

Spirit from him who had inspired him with his penitential resolutions. (Psalm li. 11.) To what purpose doth the Holy Ghost descend upon us, but to declare to us "the things that are freely given to us of God?" (1 Cor. ii. 12.) And is it fit for us to hear such a declaration without a quick suitable reflection? Since the Comforter is to bring to our remembrance what Christ both spake and did, (John xiv. 26,) it must be for the same end for which they were both spoken and acted by him,—which was, to bring us to a near converse with God. Therefore, when the Spirit renews in our minds a gospel-truth, let us turn it into a present plea, and be God's remembrancers of his own promises, as the Spirit is our remembrancer of divine truths. We need not doubt some rich fruit of the application at such a season, since, without question, the impressions [which] the Spirit stamps upon us are as much "according to God's will" as the intercessions he makes for us. (Rom. viii. 27.) Therefore, when any holy thought doth advance itself in our souls, the most grateful reception we can bestow upon it will be to suffer our hearts to be immediately fired by it, and imitate with a glowing devotion the royal prophet, in that form he hath drawn-up to our hands: "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy servant, and prepare my heart unto thee." (1 Chron. xxix. 18.) This will be an encouragement to God to send more such guests into our hearts; and by an affectionate entertainment of them, we shall gain both a habit of thinking well, and a stock too.

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## SERMON XX.

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HOW MUST WE GOVERN OUR TONGUES ?

*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.—Ephesians iv. 29.*

IN these words is a *prohibition*, and [an] *admonition*: every corrupt word is restrained, savoury and useful discourse is enjoined.

For exposition inquire,

1. *What is this corrupt speech that is forbid ?*

Some restrain it to filthy, unclean speech; others extend it to all wicked speech; I conceive, it reaches also unto idle, empty, unprofitable discourse; and to this apprehension I am led by the import of the original word, σαπρος, which signifies "rotten;" and am further confirmed by the antithesis in the latter clause of the verse: "But that which is good to the use of edifying;" where he seems to intimate, that, the design of discourse being the edification of one another, as rotten, unsound wood, that will bear no stress, is not put into building, so

neither should sapless words, that have no heart in them, be used in our conversing. Downright evil words may be here condemned eminently; unclean, filthy words especially; but idle, empty words I apprehend also included; as in Eph. v. 4, they are particularly expressed, "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking."

2. *What is understood by its goodness to the use of edifying?*

In the original it sounds pretty harsh: "To the edifying of use;" which I take to be an Hebraism, and equivalent to "useful edification." Some way or other profitable our discourse should be, to the embettering and not worsening of ourselves or companions; and the goodness here spoken of is its aptness to this end. Though our discourse hath a higher or lower degree of goodness in it, as it promotes and refers to a greater or lesser good; that which refers to the embettering of our souls is eminently good discourse; and that which vulgarly carries the name of it. But we are not confined to this; if the body, the estate, the name, of our brother be industriously promoted, yea, if his mind be innocently cheered, the discourse by this rule seems allowed and approved.

3. *What is that grace that should be still ministered by it?*

Some understand it of grace in the most noble sense, the begetting and strengthening which, by our converse, we should still be endeavouring; but I cannot apprehend this singly meant; nor do I think the apostle here speaks of the adequate scope of our discourse; for *that* he seems more generally to have laid-down in the words last explained. But I conceive he points at a by-end, that will result upon our eyeing the fore-mentioned grand end, intimating, that if our words are so useful, they are likely to be grateful to the hearers, and deservedly procure us grace and favour with them; or else he here directs us so to season our speech, that it may be savoury, and have a good relish with all men; a relish of our wisdom, of our charity, or some such-like gift or grace, that God hath bestowed upon us. And this way the apostle seems to expound himself, Col. iv. 6: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." The one is exegetical of the other, if I mistake not: we should not speak as we spit,—what comes next; but have that respect to matter and manner, as no man shall reasonably be disgusted at what we say, whereby he hopes we may be able to answer every one, attaining by this practice the tongue of the learned; the salt there advised is to prevent the putrefaction before-cautioned. This grace of speech Christ was eminent in; whereon it is said of him, "Grace is poured into thy lips." (Psalm. xlv. 2.) And by this as well as other excellences he grew *χαριστι*, "in favour with God and man." (Luke ii. 52.)

From the various expressions in this latter clause I gather,—

1. *That the design of our speech should be always to some good use.*
2. *That ordinarily we should aim at the promoting one another in grace.*
3. *That, accordingly, we should study that there be an aptness and idoneity in our speech to these purposes.*—"The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth," or belcheth, "out foolishness." (Prov. xv. 2.)

But, to wave particulars, I shall only pursue this general observation :—

**OBSERVATION.** *That our very lips are under God's laws.*

If we would approve ourselves universally Christians, we must look to our words, as well as hearts and deeds. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, this man's religion is vain." (James i. 26.) The case, then, I would speak to, in answer to a query I may well expect from you, is,—

**QUERY.** *How we may and should order and govern our tongues, that we may not by them talk away our religion, but rather evidence and confirm our holy profession ?*

In handling which, I would proceed by these gradations ; showing,—

1. *That there is a great difficulty in governing the tongue.*—It is noted as a very unruly member, beyond other members, yea, beyond every thing else : he speaks even despairingly of our mastering it : "Every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind : but the tongue can no man tame ; it is an unruly evil." (James iii. 7, 8.) We find this by too sad experience : persons that in their actions are blameless are frequently in their words very faulty, and scarce reckon themselves guilty. The double guard that nature hath set over it, (of lips to secure and imprison it, of teeth, as it were, to punish it,) suffices not to restrain it. It breaks through all the bounds of God and nature, and hardly acknowledges any master.

Now the tongue is so ungovernable,

1. *In that it is a proud member.*—Being, with its endowments of rational discourse, peculiar to man ; whereas our other members are generally common to beasts. Hereon we pride ourselves hugely in it. David calls it his "glory ;" (Psalm lvii. 8 ; ) and it is certainly an organ of great excellency and use, without which we were incapable of communion and commerce, the chief advantages of human life. All of us have on this account a great opinion of it, are much pleased to hear ourselves talk, promise ourselves great matters from our tongue : *That shall get us favour, that shall get us honour.* When we despair in every thing, we have hope in that ; that can make evil good by its pleadings, and that can make good evil by its reproaches ; that shall revenge us on our enemy that is otherwise too hard for us, and defend us at the bar when aught is objected against us. You cannot imagine what confidence men have in their tongues ; and therefore no wonder they stand up so for the liberty of them. "With our tongue will we prevail ; our lips are our own : who is lord over us ?" (Psalm xii. 4.) Herein lies the impotent man's great power, and hereby he thinks to be even with every one. The hands many times are bound, and can do nothing ; it is a relief and pleasure that we can say what we list, if not before the face, yet behind the back, truly or falsely. The tongue's power lies in its liberty, which makes us so loath to have it abridged. When no way else Jeremiah's enemies could hurt him, by this dart they thought to wound him. (Jer. xx. 10.) They, therefore, that are feeblest, and most destitute of other weapons, are loathest we should blunt or any way restrain them in the use of this.

2. *In that the tongue is an active member, much beyond any others.*—

Opportunity must be waited for their actings, weariness is contracted by their actings; but the tongue is always ready and never weary, that it must be continually watched.

Active this member is *in itself*: [it is] compared therefore to a fire: "The tongue is a fire." (James iii. 6.) Its volatility and activity, as also its impartiality in respect of friend or foe, is hereby noted.

Actuated also it is *by many strong springs within*, that it is hard stopping its motion, or finding-out sometimes whence it has its impression. Pride, anger, envy, malice, hatred, all the wickedness of the heart, seeks its vent by the tongue, and falls-in upon it like streams on a mill-wheel, that of itself is disposed to perpetual motion. How can it but move, and how can it regularly move, that is impelled by such various and vicious principles? "The tongue," says he, "is full of deadly poison;" (James iii. 8;) all the ill humours are gathered to it; hence it is a great difficulty to cure or check the malignity of it.

And yet moreover it is acted and vehemently incited *from without*. The devil is still provoking of it without occasion, and by presenting occasions to show its tricks; so that there is little hope of its lying still, or acting according to God's will. What can be expected from a member that for its own activity is a fire, that is fed with such fuel, that is inflamed by such an incendiary? For so the apostle tells us, that "it is set on fire of hell." (James iii. 6.)

3. *In that it is not aware of its iniquity, what mischief it does, how guilty it is.*—Whereon it is very hard either to prevent it or repent of it. What words did they drop, and yet how do they stand up in the defence of them, as if nothing had been said amiss! "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?" (Mal. iii. 13.) The tongue is never in fault, if we might be judge, and that its own advocate; even they that are severest in censuring others' words, have always something to say for their own. And the insensibleness of tongue-sins may arise,

(1.) *In regard of its sleight and nimbleness in its actings.*—Especially when it acts in an accustomed way, it vastly out-runs our observation, as in your ordinary cursers and swearers you may see. Not one in ten of their horrible execrations is so much as noted by them: they patter them over, as a parrot doth his lesson, without any present sense or after-reflection; and are ready, if hastily charged, to swear they did not swear, and curse themselves if they cursed.

(2.) *In regard of the imperceptible wound it makes.*—It draws no blood, it doth not immediately invade its neighbours' goods, and it cannot see what hurt it does: any wound it makes, it thinks it can lick it well again straight; but therein is a great deceit: it may lick its own lips, and think so, and that ordinarily suffices. Alas! can they not bear one of its lashes? "We did but talk as we heard, as we thought;" and that is nothing till it comes to be our own case.

(3.) *In regard of the pleasure it takes in all it doeth.*—That drowns all sense of evil in it: it cannot be sin that tastes so sweet. Whereas many other sins are not acted without great pains, men draw at them like horses; they proceed out of us, as the devils out of the poor men, tormenting and tearing of us, that we are sensible of the evil of them;

these sins of the tongue are vented with ease: we are not wasted, nor any way wearied, by them; yea, they ease us in their venting, we were big to be delivered of them, that some pleasure comes that way to us; and several things in us are mainly tickled by them: now pride, on a conceit of wit; then profaneness, in our very boldness; again, malice and revenge, that it hath wreaked itself with such easiness: one devil or other is still set on laughing in us, and thus these sins go down merrily with us, and are little suspected or censured by us, they look too pleasantly to mean any harm to us. Thus you find some tickled by those speeches, through which others were damned. "Spots they are and blemishes," *μωμοι*, "sporting themselves with their own deceivings." (2 Peter ii. 13.)

(4.) *In regard of the applause it ordinarily hath.*—Whisperers and tale-bearers, how welcome are they to a great many for their story's sake! They procure oftentimes favour to themselves, while they are breaking the most entire friendship. The profanest scoffers, even at religion itself, for some spark of wit in that their greatest folly, are entertained commonly by laughter: one corruption or other in hearers cries-up every thing that is ill said, and many things purely for being ill said; and these prating fools are hardened in their sin, in that these laughing "fools make a mock of it." (Prov. xiv. 9.) Upon these accounts, then, it appears no small difficulty to govern the tongue; the more pains is to be taken with it, the severer watch is to be set over it.

II. *The tongue is a very mischievous outlaw, no member like it, if it get loose.*—What expressions has the apostle of it? "A world of iniquity," he calls it; (James iii. 6;) knowing by nothing greater to set it out, and intimating all sin to be gathered together in it,—uncleanness, injustice, heresy, hard-heartedness, and what not. And yet, as if he had not said enough, he adds, that "it defileth the whole body:" it begins its mischief at home, like a recoiling gun that lays its shooter in a shattered condition on his back, while it wounds his brother at the heart. One cannot bespatter his neighbour but he dirties and daubs himself; the sin is his, and the shame shall be his, whoever may at present suffer by him. Can he charge any further mischief on the tongue? "It setteth on fire the course of nature." All the turbulent motions of these lower spheres are from the petulancy and inordinacy of this little member, that lashes every thing out of its genuine pace: it sows jealousies, it stirs-up heats and animosities, it foments enmities, provokes to injuries, it sets all the world together by the ears, that we had better [have] been without tongues, than that they should be without government. Yet, more particularly,

1. *It lets fly at every one, nobody is secure from it.*—Majesty and innocency, that are fences against most evils, set none beyond the reach of the tongue. The God of heaven, and the greatest and holiest men on earth, do often suffer by it. We are told of some that should "curse their king and their God," (Isai. viii. 21,) and "are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." (2 Peter ii. 10.) It is a meddling member that will let nobody alone; a very wasp that is buzzing about in every corner, if its wings be not clipped; another Ishmael, its hands are against every one: very extensive it is, then, in its offence.

2. *It lets fly every way, in a way of detracting, reviling, flattering,*

*lying, &c.*—No member has so many and such contrary ways of offending, that it never lacks opportunity of doing mischief, be it in good humour or in bad: either by its glozing it deceives us, or by its roving it tires us, or by its levity it deadens us, or by its ribaldry it daubs us, or by its insolency it affronts us.

3. *No such wounds as those that are made by it.*—It hits us even where it lists; in our estates, in our lives, in our names. By false witness or privy slander, it may undo us in all that is dear to us at once, especially in a credulous, uncharitable day, as this is: hence you may observe that he which bore all the evils of the world without any flinching, is something moved by what he suffered from the tongue, that commonly touches where we be most tender, its darts sink deepest, and its wounds heal slowest of any other. (Psalm lxi. 19, 21.) And in this respect the tongue may be expressed not only by a rod, by a scourge, by a sword, but by the sting and poison of a serpent, to note the anguish of its biting, and the difficulty of its curing. (Psalm cxl. 3; xlii. 10; Prov. xiv. 3.)

Can we infer nothing from all this? Sure, we may conclude,

(1.) *That in all reason and righteousness such a member should be strictly kept-in, even as an ox that is wont to going.* Or,

(2.) *That if we keep it not in, God will cut it out.*—His righteousness requires one, if our righteousness fail of the other. If our tongue must take its course, and go uncontrolled, it shall not go unpunished. The first signal judgments in the primitive times were for the sins of the tongue. Ananias and Sapphira for their lie are struck dead; (Acts v. 1—10;) and Herod for his vanity and vain-glory in his speech is eaten-up with worms, while alive. (Acts xii. 23.) And doth not the scorched tongue of the rich man in hell tell us, that tongue-sins shall be severely required of us? (Luke xvi. 24.)

III. *That the tongue, when reduced into order, is an excellent subject.*—No member so able, so active as that: it is the same for good as it was for evil: when rightly set, none is more useful or ornamental to religion than that. You hear what a value God sets upon it; the very hearts of others are not to be compared to it. “The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth.” (Prov. x. 20.)

To show particularly what a good subject it is, such as none like it, note,

1. *That it is a faithful intelligencer to God, and to that purpose holds a continual correspondence with him, betraying its bosom-friends that it finds enemies to him, and discovering all plots that are against him.*

—Not a sin shall stir in our own hearts, but God shall hear of it, that he may timely suppress it; not a sinner shall tumultuate in the world, but it shall notice him thereof with a sharp zeal for his honour and interest. “It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law.” (Psalm cxix. 126.) “Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.” (Psalm lxxiv. 22, 23.) This office advanceth the tongue unto no small capacity in the kingdom of God: not that God needs it, but he likes and requires it; and with a communication of like secrets that concern us he ordinarily requites it.

2. *It pays a continual and considerable tribute to him of praise and thanksgiving.*—Yea, it doth not only pay its own share, but would willingly collect it of others for its great and greatly-beloved Prince. “My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.” (Psalm cxlv. 21.) Its only grudging is, that it hath so scanty an offering, that it can speak no louder, and sing no sweeter, when it hath such a subject as God’s praises: whence is that: “O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.” (Psalm li. 15.)

3. *It busies itself in bringing-in and reconciling rebels to him, seeks every way the enlargement of his kingdom.*—By making advantageous reports of him, as in Canticles v. 10; by beseeching persons to lay aside their enmity to him. (2 Cor. v. 20.) David promises this service to God with some hopes of success: “I will teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” (Psalm li. 13.) It is needless to tell you how serviceable the tongues of good men have been, and yet are, to this purpose: which work, as it is the glory of God, so, of all works, is the joy of angels. (Luke xv. 10.)

4. *It is also a useful fellow-subject.*—It hath to give, and is ready to give, good advice and counsel to others, by which it is hugely helpful to them. The tongue’s charity and liberality is famous; and, believe it, when it is become a good tongue, it is, as before noted, a silver tongue, and its gifts are beyond those of silver and gold. Two expressions note to this effect: “The lips of the righteous feed many.” (Prov. x. 21.) Their words are others’ bread, and the best bread they can get. But are they drink too? See Prov. x. 11: “The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life;” a well for plenty, for purity; and a well whose waters have a singular encomium,—they are waters of life. To this let me further add what you find, Prov. xii. 18: “The tongue of the wise is health;” whence it may be called the “wholesome tongue.” (Prov. xv. 4.)

Two inferences I would hence make:—

(1.) *That it is worth our while to use our utmost diligence to bring our tongues into order, since they are such excellent organs of God’s honour, and so eminently serviceable unto our brethren, upon their regulation.*

(2.) *That it must needs be God’s great delight to see them in order, and observe them acting in this their glory.*—Now he loves to hear us speak, accordingly he provokes us to it, as if it yielded sweet melody to him: “O my dove, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice.” (Canticles ii. 14.) Elsewhere what a high commendation does he give of it! “Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honey-comb: honey and milk are under thy tongue.” (Canticles iv. 11.) But, above all, we may see this in that of Mal. iii. 16, 17, where they are represented talking, God hearkening, writing, and resolving what he will do for them, and expressing what account he made of them; their words seemed to hang as jewels in his ears, and their persons he will lay as jewels in his royal closet: “They shall be mine in that day that I make up my jewels.”

IV. *That it is the great glory of a man to have a good government over his tongue.*—The bare holding of it in makes a fool seem wise: “Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth

his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." (Prov. xvii. 28.) And the lolling-out of the tongue, both naturally and morally, is reputed a great indication of folly. "He that uttereth a slander, is a fool." (Prov. x. 18.) For what can he propose to himself in it to compensate for what he ventures by it? His brother's credit is wasted; but his own conscience,—it may be wounded, as having transgressed both charity and equity: and two to one, if in the like or a worse kind he be not requited, and go unpitied; yea, should all others spare him, he is even with himself; for whatever he hath said of his neighbour, he hath scarce given him a worse name than he has taken to himself [that] of a slanderer.

But the right ordering of our tongue, as to what is let-out, and what is kept-in, does not only speak a good man, but makes him glorious and eminent among other good men: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." (James iii. 2.) He must have a measure of his own parts, a command of his own passions, and insight into seasons and occasions. It is a modest expression, that he which can do this is able to command himself; indeed, if we could find the man, he is fit to govern the world.

Whereas, on the other hand, *he* is fit for nothing *that* has a loose and licentious tongue; and it is generally a token of an impotent man. Try what you can make of him: an ill *neighbour*, I will warrant you, he will prove; he must be prattling of every thing, and every one; every thing he sees, every thing he hears, he turns into a story: one would not he should look over one's wall, come into one's house, talk with one's children or servants; he is either fishing out of them, or dropping into them, what is not convenient. His eye, his ear are still propping for fuel to that fire [which] his tongue is inflamed with. His humour is set out, Psalm xli. 6: "If he come to see me, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it." As bad a neighbour as he is, he is yet a worse *friend*: he trifles away our time, he tires our patience, he betrays our trusts: there can be no confidence in him; we must still be upon the watch; one may as well make a whole town our friend as such an one. But yet, too, a much worse *relation* he makes: it is next [to] dwelling in a mill, to dwell with him; his clack is always going, only not in so good tune and order as that we allude to. The wise man could not think of a condition so intolerable as the being yoked with such a relation. "It is better to dwell in the corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house." (Prov. xxv. 24.) And a brawling man is as very a trouble-house, and in some sense more intolerable, as more preternatural. In sum, a well-governed tongue is not more our glory than an unruly one is our shame; that we are pricked on both sides, by honour and dishonour, to endeavour as much as may be the regulation of this member, as we consult the credit of our whole man. These things that we in general have premised may be improved as motives, and moral helps for the government of the tongue. But, more particularly, in order to its right management we must consider,

- I. *Its just measure.*
- II. *Its due matter.*
- III. *Its proper scope.*



I. *As to the measure.*—And here we must note the *extremes* that are to be avoided, and the *mean* that is to be observed.

1. The first extreme is *over-silence*; a rare fault, but a fault against the very intent of the tongue, and is a burying of that talent: it is justly chargeable with a great deal of evil, and suspicious of much more. And this in some is natural from frigidty and excessive melancholy: they are the easiest pardoned, though not altogether excused, when otherwise duly qualified and called. (Exod. iv. 10—12.)

In some this is contracted by others' iniquity: these are most to be pitied; the violent suffocation of their thoughts is not without great vexation of their hearts: as Lot might be an instance. (2 Peter ii. 2, 8.) And David: "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned." (Psalm xxxix. 2, 3.)

In others this is affected out of moroseness, doggedness, or design; in these the offence is most aggravated, the silence is most sinful. But, more particularly:

*When are we guilty of over-much silence?*

(1.) *When justice is obstructed by it.*—My neighbour has suffered wrong; I know it; without my testimony he cannot have right; I conceal it; my secrecy involves me in the iniquity. (Lev. v. 1.) A pretence of peaceableness and good-neighbourhood stops the mouths of several in this case; but peace of conscience, and the cause of righteousness, should be preferred before all peace, and above every other consideration take place, if the matter especially be momentous.

(2.) *When charity is omitted, and is not likely from other hands to be at least so seasonably and advantageously administered.*—There is oft-times great charity in a word; and it is the greatest cruelty imaginable to spare that word; and it is often further heightened from the parties to which it is grudged. For instance: if we are made privy to any thing, the discovery of which is for great public good, and conceal it for private advantage, beyond what is fitting for our private capacity, and a just reward for our ingenuity; we highly transgress against public charity, and are unworthy of the benefits of society: this we learn from the lepers' case, themselves being judges. (2 Kings vii. 8, 9.) Again: if we alone are privy to a brother or friend's fault, wherein he goes on, and is not like of himself to come off, bolstering himself up in the opinion of its secrecy, a word of reproof from thee might save him; and thou art the greatest enemy he has, if thou withholdest it from him. (Lev. xix. 17.)

Further: thy own soul is in a dark and dismal state, thy neighbour or friend is full of light: by one question thou mightest do much to thy own illumination; and yet thou pinest away and perishest for lack of knowledge: where is thy love to thyself in the mean time? Tongue-charity is the cheapest of all charity; and yet many, certainly not without great guilt, let their country's, friends', and own souls starve for lack of it.

(3.) *If our own spirits be soured by it.*—Words kept-in are, many times, like humours struck-in,—go to the heart and offend the vital parts. Maliciousness, censoriousness, are often so fed; vent might give relief in this case, and be the only means for our cure, if moderately and discreetly given. Many can write their *probatum est* to this.

(4.) *If our company, whom we may and ought to please so far as we can, be grieved or offended at it.*—Silence, where we may be free, and have wont to be free, and it is justly expected we should be free, as among friends, relations, &c., *speaks* very cuttingly, and should not causelessly be long kept, lest it be ill interpreted: it intimates anger at them, or contempt of them; it renders you wholly insignificant to them: you had as good send your horse among them, if you will not converse like a man with them.

(5.) *If our calling and commission from God be to speak, we may not be silent, as to any one thing committed to us to speak, in this case.*—You know who said, “We cannot but speak;” (Acts iv. 20;) woe is us, if we do not. Paul no other way could clear himself of their blood, than by protesting “that he had not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God.” (Acts xx. 27.) And our Saviour doth mainly comfort himself, as having hid or kept back nothing given in charge to him. “Lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart: I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth. Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me.” (Psalm xl. 9—11.)

(6.) *If the cause and honour of God call for a public testimony, no one in his way may innocently withhold it, however mean be his capacity.*—Children, therefore, in Christ’s day, were called forth to it, and justified in it. (Matt. xxi. 15, 16.) And when offence was taken on a like occasion, he tells them, that if “those should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.” (Luke xix. 40.)

You see, then, that there is a “time to speak” as well as “keep silence:” (Eccles. iii. 7:) happy he that hits his time; and he that heeds it will hardly miss it, or if he does, shall the more easily be excused it. We commonly say, that “little said is soon amended:” true; but yet for not speaking, as well as not doing, in some cases we may be condemned. It is therefore our duty to rouse our tongue when it is sluggish, as well as hold it in where it is lavish, calling upon it as he, [in] Psalm lvii. 8: “Awake up, my glory;” or, as you have another instance: “Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song.” (Judges v. 12.)

2. The second extreme to be avoided is *loquacity*, or overmuch speaking; a fault many are incident to, through the levity of their temper, and looseness of their tongues; and it is a very hard task for them to talk much and talk well. He is peremptory, that “in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.” (Prov. x. 19.) And I suppose he speaks modestly, and that he means that there is a great deal of sin.

But let our query be,—

QUESTION. “When any one may be said to talk too much?”

Some few of many instances take as follows:

(1.) *When talking excludes thinking.*—The tongue outruns the wit: a little of this talk is too much, as being to no purpose but to betray our folly, abuse our brother’s patience, and waste precious time. One may talk to children at this rate to save a needless expense of sense, where there is but little; but it is an intolerable presumption upon men to entertain them with words more crude than our belches, that we fetch not so low as our breath, and that little differ from an ass’s braying.

(2.) *When it will not give way to hearing, especially when wiser and better men be present.*—If they were inferior and weaker, it were meet they should be allowed their turns; every one may be supposed to have brought something wherewith the whole might be edified: in engrossing all the talk to thyself, thou art chargeable with unseemly vaunting, thou art in the ready way to emptying, there is no hope of thy replenishing; go whoop and halloo in the woods, if thou wilt be answered only by thy own echo. Proud men and passionate men are apt so to offend: they have no ears, and so are unlike to edify, and, for any thing they are like to get, had as good keep out of company. Mark advice of one that understood the government of the tongue as well as any other: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." (James i. 19.) The last direction is to make good the former.

(3.) *When talking shuts-out working either in our common or Christian calling.*—Some men have got such a vein of talking, that it is their great business, and for which they neglect all business, so many hours in a day they snatch from all occasions on purpose to chat: this is more than can be justified; the apostle blames it in the women of his day: "They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle, but tattlers also and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not." (1 Tim. v. 13.) And, sure, it is more to be reprov'd in men, that should be more stayed, and might be much better employed; but the tongue is not only wont to take the hands off of business, but to take upon it the business of the hands; as in the great duty of distributing to the poor, *that* will serve them with good words, when the hands should be ministering good things; the vanity of which he upbraids, James ii. 15, 16. And so it is apt to run all religious offices into mere talk, which is like grain that hath only a stalk.

(4.) *When the whole man is turned into tongue, that, sure, is a talkative man.*—And such there be a great many, that cannot utter half their mind the natural way: whether it be from the fulness or filthiness of the matter they are stuffed with, you may guess; I am apt to think that they are full of filthy matter, that the tongue is even ashamed to utter; or else straitened to vent fast enough, and therefore hands, and feet, and eyes, must speak too for greater riddance. They talk in characters for haste; sometimes you have signs for words, at other times words for sentences; you must guess their meaning. For instance: "He is — I will say no more:" that is their way to brand a man, leaving you to think the worst you can, and at leisure to put it in, reserving hereby a liberty for themselves to creep out, if called in question. This is the greatest talker I know: he speaks when he says nothing, and says most when he utters least: *Hunc tu, Romane, caveto*:\* look to this man; I durst almost warrant him a filthy beast, or crafty knave, though, it may be, he only counterfeits one: the wise man doth so represent him. "He walketh with his mouth, and talketh with his feet:" (Prov. vi. 12—14:) what a monster is this man!

\* HORATIUS *Sermonum* lib. ii. sat. iv. 85.

"Of things he never saw who tells the tale,  
And friendship's secrets knows not to conceal,  
This man is vile. Here, Roman, fix your mark:  
His soul is black, as his complexion's dark."—FRANCIS'S Translation.

3. The mean that lies between these two extremes is, *neither to wrap this talent up in a napkin, nor yet lavish it away ; but prudently to use it as we see opportunity to improve it, that in the latter day we may give an account of it.*

RULES.

In order to the observance of which mean I would give the following directions :—

**RULE I.** *Rest not in ignorance.*—That will seal-up thy mouth in silence if thou beest sensible of it, or let loose thy tongue with impudence if thou overlookest it. Open thy eyes, open thy ears, open thy heart, to receive instruction, that thou mayest be fit for pertinent communication ; lay-in before thou layest-out ; and particularly know thyself, know whereof thou art about to speak, to whom thou dost speak, and thou shalt not be to seek how to speak, whether any thing or nothing, whether much or little, whether interrogatively or dogmatically ; the knowledge of thy own measure will be a great help to keep the right measure in this whole matter.

**RULE II.** *Give not way to idleness.*—Employ thy heart, employ thy hands, charge every part with something, and then this busy member may submit to its share, and go to its burden ; but if the whole man be disengaged and unemployed, all the vigour of the man doth ordinarily run to his tongue. He must be doing something, though next to nothing, and falls commonly into a humour of excessive talking, as you may observe in children that are not come to work, and old people that are past it, unless grace or gravity of manners check it. The Athenians were this way tainted, that nothing but news would be digested ; and in gathering and spreading that they were perpetually exercised. (Acts xvii. 21.) But business diverts and spends the humour, and something tames and moderates this as well as other members.

**RULE III.** *Avoid drunkenness.*—That loosens the reins of the whole man, and especially prevents the government of the tongue, and sets it on running and rambling without fear or wit. It makes men spew, that were wont only to spit ; it brings-up all that is in our minds as well as stomachs. *In vino veritas* : “All will out when the wine is in.” (Prov. xxiii. 31.) Persons of an airy, light temper may find this inconvenience forthwith, upon a sip or two of wine or strong drink, and for every glass of liquor abate an ounce of wit : they should be more cautious than other men. Wine is indeed proper for them of a sorrowful heart, to raise their dejected spirits to a due temper ; (xxxi. 6 ; ) but one that for ordinary is rather touched with too much levity, is quickly overborne with it, and his tongue soon trips, however firm his feet may stand.

**RULE IV.** *Watch against all passionateness.*—That is a degree of madness, and precipitates wise men into great extravagancies of speech ; many can scarce hold their hands, but fewer can hold their tongues, under the transport of it. If ever the teeth are useful to bite-in the tongue, it is when it is inflamed by passion, and has broken in heat from the government of reason. Either refrain anger, or refrain speech altogether when angry, as you would not proclaim your own folly.

**RULE V.** *Keep-under pride.*—That never keeps a decorum, but puts

you forward beyond what becomes you, in contempt of others that are not inferiors to you ; whereas humility will represent them at least even with you, that you would be awed into a graceful modesty. If we think we have all the wit, we shall next arrogate to ourselves all the talk ; and by thinking ourselves wise make ourselves fools.

RULE VI. *Keep-up charity*, which will secure from the transports of ill-will and envy.

II. *The matter* of our discourse is to be regulated : and here occurs a two-fold consideration of it :—

1. *Something it is our sin to make matter of our discourse.*

2. *Other things it is our duty.*

1. As to *sinful matter*, we must wholly restrain our tongues : “ Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.” (Eph. iv. 29.) And, again : “ Keep thy tongue from evil.” (Psalm xxxiv. 13.)

The particular evils of the tongue are not to be reckoncd-up in a single sermon.

Some general rules I will therefore lay down, whereto the most considerable may be reduced.

#### RULES.

RULE I. *Those things are evil, and not to be uttered, whereby God immediately is dishonoured.*—And by this we are admonished to take heed of venting heresies, uttering blasphemies, all rash swearing, forswearing, and taking God’s name in vain ; sins all of a high nature, and committed generally in height of spirit, and [which] look as like presumptuous sins, for which God hath appointed no sacrifice, as most we can reckon-up, in regard of the small temptation to them, and the impudence that is common in them. (Num. xv. 30, 31.)

RULE II. *Those things also our tongue is to be restrained from, whereby our brother is wronged as to his outward man ; whether as to life, estate, or name.*—Unrighteousness is the evil of such speeches, a manifest evil, and is aggravated from the degree wherein he suffers, and from the directness of our intention in bringing it upon him ; though, whether directly or indirectly, of malice and set purpose or out of pure weakness, our brother suffers and we sin, that we were no more tender of him in concerns that are so dear to ourselves, and about which we have been so specially cautioned of God : and of this nature eminently are slander and false testimony.

RULE III. *Those things must more especially be forborne, whereby our brother’s soul is likely to be defiled, and his manners corrupted, in that the greatest charity is here transgressed.*—As, for instance, all unclean speeches, by which lust may be drawn-forth ; provoking speeches, whereby passion may be stirred-up ; all enticements to evil, and encouragements in evil ; any thing whereby our brother’s spirit may be lightened, or his heart hardened.

RULE IV. *Such things whereby the fundamental laws of society are violated, and all confidence in one another destroyed.*—I will instance particularly in three :—

(1.) *Lying.*—That makes words signify just nothing, and cuts-off all communion between one another’s souls, that we can never know each

other's minds : we are hereby at a far greater loss than if we could not speak at all. How detestable this sin is, you may learn by what you read, Rev. xxi. 8 ; xxii. 15.

(2.) *Tale-bearing*.—That is a trade set-up directly against all friendship, and [is] the great bane of love in the world ; which yet has too much countenance from the generality of the world : but God, that is always more than ourselves solicitous for our good, has especially cautioned against it, (Lev. xix. 16,) and warned us of the evil effects of it. (Prov. xviii. 8.)

(3.) *Revealing of secrets*, which destroys all confidence, and breaks the most sacred bonds of friendship. And as to these we may be doubly faulty :

(i.) *In reference to such secrets as are committed to us sub sigillo.\**—These every one is convinced he ought to keep so for his truth's sake, and to answer the confidence that was put in him ; though many are never quiet till they have broken this bond, but are rather irritated by their being bound. "A tale-bearer revealeth secrets." (Prov. xi. 13.) Especially,

(ii.) *In reference to such as come to us without such a formal bond, out of weakness or good-nature*.—If there may be wrong to the party confiding in us by divulging what he hath so committed to us, the very matter of the case obligeth us ; in justice, though not in faithfulness, we are bound to be his secretaries, if a far greater good may not come by the discovery. And let me here give a special caution in a case wherein you may be liable to temptation.

Take heed what you do tell to a friend, lest he should after prove an enemy : this is prudence. Take heed you discover not, when an enemy, what was told you as a friend : that is piety.

RULE V. The matter of the discourse is faulty, *when the very ends of it are overlooked, and you fruitlessly and foolishly squander away both time and talents, not considering that idle words are also evil words, and to be reckoned-for another day.* (Matt. xii. 36, 37.)

QUESTION. "How shall we restrain our tongues from all this evil ?"

(1.) *By purging the seeds of it out of our hearts*.—Our Saviour looked upon it as an unnatural thing, and not to be expected, that they that are evil should speak good things, inasmuch as "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Matt. xii. 34.) That, therefore, must be first cleansed, that the mouth may be kept clean : while there are filthy thoughts, malicious purposes, impetuous passions, and idle imaginations allowed there, by the tongue, as well as other ways, they will have their vent ; by every member the heart will be discharging itself of its abundance. Whence, again, he observes, that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts, false-witness, blasphemies." (Matt. xv. 19.) Mind, therefore, how you are still directed to lay the axe unto the root, and crucify the evil affections of the heart, that you may prevent the extravagancies of the tongue : "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." (Eph. iv. 31.) He despaired [that] clamour and evil-speaking should be restrained, except wrath and malice were extirpated. And to the same purpose, Col. iii. 8, 9 : "Put off anger,

\* "Under the seal" (or charge) of secrecy.—EDIT.

wrath, malice;" and then he hath some hopes they might also forbear "blasphemy, filthy communication, lying." Let your first care, then, be of the heart, and its first motions; for every member thence hath its impressions; and all pretence of care, without a regard to this, will be but a palliation, and we may expect a more violent eruption.

(2.) *By stopping our ears, and shutting our eyes, against every thing that may feed the fore-mentioned evil humours.*—If they be fermented afresh, they will flow anew. And be aware of remainders of them in the best of you: if we would effectually keep a fire from smoking, we must keep it from burning; and to secure it from burning, keep it from blowing, and fresh supplies of fuel. We can easily apply this: no refining of the tongue without purging of the heart; no keeping that pure, if any thing that defiles is suffered to enter there, the ordinary passages into which are by the eye and ear. Avoid, therefore, in prosecution of this direction, all vain, idle, angry, envious, malicious companions, lest they be infusing into thee their venom. Bid adieu to all profane ranters and ribalds, to all tale-bearers and whisperers; they will kindle the fire of lust or anger, if there be a spark in thee. And, next to them, avoid all books that are stuffed with profane jests, or that gender to excessive heats: these assault us like formed armies, when occasional words are like slight sallies of a small party. And, lastly, beware of vain and filthy sights; and the more artificial, the more dangerous, as, more affecting the fancy, sinking deeper into the memory, and pressing more importunately into the mouth, they tickle us into the talk of them.

(3.) *By laying the laws against all idle and evil speaking before our eyes, in their reasonableness and rigour.*—Their reasonableness will appear, if we consider them *as for us*: would we [that] any body should abuse us with lies, or load us with reproaches? No. Why, then, it is well God hath provided by his law that they shall not; and is it not alike equal thou shouldst not deal by another as thou wouldest not be dealt-by thyself? The law, then, is good, and the punishment is as great. Thy soul may go for an ill word: consider of it, has an evil word sufficient pleasure to compensate for eternal pain? Sure, it is wisdom to forbear such words, if we may pay so dear for them.

(4.) *By considering the odiousness of it in others.*—And in them we may see it in its true colours; things are too near us to be aright discerned by us, when they are observed in ourselves. A liar, a false witness, a backbiter, a tale-bearer,—how do you like such men? Would you have your child trained-up in such things? Why, then, will you allow them in yourselves? How came they to be more tolerable in you than other men? Is it that it is no matter what becomes of you? How comes it that you have cast-off all care of and love to self, that you would have every body better than yourself?

(5.) *By reflecting upon the reproaches we have had from our own hearts for it, and the inconveniences we have suffered, and the damages others have reaped by it, beyond our possible reparation.*—Is it not time, then, to take-up?

(6.) *By remembering that God observes it, and will judge thee for it.*—A reverend man would awe thee, if there was danger, especially

of the pillory; and how canst thou cast-off the fear of God, to talk before him so loosely? How wilt thou like to have all thy vain and vile words read and aggravated at the last day? It will be one part of that day's work. (Jude 15, 16.)

2. *There is matter that it is our duty to discourse of.*—The general nature of which I shall lay before you; as,

(1.) *Such as, though of a common and inferior nature, as referring to things of this life, yet is of consequence to ourselves or neighbours to be debated, for the right understanding or better managing of our joint or several concerns.*—This, as tending to justice, charity, peace, or the like, by the good use it may be of, is sanctified and becomes our duty, and we may not without sin decline it, when duly provoked to it; for, as mean as these matters seem, God hath concerned himself to make severe laws, that we worst not one another in them; by which we are obliged to improve and embetter each other as we can; and surely most of all when by a word it may be done. How does Job's conscience approve him in his having been a faithful counsellor!—"I was eyes to the blind." (Job xxix. 15.) And what a character does Christ give to the peace-makers!—"They shall be called the children of God." (Matt. v. 9.) And, yet further, the command to worldly business six days in seven does more than allow worldly discourse, especially when it hath a moral use. So that as it is a vain superstition of some not to touch these things, so is it of others to decline necessary profitable talk of them; as if it were a piece of service to God to be useless unto men, while by his providence we are among them. Know, then, where by weakness your brother needs advice, and by a greater stock of wisdom you are able to give it, it is his duty, in order to the prudent management even of his worldly affairs, to ask it, and yours as freely to give it; for you therefore have it, and cannot otherwise give a good account of it.

CAUTION. Let me only caution, that on this pretence you launch not out into discourse of this nature *unseasonably*, as on the Lord's day; *unnecessarily*, for mere talk's sake; *immoderately*, to the burying of all other discourse or hindering more important business of your own or brother's: it should also be carefully avoided, that we intrude not ourselves as busy-bodies into the discourse of others' matters, while we are unconcerned, and to persons unconcerned, for which we are like to go unthanked, whereby our brother may be wronged, and nobody is edified.

(2.) *It may be our duty to discourse of what is done in the world, wherein God's justice, power, wisdom, faithfulness, or goodness is advanced.*—One design of God's marvellous working is to furnish us with fit matter for talking. His signs in Egypt are particularly noted to have had this reference: "That they might tell in the ears of their sons, and sons' sons, what things he had wrought in Egypt, hat they might know that he was the Lord." (Exod. x. 2.) God's works are one of his books, that we should much confer about. David pleases himself to see the whole world as set about a round table, conferring their notes of what they had seen and observed of God in his works, from generation to generation: "I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy



terrible acts ; and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness." (Psalm cxlv. 5—7.)

This seems to be talk for the generality of men, there is something in it peculiarly pleasing to all palates ; and an example often affects, when a precept would be overlooked ; and, I am confident, if we could prudently discourse of the works of God, we might more advantage the profaner sort of men, than by talking to them out of the word ; for they are prejudiced against that, and shut upon it straight, as perceiving whereto that would [tend] ; but they are pleased with story, and lie more open to it, that there is greater hope, ere they be aware, of their being caught with it. (Psalm cvii. 42.)

That this discourse may be profitable, take the following advice :

First. *Make wise observation.*—Look with both eyes on what happens, look into it, look after God in it, and spy what attribute is eminently glorified by it. "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." (Psalm cvii. 43.)

Secondly. *Make faithful representations.*—Lie not for God. The Romish legends, by their multitude of fables, have greatly minished the veneration of all miracles. One fly spoils a whole pot of ointment : the same does one lie in a most useful history.

Thirdly. *Make charitable interpretations as to persons or parties.*—Be not too severe in censuring them that God makes examples. It was the fault and folly of the Jews. Christ tells us, they were out ; and we, as well as they, may be out : let us be warned by them. (Luke xiii. 1—3.)

Fourthly. *And make pious applications.*—And still put-in yourself as concerned where you note any thing to be learned. (1 Cor. x. 5, 11 ; Psalm xc. 11, 12.) Many profane the providences of God by their slight discourses of them, without regard to God or his glory in them ; but you, on the other hand, by observing rules, may hallow his name and spread his fame.

(3.) *It is yet more especially our duty to be discoursing to one another of what God hath said to the world for our mutual direction, caution, and consolation.*—This is to be our familiar and frequent discourse, wherein we should be most delighted, and whereby we may be most edified. "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart : and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deut. vi. 6, 7.) "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another." (Col. iii. 16.)

What will we advise in order to the more easy and profitable management of this duty ?

First. *Furnish yourselves with all variety of pious matter, that you may have a word to adapt every occasion, and bring out of your treasure new or old according to the season.*—Hence you will have a presentness of mind to the work, and there will be a peculiar gratefulness in your words, as savouring neither of force nor affectation : in this sense Christ had "the tongue of the learned," (Isai. l. 4,) and thus he would have every scribe instructed. (Matt. xiii. 52.) This would make our dis-

course still pertinent, that it could not well be rejected. "A word upon the wheels" (Prov. xxv. 11) he calls it, in respect of readiness and regularity.

Secondly. *Affect your heart with what you are about to speak.*—David waited till his heart was hot, and the fire burned, and then he spake. (Psalm xxxix. 3.) And then it is that your words will flow from your mouths, and glow upon your companions' hearts; you seem in earnest, and they know not how to take it in jest.

Thirdly. *Fortify yourselves for such discourse, reckoning you may meet with discouragements.*—But put on the brow of brass; be not dismayed nor ashamed; let iniquity be ashamed and stop its mouth. But, while vanity and all manner of ribaldry pass current in every company, let not good discourse creep into a corner, as if it alone were guilty. Say, as Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ;" and resolve to walk and talk according to it, say the world what they will of thee for it.

Fourthly. *Watch occasions to fall most handsomely upon it.*—Not as putting-by discourse of a lower alloy, but as improving it, ingrafting your good fruit on their crab-stock, as Christ hath given you frequent examples; and assure yourselves, the more natural and insensible your transition is, the easier and better will the discourse be entertained, inasmuch as the company is less affronted than if their discourse was directly put by, and yours preferred.

Fifthly. *Labour to make your good discourse every way as grateful as it may.*—Wisely considering [the] persons you are conversing with, what is to be said, and how every thing may take best that you say. "Because the preacher was wise, he sought to find out acceptable" (as well as profitable) "words;" (Eccles. xii. 10;) and no doubt *acceptable*, that they might be *profitable*. Now there are several things [that] give a grace, and are a great set-off, to our words, some of which commend them to one, and some to others, and some to all.

To begin with those that are more general and adorn all discourse: such are *measure, season, suitableness, sweetness, soundness, &c.* These must be still regarded, or company may justly be offended, as being some way abused; their time seems not valued, their businesses [not] regarded, their passions [not] considered, their persons or parts [not] duly revered, when their ears are impertinently entertained, or perpetually with the same things tired.

And then, more particularly, *modesty* wins much on superiors; *familiarity*, on inferiors; a *pleasant lepor or saltness*, upon equals; *freeness*, on friends; *courteousness*, on strangers; *meekness*, on offenders; *plainness*, on the ignorant. You need take least care to please the wise; for he heeds *the matter*, and can make allowances for *the manner* of the discourse.

QUESTION. "Is that *lepor* or 'saltness' of speech [which] we spoke of allowable in holy discourse?"

The grounds of doubt are, in that the apostle seems to reckon it inconvenient in any discourse; (Eph. v. 4;) and it may look like a transgression of that peculiar gravity that seems proper for our religious discourse.

ANSWER I. It is generally granted that the word *ευτραπεια*, by which this jesting or facetious expressing ourselves, condemned here by the apostle, is noted, is of a good signification, and was of good reputation among the soberest Heathen, and imported, as they deemed, one of the great virtues, or graces of speech, as showing readiness of wit, and sweetness of manners; in which original sense, Calvin says of it, that it is worthy of a free and ingenuous man.

ANS. II. It is as generally supposed, that this *lepor* or "saltness" of speech was ordinarily abused, and under pretence of wit most men played the fools, venting the froth instead of the flower of their brains, which the apostle is thought to have respected in joining together "jesting and foolish talking." And you know that a jester and a fool are even synonymous terms among us, none more idly squandering away their wit, without respect to those chief ends, for which God gave it, and they are obliged to use it; minding only the tickling of the flesh, having no regard to the profiting of the spirit. This abuse of wit, that was even become general, I conceive the apostle lets fly at; as also they apprehended that translated the word by "scurrility," into which this *lepor* was degenerated. Now, our wit may be reckoned to be abused,

(1.) *When we are conceited of it, and use it purely in ostentation of self, and contempt of others.*—Hereby we are injurious to our own souls, nourishing pride, which it should be our great business to pluck down.

(2.) *When we are immoderate in it, and either vainly or extravagantly lavish it.*—Wit should be used like salt,—sparingly: a grain or two does well; a meal surfeits. It speaks vanity in us, and nourishes overmuch levity in others; and two to one we run dregs, if we know not when to have done, meddling with every thing and every one.

(3.) *When we are offensive by it, either to God's holy ears by our profaneness, or to our brother's by over-sharpness.*—And we should be especially tender, where there is more than ordinary weakness or plainness; and a greater liberty may be used in this latter kind, where there is great wickedness or conceitedness.

(4.) *When to any base ends we prostitute it.*—As, first, to expose holy things or persons to the scorn of fools, lessening their repute and reverence by our light mentioning of them, or playing upon them,—this is a degree of blasphemy; or, secondly, when we design it only to make sport and raise laughter among those especially whom we should rather provoke to weeping.

From all this it appears that there needs great caution in the use of this gift or faculty. But yet, that it may be both innocently and advantageously used, and Christian gravity maintained, I shall briefly prove from scripture-examples, even in most serious and weighty matters. And I note eminently three occasions, where there may seem needful some more than ordinary strain of speech, or use of salt in it:—

(1.) *If what we say be for food or physic to a sick or weak-stomached person, that may otherwise nauseate it, this salt may be useful to give it a relish, and get it the easier down.*—For which purpose the plain way of speaking was waved by Nathan; (2 Sam. xii. 1, &c.) and, again, by another

prophet ; (1 Kings xx. 38, &c. ; ) and almost generally by our Saviour : without a parable he scarce spake any thing ; there was no coming upon those kinds of persons without circumventing of them. On the like necessity we should endeavour to show like ingenuity, that we may catch persons with guile, that will not otherwise come to hand.

(2.) *If our words be intended for swords, this kind of speech doth set a keenness upon them.*—For which purpose it is most frequently used in scripture; as you may see notable instances, 1 Kings xviii. 27; 2 Kings xvii. 32, 33. The proud fool will not be convinced often by plain reason, [so] that there is almost a necessity of irrision: we must make him ridiculous, that his folly may be conspicuous: when he is thoroughly exposed, he may chance [to] be humbled. I take the wise man as directing us to this method with this sort of men: “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.” (Prov. xxvi. 5.) *According to his folly*, that is, according as his folly does deserve; answer him sharply, smartly, utterly silence him, that he may take care to speak wiser another time. *Repone illi verbera et virgam*, as one says, “Answer him with words as smart as rods:” the fool’s back requires them. (Prov. xxvi. 3.)

(3.) *If as nails we would drive our words, (to which also they are compared, Eccles. xii. 11,) there is a tendency in this pleasantness of speech to fasten them, and fix them more firmly in the memory.*—Whence I conceive, old dying Jacob gave his last blessing in such harmonious words, as some of them are bearing allusion to his sons’ names, such as Jehudah, Jodudah; Dan, Jadin; Gad, Gedud, &c. The mothers imposed their names for one reason; but something in their future condition the father sees that agrees well enough to their names, whereon he chooseth to read their destinies as it were by them, for the more easy remembrance of them. I would not [that] these examples should be abused; to prevent which, let me only caution, that we gravely, sparingly, and for like necessary ends, do imitate them, or pretend no patronage from them.

To proceed:—

Sixthly. *Naturalize this discourse, if possible, and as far as possible, to you.*—Then, and not till then, you will speak with ease, and speak with a grace; and this facility is chiefly got by frequency. We must in a manner confine ourselves to this dialect, that we may get this excellency in it: for which purpose let your converse be most with those that speak this language, and converse with all that are any way capable in this language; provoke them to it, use them to it, necessitate them to it, if they will converse with you; be as one that could hardly speak any thing but it; from your youths accustom yourselves to it; in your houses and among your familiars, initiate yourselves herein: they will bear with your stammerings, which you might be ashamed of before strangers; and having once got, take heed you do not forget, the language, but inure yourselves daily to it; you may travel through the world with it; it is one of the learned languages, that all scholars that have been bred in Christ’s school understand; you herein have converse with them. And it is no great matter if you are a barbarian to others: if it quits you of their company, it does you a kindness; if this way you can be quit of

vile and vain companions, it is the honourablest way you can be rid of them ; and, so far as separated from them, you have heaven's happiness on earth. Better a great deal they should be angered and estranged from you upon the holiness of your discourse, than you grieved or defiled by the commonness or profaneness of theirs. Though I must also tell you, if once this discourse was habitual to you, it might be better borne in you, and nobody would expect other from you, but, as they had occasions of dealing with you, might probably be awed into a conformity to you.

Further to engage you, so far as may be, in this holy strain of speech, take these

#### MOTIVES.

MOTIVE I. *No discourse is so proper for you as Christians, it being the language of the country to which you do belong.*—Further, your concerns generally lie in the word, all that are worth speaking of : why should you in a manner talk of any thing else ? It is almost an impertinency for a Christian to talk of this world, wherein he is a stranger, and whereof he can call little his own but a burying-place. This was the utmost I find great Abraham to have grasped after or reckoned of in this world, that he made sure of : " I am a stranger and a sojourner with you : give me a possession of a burying-place. And the field and the cave was made sure unto Abraham for a burying-place." (Gen. xxiii. 4, 20.) Truly this is all we are sure of here below ; [so] that if we talk of any thing in this world, it is most proper to talk of our graves, and our daily readiness to drop into them ; into which discourse David naturally fell when his company would not bear higher : " Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is ; that I may know how frail I am." (Psalm xxxix. 4, &c.) But turn him to the word : he has something there ; God, Christ, men, angels, life, death, things present, things to come, all things are his. Confine [yourselves,] then, to your own matters, especially since you have so large a field. Every one talks of their proper concerns : *Navita de ponto*.\* Have you nothing of your own to talk of ? or is it not to compare with what others so much please themselves to prattle about ? For shame, Christians, that you alone should rove and ramble at this rate ! Holy, heavenly discourse is that one would expect from you, and that alone seems pertinent to you.

MOTIVE II. *No discourse is so profitable.*—One may hear a deal of other chat, and be neither the better nor wiser, or at least we are instructed unto some little mean designs ; but when we talk out of the word, we are in the way of learning or teaching what will be for our universal accomplishment ; for, as he says, the scripture is " profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.) Yea, such discourse does not only fit us for the work of this world, the best, the noblest achievements in it ; but it prepares us for, and in a sense enters us into, the work of the other world ; for that, I conceive, lies much in the holy use of the tongue : we hear of no other employment of the saints in glory, but that they night and day

\* " A sailor's discourse is usually concerning sea-affairs."—EDIT.

are praising God. He is always in their eyes, he is ever in their mouth. The work of heaven will not be uncouth to them that have been much exercised in holy, heavenly discourse on earth; but for others, that can scarce frame their mouths to a good word on earth, for my part I know not what they will do in heaven, though I think there is no great danger of their coming thither.

MOTIVE III. *No discourse is so pleasant.*—Next to the songs of angels, the pious conference of holy men is the sweetest melody our ears can be entertained with; other things comparatively sound harsh to the things of God, neither at the instant affect the ear with that pleasure, nor afterwards leave it in that composure. To reflect a little, by way of comparison: and, first, let us listen a little to what the world says; a buzz there is in both ears; but what do we hear? “Such a man hath played the knave, and such a man hath played the fool; such a family is at great discord, or in great distress; such a nation is involved in war, or such a person hath shed the blood of war in peace:” for, ordinarily we hear nothing but what it is a vexation to hear, nothing but what may make our ears to tingle; or if aught seems at present to tickle them, as profane jests and idle stories may for a while do, this tickling ends in torment, the ear is put out of order, and the heart as being defiled is not a little discomposed. He could see so little pleasure in the speeches, that he abhorred the songs, of sinners, as having no harmony in them; their mirth was rather his sorrow: “It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.” (Eccles. vii. 5.) But, secondly, in listening to holy discourse, we hear of the love of God, the glory of heaven, the graces that do shine in some, the duties that are performed by others; we hear of an end that shall be put to all earthly troubles, whereby the sharpest sufferings are allayed; and, by what we may hear further, death itself comes to be despised. Are the stories we hear on one ear and the other to be compared? We may hearken long enough ere the ear will be satisfied with hearing, except we chance to hear something from heaven; all the good news is in the word of God, and to be heard from good men that bring us stories therefrom.

MOTIVE IV. *By neglecting holy discourse, you may lose opportunities of good both to yourselves and others, that you will wish you had taken.*—First. It may be, *as to yourselves*, you were in company with persons eminent for grace and knowledge: here was an opportunity of doing your own soul good; but, by the stream of your impertinent tattle, all savoury discourse was diverted, that season was neglected: afterwards you see your lack of knowledge, the instrument is removed. “Ah fools!” do we not then cry out of ourselves? “the opportunity is gone, and we are undone!” How must it gall an awakened Jew to think what discourse he had with Jesus Christ!—“Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar?” “Here is a woman caught in adultery.” “Why do not thy disciples fast?” &c. “Ah! had I nothing else to inquire of my Saviour? Would it not have been more pertinent to have asked, ‘What I shall do to be saved?’ But he is gone, and I must die in my sins.” How many persons have we sent away, that have had a word of wisdom in their hearts, having learnt only what o’clock it was, what weather, what news;

forgetting to ask our own hearts, what all this was to us, and inquire of them things worthy of their wisdom and our learning! Secondly. *As to others*, you may rue the opportunities you have lost. Here lay a poor wretch, with one foot in hell: would he not have started back, if he had had light to discover his danger? Well, you are together: something you must say; the same breath would serve for a compassionate admonition as a complacent impertinency, which will redound to neither of your advantages: you part; the man dies in his sins, and in the midst of hell cries out against you, "One word of yours might have saved me! You had me, you might have told me of my danger; you forbore, I hardened. The Lord reward your negligence!" O give not poor souls occasion to rail at you in hell for your sinful silence or impertinent converse with them here on earth!

**OBJECTION.** You will pretend, it may be, want of matter in excuse for your forbearing holy discourse.

**ANSWER.** No, friend, it was want of mind; thou art not straitened in thy subject, but in thyself. Religious matter has no end; eternity is not sufficient for it; but thou art resolved also it shall have no beginning.

Well, you know your duty, and do as likes you.

III. In order to the right management of our tongue, especial regard must be had to *its scope*, what is aimed-at in every motion of it, either immediately or ultimately; for, without some scope, it is vain talk, and, according to the goodness or badness of our scope, it is ordinarily good or bad talk: I say *ordinarily*; for some talk is so bad, that it is scarce capable of a good scope, much less of being made good by it, yet less evil it does become: to instance in blasphemy and lying, great moral evils both in their own nature, and no design can destroy the nature of them, in that the word of God allows not, but forbids, the doing of evil that good may come of it; yet speeches materially so have been passed over, the evil as of simplicity pardoned, and the good aimed-at in them as of sincerity rather rewarded. As Paul, Rahab, and the Egyptian midwives might be instances; but let us take heed of making them examples. But ordinarily, as I said before, the scope does much unto the specification of the speech, so much,

1. *That fair speeches become foul, if dirty designs be couched under them, or carried on by them.*—He cries out, therefore, for help against the flatterer, as if he was a murderer: "Help, Lord; for the faithful fail. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips." (Psalm xii. 1—3.) "His words are softer than oil, yet are they drawn swords." (Psalm lv. 21.) The like may be said of the fawning woman that entices to vice: "The lips of a strange woman drop as an honey-comb: but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword." (Prov. v. 3, 4.)

2. *Good speeches become evil to the users of them, if evil be meant by them.*—As, if we couch under them to cover sinful purposes, or colour sinful practices, hereby they are profaned; and the holier they be, the wickeder: "Woe to you! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers." (Matt. xxiii. 14.)

3. *Our most common speeches, that might otherwise seem culpable, are not only allowable, but commendable, as they may be referred unto some good purpose.*—As, First, for the remission of a mind over-bent and burdened with serious matter, that one may return with more vigour to it. Secondly: for the prevention of worse discourse, where better will not be entertained. Thirdly: for insinuation into bad men, that we may gain an opportunity of doing good upon them; and for introduction into better discourse, which abruptly cannot be brought-in.

So much, then, depending upon the scope of our discourse, let me give two cautions hereon.

CAUTION I. *That none pride themselves in the material goodness of their discourse.*—If the design be bad, it is like a fair apple rotten at the core.

CAUTION II. *That we judge none rashly for the seeming commonness of their discourse.*—If it be not their common dialect, and especially if they are among common-spirited people, there may be a pious guile in it, a reason for it, and it is charity to suppose it; but let every one judge himself, who only hath a capacity to know himself; and let us all be cautious, however, that we lay not a stumbling-block before a weak brother.

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## SERMON XXI.

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HOW MAY DETRACTION BE BEST PREVENTED OR CURED?

*He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.*—Psalm xv. 3.

AMONG the many sins for which God is contending with England, and especially with the professors of religion in it, I doubt not but one, and that none of the least, is, the gross misgovernment of their tongues. The abuses of the tongue are many, one whereof is the malignity of it. And whereas in David's time a malignant and virulent tongue was the badge and cognizance of an atheist: "Behold, they belch-out with their mouth: swords are in their lips: for who, say they, doth hear?" (Psalm lix. 7;) now, alas! this spot is become the spot of God's children, and high professors of religion. A man can scarce come into any company, but his ears shall be filled with censures, detractions, reproaches; party against party, person against person. Instead of that old Christian love and charity for which the ancient Christians were noted and applauded even by their adversaries, ("Behold," said they, "how the Christians love one another!") men's hearts are generally full of rancour, and their tongues of sharp reflections, contemptuous and reproachful expressions, censures, and slanders, against their absent, and oft-times innocent and more worthy, brethren. This is the disease