



WORDS—THE THERMOMETER OF YOUR HEART

A thermometer is often used when physical illness is apparent. In another aspect of life, there is an overlooked “thermometer” that helps to reveal a person’s spiritual health, especially with regard to one’s self-centeredness as opposed to Christ-like development. This “thermometer” is accurate and available to anyone within hearing distance. The “thermometer” is our speech!

Luke 6:45, *“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, **for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**” [Emphasis added]*

If you are *not* a believer in Jesus Christ, your words will mirror that spiritual perspective. If you are a believer in Jesus, your words can disclose if your heart (your mind, the “inner you”) is currently focused on eternal perspectives or earthly concerns (Colossians 3:2). This focus determines if you are joyfully growing in Christ or spiritually struggling by relying on “self.”

Colossians 3:2, *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

THE OBVIOUS

Words, along with how you say them, are “verbal vehicles” that transmit viewpoints on:

- Relationships (family, friends, business, countries, etc.)
- Finances
- Marriage
- Responsibilities (family, employment, education, neighborhood, etc.)
- Daily difficulties as well as prolonged trials
- Emotional stability (anger, fear, anxiety, depression, peace, joy, etc.)
- Sex
- Politics
- Race or ethnicity
- Business philosophy and work ethic
- Personal accomplishments and failures
- Health issues
- Goals, planning, and use of time
- Personal likes or dislikes regarding any subject or person
- Spiritual life and beliefs

THE NOT SO OBVIOUS

The first verse quoted above (Luke 6:45) states that your speech reveals the spiritual condition of your heart, the “real you.”

Since words reveal your heart, an accurate examination of “heart issues” is vital. This evaluation requires an infallible standard of truth. The Bible, God’s Word, is the criterion by which speech and all other aspects of life and relationships are to be evaluated.

Hebrews 4:12, *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17, *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

When words are scripturally evaluated with regard to one’s spiritual condition, the definitions and uses of these words will reveal one’s orientation toward “self” or Jesus Christ. Self-centeredness and Christ-centeredness are so

contradictory to one another that it seems impossible for the same mouth to speak words near both ends of that verbal spectrum . . . but it can happen.

James 3:8-10, *But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.*

SELF-CENTERED SPEECH

Let's first look at examples of self-centered speech, using the Bible to list some of these expressions. *Note: All Bible references below have corresponding verses printed at the conclusion of this study.*

- Deceitful mouth and devious speech (Proverbs 4:24)
- Quarreling that creates strife (Proverbs 20:3, 2 Timothy 2:24)
- Words aimed at hurting others (Proverbs 12:18)
- Abusive speech (Colossians 3:8)
- Lifting up the Name of the Lord in vain (Exodus 20:7)
- Perverted speech that crushes the spirit of another (Proverbs 15:4)
- Slandering (Proverbs 16:28) or giving a false report against another (Exodus 20:16)
- Unwholesome words that do not build up or provide grace to others (Ephesians 4:29)
- Lying (Ephesians 4:25)
- Wicked, mischievous words (Psalm 10:7)
- Deception, cursing, and bitterness (Romans 3:10-14)
- Filthy talk, coarse jesting: "dirty jokes" (Ephesians 5:4)
- Gossip (Proverbs 20:19)
- Boasting of personal wisdom, strength, or riches (Jeremiah 9:23)
- Harsh words aimed at stirring up anger (Proverbs 15:1)

There are other references to self-centered (sinful) speech in Scripture, but the above list illustrates the various ways that words reveal one's self-centeredness. A self-focus is also exhibited by speech that is contradictory to biblical love explained in 1 Corinthians 13 and the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, *Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails ...*

Galatians 5:22-23, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

As you review the various kinds of self-centered speech, you may remember speaking in that manner. For all of us, the issue is not "Have I ever talked in a self-centered manner?" because all of us have done so at one time or another. If you are an ardent follower of Christ, you probably do not have a habit of self-centered speech and may not have spoken in every self-oriented manner described in the list above. Nevertheless, all of us have sinned in our speech, and it may have happened today! If any of us would truly have our tongue under control at all times and in every circumstance of life, we would be perfect, as the following verse indicates.

James 3:2, *For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.*

If the spiritual condition of your heart (the "real you") is sinless, then your speech would indicate that perfection. Without spiritual perfection, however, sinless speech is not possible. James 3:8 says that "no one can tame the tongue," which is another way that God's Word says no one is sinless with regard to practical matters of everyday life.

CHRIST-HONORING SPEECH

Believers who mature in Christ will indicate their spiritual progress through their speech. Some aspects of Christ-

honoring speech follow. All Bible references below have corresponding verses printed at the conclusion of this study.

- Giving thanks to the Lord in every situation (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
- Telling others of the difference Jesus has made in one's life (1 Peter 3:15)
- Building up others through wholesome communication (Ephesians 4:29)
- Teaching sound biblical doctrine (Titus 2:1)
- Boasting in the Lord instead of one's self (Jeremiah 9:23-24)
- Giving praise to the Lord continually (Psalm 34:1)
- Returning a blessing when persecuted (1 Peter 3:9)
- Responding gently in difficult situations (Proverbs 15:4)
- Speaking graciously to others (Colossians 4:6)
- Speaking the truth in love in all circumstances (Ephesians 4:15, 25) For further study, see [Truth is Personal, Not Merely a Concept](#)

Christ-honoring speech will also correspond to biblical love, described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 (both passages printed earlier).

THE SPEECH AND HEART PRAYER

When the "mirror reflection" of speech and heart is recognized, then one of the personal prayers recorded in God's Word can be seen to emphasize an undivided, God-oriented perspective of life.

Psalm 19:14, Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer. [Emphasis added]

GOD'S JUDGMENT OF SPEECH

The relationship between "speech and heart" is so reflective of one another that God's judgment of both has eternal ramifications. Jesus stated this reality in rebuking the Pharisees who accused Him of being empowered by Satan.

*Matthew 12:33-37, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? **For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." [Emphasis added]*

Believers who realize the correlation between "speech and heart" will use their judgment of personal speech to grow in Christ and joyfully anticipate being with Him forever. In the meantime, a believer will probably realize the tremendous power of words (Proverbs 18:21) and will use them to graciously build up others (Ephesians 4:29).

Proverbs 18:21, Death and life are in the power of the tongue ...

Ephesians 4:29, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

WHY USE THE SPEECH THERMOMETER?

God has ordained that an on-going evaluation of one's speech provides some level of insight into one's self-centeredness, a sinful orientation that hinders growth in Christ. If you, as a believer, will ask the Lord to grant wisdom for you to evaluate your words on a daily basis, you should have further impetus to grow in Christ and give praise to the Lord for His work in your life.

A SUGGESTION TO CHANGE THE SPEECH THERMOMETER READING

If you do not know where to begin with regard to changing your speech, consider the following verses.

Proverbs 10:19, When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

James 1:19, Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

Proverbs 13:3, Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

Ecclesiastes 5:2, Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

Proverbs 17:27-28, *Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.*

These verses are easy to understand but typically difficult to implement. As the Lord helps you develop the habit of being “slow to speak” you will become more aware of your tendency to respond out of self-centered emotions instead of a Christ-like perspective. You may begin to realize how easily you judge others and what they say instead of first judging yourself on what you say (Matthew 7:1-5). You may also become aware of jumping to conclusions before listening to all that another person has to say (Proverbs 18:2, 13). As the characteristic of “restraining your words” is being developed in your life, you will recognize other characteristics coming to fruition, such as “praying without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) and the continuous need to depend on Christ (John 15:5).

Matthew 7:1-5, *“Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

Proverbs 18:2, 13, *A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

John 15:5, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

As you grow into greater Christ-likeness, your mind will be renewed. This is a work of grace that is accomplished by the Lord in conjunction with your obedience to Scripture.

Ephesians 4:17-24, *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

GROWING IN SPITE OF SETBACKS

While perfection in every aspect of life is humanly impossible, a believer can consistently grow more like Christ through a God-ordained process of sanctification. Sanctification means “being set apart for God’s purpose.” This change process has a two-pronged approach. As a believer in Christ, you are to die to self in specific areas of life (biblical “put-offs”) and, instead, rely on God’s power and obey His Word to grow in Christ in those same areas (biblical “put-ons”). Your speech is obviously included in the sanctification process and, to a great degree, indicates progress in overall Christ-like development. See [You Can Change ... One Step at a Time](#).

This process of discarding self-centered habits and, instead, establishing biblical alternatives does not happen overnight and is only possible with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is graciously designed by God to be a lifetime practice for His children.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18, *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

Verses referenced in this study but not printed are provided below.

SELF-ORIENTED SPEECH

Proverbs 4:24, *Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.*

Proverbs 20:3, *It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.*

2 Timothy 2:24, *And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,*

Proverbs 12:18, *There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Colossians 3:8, *But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.*

Exodus 20:7, *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*

Proverbs 15:4, *A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*

Proverbs 16:28, *A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.*

Exodus 20:16, *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

Ephesians 4:29, *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

Ephesians 4:25, *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

Psalms 10:7, *His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.*

Romans 3:10-14, as it is written: *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”*

Ephesians 5:4, *Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.*

Proverbs 20:19, *Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babblers.*

Jeremiah 9:23, *Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches”*

Proverbs 15:1, *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

CHRIST-HONORING SPEECH

1 Thessalonians 5:18, *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

1 Peter 3:15, *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*

Ephesians 4:29, *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

Titus 2:1, *But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.*

Jeremiah 9:23-24, *Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”*

Psalms 34:1, *I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

1 Peter 3:9, *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.*

Proverbs 15:4, *A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*

Colossians 4:6, *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

Ephesians 4:15, *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

Ephesians 4:25, *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*