

OUR SPEECH AND THE MAIL

(Jas. 3:1-6)

Introduction:

1. The Bible is filled with admonitions warning God's people about the dangers of the tongue, of our words. It would not be so prevalent if it were not such a great problem.
2. Let us consider this morning our speech, by way of an illustration I heard from Jerry Barber of the postal system. How for correct speech to occur we must have the correct address, the correct content, and the correct purpose.

Discussion:

I. The correct address.

- A. The purpose of our speech is communication; the giving or exchanging of information-Webster's New World Dictionary. If our speech is not addressed to the appropriate person communication will not occur. If I am trying to tell Don that his collar is folded up I need to tell Don, and not Terry; unless my purpose is not communication but something else.
- B. Consider the instruction we have from our Lord concerning this principle.
 1. Inside the church = Matt. 18:15-20 (in the context of not wanting any to stumble away from the truth/salvation).
 - a. When a problem arises we are commanded to go to the person from whom the problem originated (v15).
 - b. If the problem is not resolved by private communication we are to bring 2 or 3 others into the conversation in order to resolve it (v16).
 - c. If the problem is not resolved we are to bring the whole church in on it (all are to be invited to communicate with the person) so that the problem can be resolved (v17).
 - d. If the problem is still not resolved, then it is not a question of communication but of rebellion against God's will/word/people (v17).
 2. Outside the church = Matt. 5:14-16 in the manner of Matt. 7:12; and don't forget the words of Paul in Col. 4:5, 6.
- C. It is not wrong to talk with a brother or sister about another brother or sister if the discussion is informational and/or seeking advice on how to best help (or determine if help is even needed) said brother or sister. Mail delivery error occurs when the discussion is beyond that and in the realm of gossip/complaining/tearing down.
- D. When in doubt concerning any issue with a brother or sister in Christ (and in the world for that matter) go to them and talk = deliver the mail to the appropriate party.

II. The correct content.

- A. The purpose of our communication determines the correct communication. If I am writing an elected official to obtain a letter of recommendation for one of my children, a long detailed list of all of his shortcomings as my elected representative would probably not be helpful. If I am writing a love letter to my wife, a long discussion concerning the dust bunnies roaming feral in our house is probably not the right content.
- B. So too with our spiritual family. If our purpose is to maintain and strengthen the peace within the brotherhood the content of our speech should reflect that purpose. Pounding an unfaithful member with the fact that he is unfaithful is probably not the best approach. Calling him names or ignoring him (another form of communication) is also probably not going to prove useful.
 1. Consider the words of Paul in Col. 3:17 (in context) and Eph. 4:15, 16, 29 (in context).
 2. The overarching principle of Gal. 6:10 = do good!

III. The correct purpose.

- A. The right purpose comes from a right understanding. Our purpose must be Christ's purpose, not our own. Our purpose must be for the glory of the kingdom and our Lord, not self.
- B. Our interaction with one another ought to be always for the purpose of strengthening one another, comforting one another, building one another up, and at times correcting one another. We should always be seeking the best for one another.

- C. We will not have the right purpose until we have fulfilled the words of our Lord and died to ourselves in order to live for Him (Luke 9:23; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:14-17).

Conclusion:

1. Why is this such a big deal, our speech with one another and the world? Because as our Lord said many times, our speech reveals our heart (Luke 6:45 = good tree bears good fruit).
2. As always, brethren, submit to the will of God for yourself. Serve Him, and this demands serving others. And this results in salvation.
3. Invitation.

MORE ON “OUR SPEECH AND THE MAIL”

1. This illustration is not just a “cute” homily, it is powerfully effective and even makes it easier to help brethren with gossip, and other forms of inappropriate speech.
2. Our speech declares our heart (some may be good at hiding their intents but all will eventually be revealed = 1 Tim. 5:24, 25; Heb. 4:12; et al) and our heart is what we will be judged by (Gal. 6:7). That is why recognizing our speech problem is of such importance.
3. Exposition of James 3.
 - Context of chapter is lengthy discussion on faith without works being dead. The necessity of proper Christian behavior in those professing to be Christians.
 - VV 1, 2 = warning to teachers to make sure they know their stuff before presuming to teach it. Mistakes might be made but be warned; watch your words.
 - VV 3-8 = our words cause all kinds of trouble and while we must strive to tame it we may still stumble from time to time. Implied is the admonition to speak less and consider the words we do speak more.
 - VV 9-18 = words come from our heart and we must make our good words come from a good heart. Speaking Christian words and also unchristian words is evidence of contamination and double-mindedness (1:6-8). Wisdom from above manifests itself in words of righteousness sown in peace (right purpose and right content).
4. Never forget the sobering words of our Lord, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36). And, notice the context of that statement.