

THE CROSS AND THE TONGUE

~Other Speakers G-L: Jessie Penn Lewis:

"I tell you even weeping ... (of) enemies of the Cross" Philippians 3: 1 18

THE degree of our real identification with Christ in His death, and the criterion of the stage of our growth into the maturity of the life of the new creation, is in no respect more marked than in relation to the 'sins of the tongue', especially in regard to those we see to be 'enemies of the Cross', ignorantly or wilfully. For in no manifestation of the 'flesh' is its activity more painful and disastrous, than in the language used by even true servants of God concerning those who are either caught in the apostasy of to-day, "denying the Lord that bought them " (2 Peter 2: 1), or ensnared in the wiles of Satan in any form.

"If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also" (James 3: 2, R.V.), writes the Apostle James. The word 'perfect' in this passage, according to Young's Analytical Concordance, means 'complete' a complete man. The same word is used in Ephesians 4: 13, and is rendered in the R.V. text, a 'full-grown man'; and again in Colossians 1: 28, where it is rendered by Conybeare, 'full-grown in Christ' the word denoting 'grown to the ripeness of maturity'. Again, we find the word in Colossians 4: 12, and here it is rendered by Conybeare as meaning "ripeness of understanding, and full assurance of belief". And, lastly, the words occur in Philippians 3: 15, where the Apostle writes: "Let us all, then, who are 'ripe in understanding', be thus minded . . ." the word 'perfect' being the antithesis of 'babe' (Conybeare's note).

According to the Apostle James, then, stumbling not in word is the supreme mark of a 'complete' spiritual man, completely 'full-grown in Christ', having come to the ripeness of maturity as a new creature in Christ Jesus, thus having "ripeness of understanding and full assurance of belief" being no longer a child "tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men ... after the wiles of error" (Ephesians 4: 14, R.V.), but able to speak the truth in love, in the full assurance of faith, and calm, ripe knowledge of maturity in Christ.

The present is a sifting time for all the children of God in every degree in the spiritual life. 'Spiritual' men now will prove their 'ripeness of maturity' by their 'stumbling not in word' during the present distress. Panic and hasty, unloving words cannot be co-existent with the 'full assurance of faith' and the deep knowledge of God of the truly 'spiritual' man. The spirit of the man who is 'ripe in understanding' is shown in the words of Paul immediately following his utterance, "Let us who are 'perfect' be thus minded". "Many walk," he says, "of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ . . ." (Philippians 3: 18). "Even weeping!" Ah! this is the spirit of the spiritual man! No man who weeps in speaking of the enemies of the Cross will 'stumble in word', and grieve the Holy Spirit of God by the fruit of his lips. The truth must be spoken-but in love, and with "anguish of heart and many tears" (2 Corinthians 2: 4), for those who have gone astray. And let us not forget that the 'truth' means not what we consider 'truth' about another, but bearing_ witness to the truth of God, as ,it is written', and we have proved and known it in our lives.

And to 'stumble not in word' has much to do with our power in prayer, and our abiding in the place where we can have power with God, and prevail with men. If the adversary can draw us out of the hidden place 'with Christ in God' into the strife of tongues, he will do it. Prayer warriors, let us take heed that we abide in the place where we can 'lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting". We must 'stumble not in word' if we are to be truly abiding within the veil. And why? The Apostle James shows clearly the reason: "Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter?" (James 3: 11). Can we speak wordsbitter words-one moment, and be a channel for the sweet, pure stream of the "river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the Throne of God and the Lamb" the next? Let us listen again to James, and hear him tell the reason why the mark of a man truly 'sanctified' in spirit, soul and body is the 'stumbling not in word'.

The "tongue", says the Apostle, "setteth on fire the wheel of nature (or birth, R.V.m.), and is set on fire by hell". The 'wheel of nature', or life, which came to us from the first Adam in our birth into this world, is always roused or 'fired' by hell-by the serpent which poisoned the stream of the earth-born life in Eden. And the serpent's most effectual weapon is the tongue, for 'firing' the 'wheel of nature' in ourselves, or others. Hence the wondrous silence manifested by Christ-the Last Adam, as the pattern of the Christ-life for His redeemed, when He was accused by the chief priests and elders. He answered nothing. "Then saith Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He gave him no answer, not even to one word: insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly." Only when appealed to for truth did the Lord Christ speak, and bear witness to the truth (see John 18: 37). "Art Thou a King, then?" said Pilate. "Thou sayest it because I am a King" (R.V.m.), replied the Kingly Prisoner.

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Even so must it be to-day. Silence from witness-bearing is criminal. The trumpet-voices of the leaders of God's spiritual Israel must give no uncertain sound in the day of battle, but in all ranks of the army of the Lord 'the wheel of nature' must not be fired by hell, or it will be disaster indeed. The wheel-or movement-of the life of nature which came to us at birth must be kept continually under the power of the Cross of Christ so that the life of the Last Adam may grow in us into ripeness of maturity. The soul who has thus been united to Christ in death knows how to 'always' bear about the dying of Jesus, and to hide in the Cleft of the Rock away from the strife of tongues, which 'hell' would use to 'fire' the old life, were it not kept crucified with Christ.

The mark, therefore, of a full-grown spiritual man as 'stumbling not in word' is now easy to be understood. He has become 'full-grown' with his body under the complete mastery of the Spirit. The 'deadly poison' of the serpent transmitted by the tongue to rouse 'the wheel of nature' must find the believer hidden deep in the death of the Cross, so that he becomes a channel for God to speak through him healing, blessing, life-giving words of love. Let us therefore take heed at this time, and ask for the light of God upon the words of our mouth, lest we lose unwittingly our power within the veil. Let us "take forth the precious from the vile" i.e., distinguish in the light of God what words are from Him, or are of our own mind, so that we may be as His mouth (Jeremiah 15: 19) in this day of crisis.