

# TALK THAT'S NOT

# CHILD

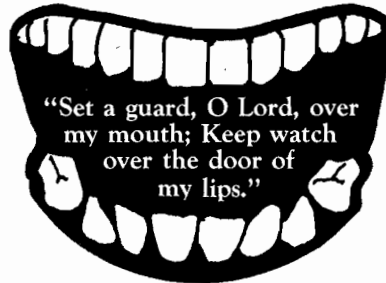
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She looked at me with pity but she didn't offer to help. My arms were full with an enormous box containing thirty fragile bud vases filled with flowers and water. "Why won't this wretched car door open the first time?" I muttered under my breath. As the car door finally swung open, I looked up. She was still standing there, staring at me. "You see, I'm getting married tomorrow," I offered. "These are the flowers for the reception hall dining room tables. I'm so excited! I'm actually getting married!" She began to walk away, pausing only to turn and throw me a rather skeptical glance.

As I drove away I speculated about this woman and her life. "Maybe she's never known true love," I pondered. "Oh well," I rationalized, "if she knew how wonder-



ful Bill is she probably would be happy for me!"

Reflecting back on the week that preceded my wedding I realize that this incident was not unusual. I was so thrilled at the prospect of marriage to Bill that I frequently went up to total strangers to tell my good news. Their reaction was relatively unimportant to me; I was unable to keep silent. I was getting married! I was simply proclaiming my joy!

Shouldn't it be that way in our Christian lives? Isn't it exciting to contemplate our position in Christ? As God's children we enjoy a marvelous heritage. God our Father is intimately acquainted with our lives. He loves us. He forgives us. Every day we experience His grace. As our hearts are filled with joy, so our mouths should be overflowing with praise to God.

Yet when we spend a moment analyzing our own speech, many of us are no doubt disappointed. We realize how we fail to speak of God's goodness or to tell of His works in our lives. We fall short of biblical guidelines designed to govern our conversation.

It doesn't have to be this way! God's Word offers help. In fact, the Bible says a lot about speech. Paul's exhortation to the Colossians is an excellent summary of what should characterize our conversation: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:16,17\*). As Christian education leaders we know it is imperative for us to set a godly example. So how do we incorporate this truth into our lives in the realm of reality, in the drudgeries of day-to-day life?

## TWO STEPS TO GODLY CONVERSATION

*The first step toward godly speech is a correct heart.* Christ Himself said that the "things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart" (Matthew 15:18). We cannot converse intelligently concerning something about which we know nothing! For instance, I am a nurse. I know scarcely anything about being ar

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architect. I cannot tell you the first thing about how to design a building. Because tectonic tidbits are not even in my thinking, I am unable to elaborate enthusiastically on architectural matters. However, just ask me about nursing! Because it's a subject in which I am well versed, I could discourse at length without formal preparation. The same principle applies to our walk with God. Unless we know God well, unless our hearts are right toward Him, we are unable to speak with alacrity concerning how He is working in our lives.

Additionally, our thoughts affect our hearts and thus our speech. The Bible tells us that as a man thinks, so he is. (See Proverbs 23:7.) What we think about is what we talk about! Have you ever drawn a blank stare when you tried to encourage

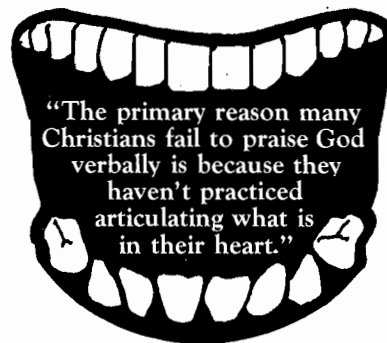
dwelt on things that are pure and honorable (Philippians 4:8). We should strain all that we see, hear and experience through a biblical sieve before we allow it to enter and dwell in our thoughts.

*The second step to godly conversation is a sound knowledge of God's Word.* In Paul's second letter to Timothy he addresses the subject of speech. Paul contrasts "handling accurately the word of truth" (2:15) with "avoid(ing) worldly and empty chatter" (2:16). Shun such talk, says Paul. It leads to ungodliness and spreads like gangrene! However, he exhorts, study the Word. Then you can stand unashamedly before God. The better our knowledge of God's Word, the easier it is to shun subversive speech. Worldly chit-chat and gossip is empty compared to the rich fellowship we can enjoy when discussing godly matters with fellow believers or searching friends.

A correct heart toward God and firm knowledge of His Word provide a sound basis for godly speech. But what about the content of our conversation? God has not left us to guess what we should talk about. The Psalms instruct us repeatedly to praise God and to tell of His works. King David is an excellent example from whom we can learn.

In Psalm 34:1 David wrote "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Did you know that he wrote these words while he

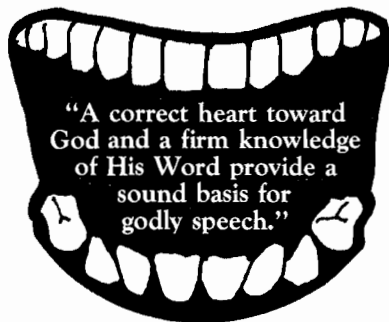
was fleeing for his life from King Saul? Indeed, he was separated from his family and hiding in a cave. He had great reason to despair! Yet David praised God and



encouraged the "humble" to hear and rejoice with him.

Notice the result of David's praise to God. It encouraged others to look to God and His works. What further motivation could we possibly need? God has given us the ability to encourage others by simply telling of His participation in our lives. But practically speaking, how do we do this?

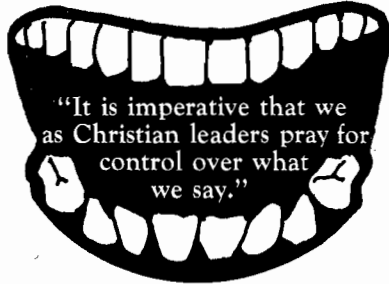
Before we can elaborate on God's acts we need to be reminded of what they are. My husband and I have found it helpful to spend time every week evaluating and assessing how God is working in our lives. What answers to prayer have we had? How has our faith grown? Have we overcome a certain character weakness in the past few weeks? As we ponder



a fellow Christian by telling about an exciting answer to prayer? We cannot respond and talk about a dimension of life in which we have no interest! Paul gives a solution to this by encouraging us to

questions such as these, God's works come to the forefront of our minds.

It seems that the primary reason many Christians fail to praise God verbally is because they haven't practiced articulating what is on their hearts. Why not section off time today for this very purpose? Ask a friend or family member to join you in recounting God's faithfulness in recent



days. As a result you will be prepared to "tell of His works" whenever you can.

We see then, that God wants us to praise Him verbally. But don't stop there. The Bible offers even more guidelines about what we say and how we say it. Paul encouraged the Colossians in chapter four verse six, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt." Perhaps we can clarify the meaning of gracious conversation by considering several of the qualities of salt.

One common use of salt is as a preservative. As salt cures food, so our conversation should build up and conserve rather than tear down and destroy.

Another interesting thing about salt is its ability to stimulate. Have you ever used smelling salts to revive a fainting friend? Our words "seasoned with salt" exhilarate and challenge those around us.

## TWO OLD TESTAMENT POINTERS

Perhaps this is beginning to sound too difficult! Let's consider two powerful pointers contained in the Old Testament. The first is presented in Proverbs 3:3. "Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck." We need to learn to mix speaking the truth with an attitude of mercy and grace. Students watching their Sunday School teacher, or teens, their youth sponsor, should be able to see a model of this beautiful blend of grace and truth.

The second suggestion is found in Psalm 141:3. "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips." Prayer is vital. James tells us that our mouths have the potential to speak both good and evil. Furthermore he says that a person who is able to restrain his tongue is able to control his entire body

(James 3:2). Have you ever noticed the context in which this was written? It follows James' warning that leaders will "incur a stricter judgment." It is imperative, therefore, that we as Christian leaders pray for control over what we say.

A recent conversation with my husband illustrates how easy it is to dishonor God with our words. Bill, who is a physician, was telling me of some recent struggles and of his prayers that God would help him to be more gracious to his older and disabled patients. Instead of my responding kindly, in an encouraging and understanding fashion, I replied, "Yes, Bill, you ARE a lot more impatient now than you were when I first met you!" Apart from being untrue, my reply epitomized speech that was not seasoned with salt. We need to look to God for the power to control our tongues.

Ephesians 4:29 sets the standard: "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear."

As we consider our speech, let's ask God to help us be examples of talk that's not cheap!

\*All references quoted from the New American Standard Bible.