

BY THY WORDS

When the Lord would make a covenant with Abraham, he had Abraham cut in half a number of animals, and lay the pieces across from each other on the ground to make a pathway. The Scriptures say, “And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.” (Genesis 15:17) The Lord himself, after causing a deep sleep to come upon Abraham, by Himself passed between the pieces, swearing that He would fulfill His promise that in Abraham all the nations would be blessed. The Lord, as He passed between the pieces, appeared as a smoking furnace. When the Lord appeared to Israel at Mount Sinai, He did so as fire. The Scriptures say, “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.” (Exodus 19:18) This appearance put great fear in the hearts of the people. (Exodus 20:20) Our God is, Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29) He is a refining fire, burning off impurities, and leaving silver and gold. For the faithful, He burns off vice, and leaves virtue. For the unfaithful, He burns them with unquenchable fire. So John the Baptist said of Jesus:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:11, 12)

The Lord refines His people, and one means by which He refines them is His word. Saint Paul wrote, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) The Word of God is like a blade so sharp that it cuts into the deepest recesses of a man’s being, into his heart and mind. Like a surgical instrument, the Word of God exposes a man’s sin, and removes it. Like a surgical instrument, the Word of God, when it performs this necessary remedy, hurts before it heals, wounds before it mends. It says in the book of Proverbs, “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” (Proverbs 27:5, 6) The Lord by His word tells us of our sins, and by His Spirit convicts us of our sins, so that we might be healed of our disease. This causes pain at first, but ends in comfort. The Lord is truly a faithful friend to His people.

God has given man the gift of speech, and man can use it for good or for evil. Because men are sinful, they too often use this gift for evil. Saint James wrote, “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” (James 3:6) God is consuming fire for good; He burns off what is impure, and leaves what is pure. Sinful men are a consuming fire for evil; they speak words, not to heal, but to hurt, not to build up, but to tear down, not to mend, but to wound. Sinful men would, in their lust, burn up the world if by doing so they could gain what they desire. Sinful men would, in their rage, burn up the world because they could not gain what they desire.

When Jesus by the Spirit of God cast out demons, the Pharisees said that He did it by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. Jesus said that this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable; it shall not be forgiven. Then He said:

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (Matthew 12:33–37)

Jesus taught that a man's speech reveals what is in his heart. A man's habits of speech make known the condition of his heart, and so the state of his soul. If a man is good, then his speech will be good; if a man is evil, then his speech will be evil. A good man speaks words that build up; an evil man speaks words that tear down. A good man speaks truth and life; an evil man speaks lies and death. Jesus warned that on the Day of Judgment, a man will be called to account for every morally worthless word he has spoken, not only lies and blasphemy, but obscenity, foolishness, and crude jokes. So, Saint Paul exhorted the church at Ephesus, "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 4:29) The Christian seeks to make God's heart his heart, God's thoughts his thoughts, and God's words his words.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.