacus emphasizes the dangers of judgment, the importance of deliberate silence, and the virtues of controlling one's tongue and embracing silence to draw near to God. He highlights how talkativeness leads to various vices and distractions, while deliberate silence fosters prayer, remembrance of death, and contemplation. St. John Climacus also points out that talkativeness often stems from vainglory or other passions, and those who love silence and spiritual mourning are able to overcome it.

Transcript

1. In the preceding chapter we spoke briefly of how extremely dangerous it is to judge others and of how this vice steals into even the most apparently spiritual people; and how it is better to subject oneself to condemnation and punishment by the tongue. Now we must show the cause of this vice, and give a proper account of the door by which it enters, or rather, goes out.
2. Talkativeness is the throne of vainglory on which it loves to show itself and make a display. Talkativeness is a sign of ignorance, a door to slander, a guide to jesting, a servant of falsehood, the ruin of compunction, a creator of despondency, a precursor of sleep, the dissipation of recollection, the abolition of watchfulness, the cooling of ardour, the darkening of prayer.
3. Deliberate silence is the mother of prayer, a recall from captivity, preservation of fire, a supervisor of thoughts, a watch against enemies, a prison of mourning, a friend of tears, effective remembrance of death, a depicter of punishment, a meddler with judgment, an aid to anguish, an enemy of freedom of speech, a companion of quiet, an opponent of desire to teach, increase of knowledge, a creator of contemplation, unseen progress, secret ascent.
4. He who has become aware of his sins has controlled his tongue, but a talkative person has not yet got to know himself as he should.
5. The friend of silence draws near to God, and by secretly conversing with Him, is enlightened by God.

6. The silence of Jesus put Pilate to shame, and by a man's stillness vainglory is vanquished.
7. Peter, having said a word, lamented it bitterly, because he forgot him who said: 'I said, I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue,'² and the other who said: 'A fall from a height to the ground is better than a slip with the tongue.'³
8. I do not wish to write much about this, even though the wiles of the passions urge me to do so. But I once heard from someone who asked me about silence that talkativeness is in variably born of one of the following causes: either from a bad, lax environment and habit (for the tongue, said he, being a member of the body, like the rest of the members, requires the training of habit), or again, in the case of ascetics, garrulity comes especially from vainglory, and sometimes also from gluttony. That is why many who bridle the stomach by force afterwards easily check the tongue and its chatter.
9. He who is anxious about his departure, cuts down words; and he who has obtained spiritual mourning, shuns talkativeness like fire.
10. He who has come to love silence shuts his mouth, but he who delights in wandering about outside is driven out of his cell by his passion.
- 1 Psalm lxiii, 7.
- 2 Psalm xxxviii, 1.
- 3 Ecclesiasticus xx, iS.
11. He who knows the fragrance of the Fire from on high, runs from a concourse of men like a bee from smoke; for the bee is routed by smoke, whereas man is hampered by company.
12. Few can hold water without a sluice; still fewer can tame an intemperate mouth. The eleventh step. He who has mastered it has cut off at one blow a multitude of evils.

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