

WHAT IS, AND WHAT IS NOT EVIL SPEAKING

(Br. Ted Smith. Discourse was given the first time in Phoenix, Arizona, Jan. 30, 1938 and in the Bellingham Home ecclesia, Sept 18, 1960.)

Hymn 267 - The Beauty of Holiness. Some wonderful happy day there is to be a grand meeting of the completed Little Flock beyond the veil. None will be there except those who have passed all the exacting tests of character development. All of God's dealings with His people are for the purpose of character development in one phase or another. There is a mighty work to be done for the world in the Millennial Age and this work requires careful preparation of those who will be used to judge and instruct the world when they are returned from their sleep in the dust of the earth. We are set apart for good works—"let us go on unto perfection."

Our subject, Evil Speaking—What It Is and What It Is Not, should not be considered as unpleasant; rather we should be deeply interested in understanding all the grand principles of character development. It is an honor to understand the principles of the Lord's spirit, as they have to do with love and justice, and reason. The principles of Christian conduct are what convinced me that our religious beliefs are true. The doctrines of the Divine Plan are grand and awe inspiring; and we love God on account of these doctrines. But the principles of character development, if we make them our own, reveal to us the actual workings of character development and what practical blessings flow from these principles.

To begin our study, let us start out with a number of Scriptures. Titus 3:1 and 2: "Put them in mind...to speak evil of no man." 1 Pet. 2:1: "Wherefore laying aside all evil speaking." Eph. 4:31, 32: "Let all evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted..." Phil. 1:27: "Only let your conversation [conduct] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." Col. 4:6: "Let your speech be always with grace [with manifest love and kindness], seasoned with salt [a purifying and preservative influence]." Eph. 4:29: "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." Rom. 8:9: "Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Col. 3:8: "But now ye also put off...filthy communication [garbage] out of your mouth." 1 Pet. 2:23: "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not..." We need to revile occasionally these all-important Scriptures. It would be tragic, if we were rejected in the end, because we failed to take heed to these exhortations. As we go along, we will fail of perfection, but we should have perfection as our standard and aim at it all the time.

So that we will remember the lessons of this study, we are going to state our findings in the form of RULES. First the rules of what evil speaking is; and then the rules as to what is not evil speaking. Reserve your judgment until we have reached the end of our study.

RULE NUMBER I—what evil speaking is: evil speaking is the telling of some thing about another that will lower him in the estimation of someone, when there is positively no proper reason for telling that something. For instance we all have personal imperfections. The relating of these imperfections lowers the estimation brethren have for one another: this is the way the mind naturally works.

To overcome the habit of evil speaking, we have an ideal rule to follow:

RULE NUMBER II—Rule #II is The Golden Rule—“do unto others, as you wish others to do unto you.” This rule is simplicity itself; we would want others to refrain from the telling of our weaknesses, faults and failings; and so we should refrain from the telling, (where there is no necessity) of the weaknesses, faults and failings of others.

RULE NUMBER III comes into play here too: Rom. 13:10: “love worketh no ill to his neighbor.” Peter states the same thought in other words (1 Peter 4:8): “Have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall COVER [protect from view] the multitude of sins.” This rule is stated in very simple language, easy to understand, and easy to put into practice IF we do have “fervent love” for one another. Shakespeare states the matter in his own inimitable manner: “Who steals my purse steals trash; But he who filches me of my good name, Robs me of that which not enriches him, And makes me poor indeed.”

We have the arguments of the old will to contend with. There are at least three with which we are all familiar no doubt: 1. When we come together with brethren, we must have something to talk about. Quite true, but should we drop to the level of the natural man’s habits and make the faults and failings of others a subject for conversation? What do the scriptures say about this? Here is one “say”: “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ...” (Phil. 1:27) Here is another “say”: “Let your speech be with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” (Col. 4:6) A third “say” is found in Eph. 4:29: “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.” These three “says” are so obvious in meaning, that they do not need any explanation; and they guide a loving and just heart naturally. (Reprint page 2443, col. 2, par. 4.)

A second argument of the old will runs something like this: “it is all right to tell about the failings of others, if our motive is moralizing, with possibly the shedding of a few tears.” This line of reasoning needs to be carefully analyzed, as we could easily fall into this trap of the old will. All we need to do is to honestly consider the three “says” of the foregoing paragraph. (Reprint page 2443, col. 2, par. 5; also especially Reprint page 4076:2, par. 2.)

To overcome the two foregoing arguments of the old will, we can adopt RULE NUMBER IV: we as New Creatures must force ourselves to adopt new habits of conversation and conduct. This is expressed Scripturally by Paul in Rom. 12:2: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

A third argument of the old will is that when we are with worldly people it is all right to indulge in gossip about the failings of others. This argument is very tricky, for is it not true (as the argument goes) that worldly people do not respect the high standard of the Christian, and they enjoy “juicy” bits of gossip? And (the argument continues), you know you will incur the dislike of worldly people if you hold yourself aloof from gossip—they will feel you are condemning them as evil if you do not join in the “fun” of juicy gossip.

To squelch the argument just advanced by the flesh, we should follow RULE NUMBER V.—rule number V is that we should not crave the friendship of the world; for as James 4:4 says: “...the friendship of the world [with the spirit of the world] is ENMITY WITH GOD; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the ENEMY OF GOD.” This is pretty strong language and we are in real danger if we treat it lightly. We must be willing to become “fools for Christ’s sake.” (1 Cor. 4:10) This is part of “our light affliction” which “worketh a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” to us. (2 Cor. 4:17) As Paul wrote to the brethren in Philippi: “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ.” (Phil. 3:7, 8)

RULE NUMBER VI: confining ourselves to truthful statements does not give us liberty to tell uncomplimentary things about others. Using this phrase—“I do not know if this is true or not”—does not release us from responsibility. (R2444, par. 5) If we find ourselves tempted to use a phrase of this kind, we should become alarmed and examine our heart sentiments very carefully; for if we enjoy telling uncomplimentary things about others that we will actually use a phrase of this kind, we are in a dangerous frame of mind, and need to do some “transforming.” One of the hardest tests in control along this line is when it involves those who are our enemies or enemies of the Truth—the flesh feels spiteful toward enemies and wants to give them a “dig” of some kind. This disposition must be eliminated by the will of the New Creature as instructed in the Word of Truth.

This leads us to RULE NUMBER VII, which is expressed very clearly in Matt. 5:43-48: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may

be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

When we have been injured or slighted, there is a great temptation to tell uncomplimentary things about those who have done us wrong. But we have a very strict rule for this as expressed by Jesus Himself, and we call this RULE NUMBER VIII. Here is what Jesus said in Matt. 18:15-17: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” That word “ALONE” is extremely significant. No uncomplimentary remarks to others “on the side”—no, go to him “ALONE.” And if it is necessary to take “one or two more” there are to be no uncomplimentary remarks beforehand: this rule is from the Master Himself and must be obeyed to the letter.

Incidentally we are reminded of 1 Tim. 5:19: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.” This is also a strict rule, and a good one. **ALL OF THESE RULES ARE GOOD AND WHOLESOME TO FOLLOW FOR OUR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT TO BECOME CHRISTLIKE.**

Conveying an uncomplimentary idea is not confined to the audible telling of something. It can be suggested by a sly smile; by an expression on the face; by a mere nod of the head; by a shrug of the shoulders; by acting hurt; even by silence. (R4282, last par.)

Circumstantial evidence, at times, can be used to great advantage in giving clues to a situation. However circumstantial evidence can be misused by a person if he has a suspicious nature and wants to weave a story of evil about someone. We as Christians, can test ourselves along this line. Do we find ourselves trying to create a story of evil about someone? If we do, then we need to examine our hearts to find out what is the matter. There is evil and evil actions and neither should be ignored. But, we should not try to create an evil story out of mere circumstantial evidence. If we think there is something evil that is more or less serious, we should be fair and make proper inquiries of the person or persons involved and test out the circumstantial evidences to see if we are interpreting them correctly. It is possible we are looking through “suspicious eyes” and a Christian must overcome this promptly as soon as it is discovered. As Paul writes in 1 Cor. 13:5: “love thinketh no evil”—love does not “think up” evil out of flimsy evidences.

We are exhorted to not speak evil of dignitaries—Acts 23:1-5: “And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.” There is an interesting comment by our Pastor in connection with Acts 23:5: “...and there is a lesson here for all of us in this day, when we find so many disposed to ‘speak evil of dignitaries,’ and bring railing accusations against them. The attitude of the Lord’s people should be a very conservative one in such matters—in harmony with Michael’s words to the adversary, ‘The Lord rebuke thee!’” While we cannot avoid calling evil by its right name, nevertheless we can let the Lord do the rebuking and avoid bringing “railing accusations” against those in authority. (R3190, par. 3)

Now we shall consider the other side of the coin, the other side of the question: what is not evil speaking, and what is not evil surmising. We must have our consciences educated with the Word of truth and its spirit.

RULE NUMBER IX—it is quite proper to tell the weakness or failing of another if it is necessary to guard someone against injury or disadvantage; but the telling of such must be carefully and kindly told. For instance, supposing a brother was about to be placed in a position that would work out injury to others; “And before anything should be said on the subject we should most positively satisfy our own consciences that our motive in speaking is a good one, and not an evil one, that we are about to use our tongue to bless, and not to injure. And even then, prompted by the spirit of love and kindness toward the weak brother, as well as toward the others, we should avoid mentioning one solitary item that would not be necessary to the object in view.” (R2445, par. 1) And would it not seem reasonable that this would apply if a brother or sister had certain peculiarities that others should know about to avoid complications? And the foregoing exhortation of the Pastor should guide us to be careful of our motive and methods.

RULE NUMBER X—it is our duty to reveal important transgressions of rules to those in authority. (Reprint page 4283, col. 2, par. 2.)

RULE NUMBER XI—if someone is being defrauded or someone or something is being injured, it is our duty to tell. (Reprint page 5471, par. 1 and 2.)

RULE NUMBER XII—it is not evil speaking to mention or warn others against false teachings, false teachers, and the tactics of false teachers. What principle is behind this

rule?—kindness to others to protect them from harm. We have important precedents to guide us. In 1 Cor. 1:11 we read “For it hath been DECLARED unto me of you, my brethren, BY THEM which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.” It is significant that Paul did not rebuke those who “DECLARED” these matters to him; so such a declaration “by them which were of the house of Chloe” was not evil speaking. 2 Tim. 2:16-18: “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker; of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.” Another precedent in 2 Tim. 4:10: “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica...” Here is a strong one—Rom. 16:17: “mark them which cause divisions contrary to the doctrine which ye believe and avoid them.” 2 Tim. 4:14, 15: “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil...of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.” Then we have Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees AS A CLASS. The book of Jude contains some very strong language aimed at those teaching error. Here is an interesting item from the pen of the Pastor, found on Reprint page 5414, par. 5: “To tell fairly what another believes and to show that it is wrong is far from evil speaking. It is speaking the truth, which should always be spoken in love. In many instances it is duty to speak.” If we find that we get special enjoyment in relating the false teachings of others, we should do a little heart-searching—it may not be love for others that is inspiring us, but a touch of maliciousness.

RULE NUMBER XIII: It is wrong to LISTEN to slander—this is not good for us spiritually, and encourages the slanderer. (Reprint page 3595, par. 6) Paul tells us in Eph. 5:11 to “Have NO fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather REPROVE them.” True slanderers should be reminded of Rule #8 as expressed in Matt. 18:15 to 17. And Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:16: “Let none of you suffer as a busy body in other men’s matters.”

RULE NUMBER XIV: If we cannot put a stop to evil speaking, it is our duty to report to the one slandered. Here is a good Reprint reference (page 4283, last par.) for our consideration: “Let us fix it in our minds as an inviolable element of the Golden Rule by which we are bound, that if evil speakings come to our knowledge without our being in any sense a party to them or able to prevent them we will *always and promptly* bring the matter to the attention of the brother or sister or person whose name or reputation is traduced and will tell that person *all that has been heard and the name of our informant* and everything else that will enable him or her to pursue the traducer, according to the instructions of Matt. 18:15-17.” There are advantages to all parties concerned if this rule is followed.

Apropos to this is the rule that will be in force in the Millennial age which suggests a good lesson to us—Matt. 5:22-24: “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his

brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remembereth that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” It is unwholesome to us as New Creatures to run others down unnecessarily.

RULE NUMBER XV: It is not wrong to defend ourselves if we are wrongly accused; but we are to refrain from slanderous counter accusations. (Reprint page 3594, par. 6) A good scripture that will assist us to be blameless when we are defending ourselves is Matt. 12:34: “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Another is: “if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged.” (1 Cor. 11:31) If we “have not love we are nothing.” 1 Cor. 13:2.

There is another very practical problem that we are confronted with, involving the telling of certain uncomplimentary facts, and the listening to such telling. Many times brethren are hard pressed by a certain set of circumstances in their lives. Such feel the need of advice, encouragement and comfort. Such feel the need of unburdening their hearts to someone they feel is MATURE AND WELL-BALANCED—to someone that is broadminded and sympathetic toward the frailties and imperfections of mankind, and who would not misuse uncomplimentary information about another, but only use this information as a basis for reasoning to assist the one who is hard pressed, and then dismiss it. The unburdening of their hearts would not be for the purpose of running down the person causing their trials; but to gain advice, encouragement and comfort; so they can understand HOW to successfully carry out the Christian life under their set of circumstances. They do not want to run away from their trials; they do not want to injure the one who is causing their trials; they do not want to express bitterness or even complain at the Lord’s providences.

If a MATURE AND WELL-BALANCED brother or sister would be confronted with a problem of this kind, it is our opinion that it is not wrong to listen and then offer advice, encouragement and comfort from God’s Word and the Holy Spirit. We believe this would be acting within the meaning of Gal. 6:2: “Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” There is a very powerful article along this line on Reprint page 3646, entitled “BEAR YE ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS”. (See also Volume VI, chapter XII entitled MARITAL AND OTHER PRIVILEGES AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE NEW CREATION. Note pages 504 and 505 especially.)

For convenience we shall call all the foregoing RULE NUMBER XVI.

The MASTER RULE to cover all is that we should not say anything uncomplimentary about ANYBODY (in the church or in the world) unless it is necessary to the welfare of

someone. This contains a world of thought! Here are some good Scriptures to remember: 1 Pet. 1:22: “love one another with a pure heart fervently.” Rom. 12:10: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brother love.” 1 John 4:8: “He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.” Prov. 21:23: “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” Life is teaching us to be broad, sympathetic, understanding. Most supposed slights, injuries are merely misunderstandings. Heb. 10:24: “Let us CONSIDER one another, to provoke unto love and to good works.”

One Sister remarked, after hearing this discourse—“we must learn that there are times when we are to use a zipper on our lips.” Thackeray said: “Not only is the world informed of everything about you, but of a great deal more.” J. Petit-Senn said: “It is only before those who are glad to hear it, and anxious to spread it, that we find it easy to speak ill of others.”