



Be Careful What you Hear

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuke to an obedient ear” (Prov. 25:11-12 NKJV)

One hundred sixty years ago, hatred brought our nation to a civil war. There was a lot of acrimonious dialog leading up to the war over slavery. People from around the world stood and watched as civil discord escalated to such a level that Americans felt they were justified in killing their brother. They must have wondered if America would survive and ever come together again. Today some of the same issues are once again dividing America to the consternation of freedom-loving nations. And once again, having always respected America’s moral leadership, the world is watching and wondering whether America will survive the current civil unrest.

With so much political hostility and hatred filling the air waves, we can get caught up in the crosshairs. *My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword” (Psa. 57:4 NKJV)*. There is not a more opportune time than now to reflect on the Apostle’s warning to *“Beware lest any man spoil you (that is to lead you away or seduce) through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions (precepts) of men, after the rudiments (principles) of the world and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8)*. If we have ears to hear, the Lord is directing us to *“come out from among them”* and separate from the morally unclean (2 Cor. 6:17). What causes personal invectives grounded in ill will to swell and spread so quickly? You may have guessed it: WORDS UNFITLY SPOKEN.

Words unfitly spoken affect us all in one way or the other because we are part of the human family. We cannot escape them; eventually they filter down to us in some form in our interactions with our family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and saints of God. Just hearing a negative news account can stir up a host of passions to take a stand without any assurance the account is true, and this is the intent of an evil report. We have to choose whether we will believe it or not. Why do you suppose that Rabshakeh made it a point of speaking an evil report from King of Assyria to the Jews in their own language rather than in the Syrian language (Isa. 36:11)? Was it not that they would hear and digest it so that they would fear the King of Assyria and not God (Isa. 36:7-8)? This is why Jesus said we should be careful what we hear, for with what measure we use it, it will come back to us and added to us! (Mark 4:24). The most secure escape route from the distractions in the world vying for our soul is hearing the word of God, because it never loses its power or passes away.

We must be attentive to what is going on around us and knowing what the will of the Lord is, be sober minded, watchful in prayer, and prepared as He instructed us (1 Pet. 4:7-8; Tit. 2:12). In these end times, the words of the ungodly will lead many astray by seducing spirits, which the Bible states will wax worse and worse as the end approaches (Prov. 12:26; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:13). The day we never thought we would see is upon us, the day when truth is called evil and evil is called good. The Spirit is saying, *“Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor. 15:33-34)*. So even born-again, believing Christians are not immune from deception, for Jesus said snares shall come to all those who dwell upon the whole earth (Lk. 21:35). We too can be seduced by false representations of the truth so that we do not recognize the truth when we hear it, to which the prophet Amos bears witness today,

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in that land, not a famine of bread, nor thirst for water, but of hearing [obeying] the words of the Lord...they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it”
(Amos 8:11-12).

Escaping Deception

We can be deceived when we think we have it all figured out based on someone’s report or some commentary. This is when we can be taken. *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:12 NKJV). To avoid deception in this hour, we need to hear the “voice” of God and follow it, and not another man’s report. If the voice we hearkened to confirms God’s Word, it will bear fruit because God’s Word is prophetic. This we know because God’s Word does not come back void (Isa. 55:11). Then we know we have the mind of God. When another man comes up with another revelation that contradicts truth, we should build upon the truth we have received from God. We do not know where he received his revelation, or who he listened to, and may himself be deceived (2 Chr. 18:19-21; 2 Pet. 2:1-2). If we build upon it, we can mislead and deceive many. Two people of the same belief system can say different things. One takes a hold of spiritual things with humility and speaks the language of Christ; the other is more abrasive, self-righteous, confrontational, and this is because he has attached himself to the spirit of the world and speaks its language. Who you follow will become your master, and Jesus said He only is to be our Master.

Revelation comes through the anointing, which teaches us all things. *“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him (it)”* (1 Jn. 2:27). It is clear the anointing is the Spirit (of Jesus), for *“...it is the Spirit that beareth witness (of Jesus), because the Spirit (of Jesus) is truth”* (1 Jn. 5:6). In spiritual darkness we can really appreciate truth and realize what we have in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Without the anointing in us, we would have no direction we could trust, and therefore no way of escape from what is coming upon the earth! Truly, we are the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). It is relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ from whom the blessings of knowledge and spiritual insight freely flows. He preserves our path from deception. Choose this day to follow the greatest “Man” on earth—the “God Man,” for He IS the way we should follow, He IS the truth we should believe on, and He IS the life (Jn. 14:6).

If we want to escape deception, there must be birthed in us a love for the truth. Then, we will hear and hearken to God’s voice, and He will grant us grace to live by it. Truth will guide us and never leave us because it will become a part of us. In times of spiritual darkness, it will speak. *“Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men”* (Prov. 4:14), that is to say, do not trust or follow their mode of action, conversation, or manner. If we abide in God’s Word and learn to live off of it as Jesus said (Matt. 4:4), we will be more spiritually discerned and less oppressed, more healthy in mind and body, and more joyful. We will become what we never thought we could be. If we ever needed to engraft the knowledge of God into our heart until it forms a stronghold in our mind it is now. Engrafting is a little bit of memorizing, meditating, praying the Word, digging out the meaning of words in the Hebrew and Greek dictionaries, and then obeying it. Engrafting

God's Word is powerful because you begin to think more and more like God, and with the knowledge of God, we can change the world.¹

Abiding in Truth

When we hear distortions of the truth and disheartening speech, how should we process it? What should we do, think or say? Should we hide or pretend we do not hear it? No, but if we abide in God's Word, He will tell us what to do.

First, we must guard our heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). Remember the principle Jesus taught: To the extent the words we hear and believe get into our spirit, whether good or evil, with what measure we then use them, more will be added, and they will become a part of our dialogue, which we spread to others (Mk. 4:24). We are what we think (Prov. 23:7), and what we think we publish, for out of the abundance of our heart we speak (Matt. 12:34).

Second, we must test the spirit of the words spoken (1 Jn. 4:1). If the spirit of a word disparages a person's character or worth, our conscience tells us not to accept or hearken to it. But neither should we simply ignore an evil report lest we accept it as the new normal. In a hotly contested atmosphere, neither side has it always right; both can be provocateurs when the conditions are favorable for their cause. Who should we believe? What should be our response? There is one thing we should not do in our response: rail against an evil speaker, especially in conversations with others. Aside from defiling them, they may be among his most ardent supporters, and doing so will cause enmities. According to *Strongs Concordance*, this word "enmities" in the Greek Dictionary means "hostility, by implication, a reason for opposition."

A strongly worded rumor or accusation against rivals dressed up as truth is a frontal attack upon our core values and begs for a response. Our response depends upon the words we listen to every day. If we abide in the truth, the Spirit of the Lord will prompt us to reject the evil report for at least three reasons: One, it will deliver us from the devil's snare. Two, His Word teaches us to speak evil of no man (Tit. 3:2). Speaking evil of a man separates friends and gives place to the devil to spread his evil agenda. And three, you can be sure another missile will follow shortly to confuse an already captive audience.

So before a missile carrying an evil report pierces our heart, or otherwise reaches its intended destination, we can shoot it down in prayer with a more powerful missile from God's word. God said to Jeremiah, "...Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth...to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:9-10). We have God's Word in our mouth (Dt. 30:14) to take down the missile before it explodes in greater conflict. David said under the anointing, "Concerning the works of men, by the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer" (Psa. 17:4 NKJV). God will hear when we call out to Him, "Lord, send out your arrows and scatter them" (Psa. 18:14).

The saving course is always first to go to the Lord in prayer. The principle is one we all know, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7 NKJV). When we let our requests be made known to God, He knows we are not standing with the world, and He promises to guard that which is under attack—OUR MIND! Believe that He is greater than any

¹ You will find these principles in my book, "The Transforming Power of Engrafting God's Word."

condition. “*God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early*” (Psa. 46:5). Thus in quietness we gain strength to fight right (Isa. 30:15).

Third, we must study and rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), for “the heart of the righteous studieth to answer” (Prov. 15:28). As you pour out your righteous indignation and disdain for injustice, ask the Lord to fill you with the knowledge of His will in wisdom and spiritual understanding (Col. 1:9). “*Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;... Then shall thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God*” (Prov. 2:3,5). Jesus said, “*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and he that knocketh, it shall be opened*” (Matt. 7:7-8). With insight from the Lord, we can lead on the strength of moral values rather than on the strict observance of partisan principles, which engenders strife.

For example, when we hear offensive speech that grieves our spirit, we can disassociate ourselves from the divisive rhetoric that wants to capture our attention and hold our tongue. This will end the conversation, stop an evil report, and avoid potential conflict. “*He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding*” (Prov. 17:27-28). On the other hand, Jesus said if we lose our salt, we will be trampled under foot by men, and so He taught, “*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matt. 5:13, 16). We cannot be silent forever.

We are in the day when we must defend truth, admonish wrongdoing, sow hope where there is despair, unity where there is discord and strife, or, in other words, be an instrument of peace. If we do not speak up, equity cannot enter (Isa. 59:14), but if we do, we spread a positive message that edifies people at the same time instilling moral values into the discourse. In responding to an evil report, we might say, “All I know is what we both hear. For me, I do not know what is in the speaker’s heart, nor do I know for sure the motive of his statements to judge him, but this is what I do know: I know in God’s eyes it is morally wrong, on both sides, to deceive, sow discord, and cover up truth. On the other hand, I know it is morally right in the sight of God to call out public corruption and evil speech, and in the hearing of all, to stand up for morality and decency because it harms no one and can help everyone.”

If we can express our disapproval against the oppression of an evil speaker’s words or deeds in a spirit of God’s love, it might be a teachable moment for him, and all who hear us, so that he might recover himself (2 Tim. 2:25-26). It is the vehemence with which we speak and motive of our heart that sparks the fire, whereas a soft word and good intentions turn away wrath and breaks the bone (Prov. 15:1, 25:15). Words cause the fracture, so God’s word is the remedy.

Abraham Lincoln’s strategy was malice toward none and charity toward both parties. While adamantly opposed to slavery, he took issue with the tone and manner in which abolitionists often articulated their views, which he viewed as non-conciliatory. As a Lincoln biographer put it,

“Lincoln didn’t agree with the tactics of the abolitionists. He thought them much too strident, too uncompromising, too obsessed with damning Southerners as unregenerate sinners. Screaming at misguided people, Lincoln believed, was not the way to correct their wrongs. As he put it later, you won people to your side through ‘persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion,’

making friends with them, appealing to their reason, gently telling them that they are only hurting themselves by their follies... But if you assailed, damned, and vilified the misled, they would shut you off and lash back.”²

Leo Tolstoy, a Russian writer and playwright, said this about Abraham Lincoln:

“Why was Lincoln so great that he overshadows all other national heroes? He really was not a great general like Napoleon or Washington; he was not such a skilled statesman as Gladstone or Frederick the Great; but his supremacy expresses itself altogether in his peculiar moral power and in the greatness of his character.”³

What was the source of Lincoln’s moral power that gifted him with such an enduring legacy that still speaks 145 years after his death? It came from his parentage and early training,

“The Bible was one of the few books in the home of Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln. And it was from his mother’s lips that little Abe first heard the sublime Bible stories and verses. And, with her encouragement, he began to commit to memory short Bible verses, and to become familiar with the simpler aspects of the moral code laid down in the Bible. Later, he could repeat from memory whole Psalms and other chapters.”⁴

And prayer. With the loss of his son, Willie, coupled with devastating losses in the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln turned to God in prayer,

"My own wisdom seemed insufficient," he wrote to a friend. I was "driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I have nowhere else to go."⁵

Along with attendance to God’s Word, there must be a lifestyle of prayer, for the Lord is the source of all our power and strength, particularly in times of weakness. Like Lincoln, we must feed on God’s Word and pray if we want to cut through the darkness and make a difference. God wants to give us a greater vision, and we must believe and follow Him to possess it.

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² Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None, A Biography of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, ©1977, 1994, p. 38

³ Joe Wheeler, *Abraham Lincoln- A Man of Faith and Courage*. New York: Howard Books (An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc.), © 2008

⁴ G. Frederick Owen, *Abraham Lincoln-The Man & His Faith*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., © 1976, p. 4

⁵ <https://www1.cbn.com/lincolns-spiritual-legacy>