

Lesson 6.

Freedom of Speech. First Part.

Definitions.

Speech, or the power of speaking, is the faculty of expressing thoughts by words or articulate sounds. It has undoubtedly been the most important instrument in bringing man to his present dominant civilization. If a person has to traverse for himself, from the beginning, the whole field of human experience, he can not go far in development before the brief span of life is passed. By the power of speech, the experiences of men have been carried, in increasing volume, from generation to generation; and upon the foundation laid by the fathers, the present-day man can build for himself a new and a loftier structure of experience. Without speech such communications between man and man, and between generation and generation would be extremely difficult, for the recording of man's thoughts in written form has been made possible, very largely through the possession of the power of speech. A good half of man's high estate among the created beings of the universe is certainly due to his power of speech. As an instrument of progress speech is second to none.

Freedom, sometimes spoken of as liberty or independence, is generally understood to mean the exemption of a person from the power or control of another. Absolute exemption, from the control of outside forces is, however, impossible. Throughout the whole of the revealed universe countless, eternal, immutable laws exist and prevail. Man can not nullify any of these laws, but by knowing and obeying them, he may make use of them. Thus, man cannot prevent the rain from falling, nor stem the rivers in their downward flow, but he may so till the soil as to store the rains in the soil to produce larger crops; or divert the mountain stream into flumes and

pipes and make it turn great dynamos to produce electric light and power for the good of man. By the wise use of law and not by opposition to it does man obtain his highest freedom. To be in harmony with law is life; to be in opposition to law, is death. Freedom accompanies life, not death. Therefore it is said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

Freedom of speech means, therefore, speech practiced in full accordance with man's best knowledge of the eternal laws that surround him. While the power of all speech is great; the power of such guided free speech is greatest.

Any power given to man including speech, may, however, be either constructive, or destructive. In the end, however, a power which continually destroys, will find itself opposed to nature's controlling law, that the whole of the universe is progressing towards a richer perfection. Free speech must be constructive; it must destroy only as part of larger construction. Thus, the great builder may remove a building to make room for a finer one; the leader of men may chastise with severe language, so that all may lead better lives. Unless, however, we are all judges in Israel, we should not permit our speech to be destructive. We should build up, and by our speech, should fill to a rich measure, our lives and those of our fellow men.

Meanwhile, the wonderful power of transmitting thought by spoken words, carries with it great responsibilities. Speech, freely uttered, bears direct relation, first, to the individual; second, to society; and third, to God. In all our speech this threefold responsibility must be kept in mind.

Free Speech and the Individual.

Few persons realize, sufficiently, that men are moulded by their speech. Our habits make us, and the habit of our speech is most potent.

As man thinks, he usually speaks. "From the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh." Our intimate speech, therefore, reveals very largely the contents of our minds. The shallow mind shows itself in shallow conversation; the vulgar story usually reveals a mind filled with impurity. Similarly, those who think deeply, speak with sense and feeling and the clean mind brings forth clean thoughts. This law should be well understood, especially by the young who are forming their life habits. Our friends may well be chosen on the basis of their speech.

A despicable, though common, habit among men is the telling of vulgar jokes. Whoever the man may be, whatever his position may be, if coarse and vulgar jokes and filthy stories burden his speech, it is fairly certain that such a man's heart is tainted and his soul is not free from sin.

As a man speaks from day to day, he continues to think; and the longer he speaks in certain ways of certain things the more set he becomes in his manner of thinking. Therefore, a man who habitually uses vulgar speech, strengthens his habit of vulgar thinking until at last vulgarity is his master, and clean things can not enter the realms of his thoughts. Just so, also, the man who persistently speaks evil of his fellow men becomes so habituated to evil thinking that he can find none good among the children of God. Fortunately, the opposite of this condition also prevails. If a man speak pure and truthful words, as tokens of his thoughts, his mind becomes more completely filled with purity and truth.

Finally, as a man thinks and speaks so he is. There is no deception about the matter. As speech reveals thought, so thought reveals the very essence of man. By our wondrous gift of speech, therefore, we give to all the world a vision of what we are.

The manner of speaking, also, affects the character, and the

estimate of a man. Words should be spoken softly and gently. Men often cover tender words with a gruff voice, and thus become feared by their inferiors; disliked by their equals; and misunderstood by all. In our American life is a rather strong tendency to loud speaking and to shouting. We make much noise, and at times mistake loudness of speech for the fervor of oratory. A gentle and subdued voice, clear enough to be easily understood, should be practiced. It will help the individual into a gentler manner of life; and into a humbler attitude towards the wonderful world about him. The simpler physical effort of speech should therefore be carefully watched, and made to conform with the true ideals of a correct life.

Speech should be indulged in only when something worth saying is to be said. To converse simply to kill time is a harmful practice. To discuss, even at some length, some topic of serious interest, is preferable to the common conversations concerning the wind and the weather which ordinarily hides shallowness of thought and poverty of ideas.

Then, speech must be timely. The Titanic disaster would not be a fitting subject at a wedding breakfast; nor would Temple work be the best subject to discuss with a man who is not converted to the first principles of the Gospel. The timeliness of speech is of particular importance when several persons are engaged in conversation. Some persons are always entering and attempting to monopolize a conversation. Though a man be the best conversationalist in a party, he must not do too much talking; others, perhaps less gifted, must also be heard. A man who habitually speaks with no reference to the time or place becomes a nuisance, and the habit of disregarding others grows upon him in all his relations until disaster overtakes

him.

The quantity of speech should likewise be carefully considered. The long sermon does not always sink deepest into the heart; the substance and manner of speaking are of more importance than the number of words used. Brevity is the soul of wit. Those who live largely and think deeply are usually of few words, while those who see little, feel less, and think occasionally, are characterized by interminable discussions about unimportant things. Gum, not ideas, should be chewed over and over. The habit of speaking clearly and concisely, if cultivated early in life, will react upon the individual and make him, in all his work, precise, accurate and clear--qualities held in high esteem by society. When the abundance of speech is boisterous, know that a bluffer is speaking. By his boisterousness he hopes to deceive you about himself. In time he may deceive himself, but seldom deceives another. Many words and small works; few words and great works, usually go together.

So

Speech affects, deeply, the feelings of the speaker. When a thought is pursued in speaking, the feelings of the speaker rapidly increase in intensity; his speech increases similarly in intensity; and gradually his whole being becomes filled with emotion. This is the beginning of the power of the orator. When, however a man speaks so as to excite his feelings, he must hold himself well in hand. If he allows his feelings to overcome him, he may so lose control of reason and even of the power of speech, that the calm controlled sermon becomes only an hysterical harangue. Every speaker should invite the feelings that accompany good speaking, but they should be under control. By suppressing or expressing high feeling at the right moment, a high order of oratory is produced. This equally is important in the ordinary affairs of life. Some men, when angry, lose

control of their feelings; such men should not attempt to speak when angry. It is well to speak of the beauty and privilege of freedom of speech, but we must not forget that the use of speech does more to shape the individual than, perhaps, any one other God-given power.

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