

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

### 38. ON CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION

The spirit in which Christian speech should be conducted, is delineated with peculiar accuracy in the word of God. How delightful would be the society of professing Christians, if the humble, loving, gracious, improving spirit, so much enforced in the holy Scriptures, filled every circle. How needful, then, at all times is the prayer of David: "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips." Psalm 141:3

The true believer is a new creature. He is surrounded by a holy atmosphere, in which the trifler cannot live. As his motives are elevated, so his conversation is pure. The giddy and the vain avoid his society, not because he is repulsive in manner, but because his views and feelings are so spiritual and heavenly. He is ridiculed as "the saint," and taxed with pride and self-conceit. But his heart is known unto God, with whom he holds sweet converse in the midst of an ungodly world. Such is the Christian. His character is little understood by the thoughtless multitude, whose time is occupied and whose affections are absorbed in the trifles of the day. But before long he shall shine, as the sun, in the kingdom of his Father.

The following suggestions may tend to improve our fellowship with each other.

We ought never to speak unfavorably, not even by insinuation, of absent people, except when duty positively requires it; and even then, there should be a marked and sincere regret that the occasion calls for such an exposure of character.

We must guard against attributing wrong motives to the actions of others, even when appearances might favor such a conclusion; remembering that God alone knows the heart; and who are we, that we should judge our brother?

We should avoid every thing that borders upon flattering adulation, especially towards those who are present; knowing how pernicious praise is to a fallen creature, and how few are able to withstand its influence.

This does not exclude a proper commendation, or a suitable encouragement, when dictated by Christian simplicity and prudence.

We must not indulge in those exaggerations, those strong hyperboles, those embellished representations, which seem to give force to conversation, but which actually destroy its delicacy and beauty. This mode of speaking, by stretching out too far, touches upon the confines of falsehood. Truth appears most beautiful in its own native simplicity.

Christian conversation is marked by love, humility, and purity. These are the peculiar features by which it is known. Although so attractive from its nature and excellence, yet how few know how to appreciate or relish its charms.

Love leads us to converse with delight on all subjects connected with the glory of God and the good of man. Humility draws a veil over her own graces, and delicately discovers the excellencies of others. It frankly confesses our own faults, and carefully conceals the failings of our brethren. Purity, like the refreshing rose, sheds a fragrance peculiarly its own over our whole conversation; and, like that lovely flower, leaves its reviving scent when we are gone.

How different from the conversation of the wicked, whose throat is compared in Scripture to an open sepulcher, loathsome and offensive, disgusting and pestilential.

We naturally love to discourse on subjects which lie nearest our heart. No wonder, then, if real Christians, who feel the love of Christ constraining them, delight to talk together on the most glorious of all subjects—the love of God in the gift of his Son. May not believers now say with the disciples of old, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?"

But, alas! how little is there of this spiritual discourse among us! The men of the world, when they meet together; can enter with enthusiastic ardor on their various objects of pursuit, whether political, commercial, or philosophical. The warrior recounts his battles, the sportsman his pleasures, the merchant his adventures, the politician his schemes, the philosopher his discovery; the worldling his excesses, with a feeling and animation which demonstrate at once that their soul is engaged in the subject. And shall Christians be less alive, when they meet together for the avowed purpose of strengthening each other's hearts, and kindling each other's devotion? If our faith and love were stronger, our communion would be more profitable and delightful.

In this our day of outward prosperity and religious liberty, there is a great danger of imbibing a worldly spirit, and of allowing our fellowship to degenerate into religious trifling and religious gossiping. The conversation of too many, although it may be technically called religious, resembles the cloud, and the well without water, so strongly reprobated by Jude. When such people separate from each other, they feel no real good derived to their souls. And why? Because their conversation was destitute of that "unction from the Holy One," which is life and peace.

Jesus and his salvation—heart experience and genuine godliness, as felt and exhibited in the soul and conduct of the believer—were not the subject matter of discourse. The head, and not the heart, was called into exercise. Some religious publication—some popular preacher—some recent occurrence—some

commonplace remarks filled up the hour; and no wonder if the mind, at parting, retained its usual flatness and leanness, after such an insubstantial meal.

If it be asked, must our conversation be altogether confined to evangelical subjects? we answer, our conversation must always be in the spirit of the Gospel. If our hearts be right, we shall always have one end in view—the glory of God and the edification of our neighbor.

With this aim constantly before us, we shall not wander far from true Christian discourse. The danger arises from entering on religious conversation without religious motives and religious affections; from having a desire to talk, merely for the sake of talking. The apostolic injunction, "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," if duly obeyed, would cut off every idle and unprofitable word.

How pertinent is Malachi on this point: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for those who feared the Lord and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, says the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him." From the whole tenor of this beautiful passage, we may be assured, that what these believers spoke so often one to another was highly pleasing to the Lord of Hosts. He was their theme. Their delight was in him. They feared the Lord, and thought upon his name.

The following portions of Scripture may serve to show the nature and spirit of godly conversation—

Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart. And you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deut. vi, 4 to 7.) My tongue shall speak of your righteousness and of your praise, all the day long. (Ps. xxxv, 28.) I will meditate of all your work, and talk of your doings. (Ps. lxxvii, 42.) My tongue shall speak of your word, for all your commandments are righteous. (Ps. cxix, 172.) The mouth of the righteous man is a well of life. In the lips of him that has understanding, wisdom is found. The tongue of the just is as choice silver. The lips of the righteous feed many. The mouth of the just brings forth wisdom. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge. (Prov. xv, 7.) The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. (Prov. xx, 15.) A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things. (Matt. xii, 35.) 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 benefit those who listen. (Eph. iv, 29.) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col. iii, 16, 17.) Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man. (Col. iv, 6.) Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another. (1 Thess. v, 11.) Speak evil of no man. (Tit. iii, 2.) Exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb. iii, 13.)

The blessed Jesus, who will shortly come in the clouds of heaven to judge the world, has solemnly declared, that "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for, by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." (Matt. xii, 36, 37.) Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matt. vii, 21.) Why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke vi, 46.) If you love me, keep my commandments. (John xiv, 15.)

"Blessed Savior! be pleased to touch my lips with a live coal from your altar. Preserve me from a vain and trifling spirit. Solemnize my mind. Spiritualize my affections. Give me to feel the importance of eternal things. Shed abroad your love in my heart, and may the law of kindness dwell upon my tongue. Make me an instrument in your hands of good to others. While laboring to promote the cause of truth by spiritual conversation, may I feel the blessedness of your Gospel in my own soul. Keep me from self-seeking and from slavish fear. Enable me to speak and act for you, and never to dread the frowns of dying worms. With increasing fervor may I love the society of your people, and find my happiness in sweet communion with you, my Savior and my God."

How sweet to bless the Lord,  
 And in his praises join;  
 With saints his goodness to record,  
 And hymn his power divine!  
 These seasons of delight,  
 This soul-refreshing gleam,  
 These rays of pure eternal light,  
 Demand the grateful theme.  
 Oh blessed Jesus! pour  
 Your quickening spirit down;  
 That I, from this delightful hour,  
 Your work of grace may crown.  
 May every waiting heart

His faithful witness prove;  
And know its own eternal part  
In your redeeming love.  
Oh! blest assurance this,  
Bright beam of heavenly day;  
Sweet earnest of eternal bliss,  
To cheer the pilgrim's way.  
Thus will our joys increase,  
Our love more ardent grow;  
While all the fruits of faith and peace  
Refresh our souls below.  
But oh! the bliss sublime,  
When joy shall be complete;  
In that unclouded, glorious clime,  
Where all your servants meet.  
There shall the ransomed throng  
A Savior's love record;  
And shout, in everlasting song,  
Salvation to the Lord!