

# "HEAR YE HIM"

## A Devotional Series For Radio

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Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister  
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The Sermon: IDLE WORDS

Scripture: Matthew 12:33-37

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 this 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.

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If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man and able also to bridle the whole body.

One of the things which distinguishes man from the animals is his ability to use words -- words which express exact and subtle shades of meaning in almost endless variety. We distinguish national groups by the words, or language they speak. Certain distinguishing mannerisms of speech can tell the expert not only your national origin, but the region or state -- and often the city and the section of the city from which you come. Peter's guttural accents branded him as a native of Galilee, and probably a follower of Jesus, when he stood warming his hands at the fire in the court of the high priest. So do our words label us as a native of New England, the deep South, Texas, the middle west, or Brooklyn, New York. Your speech betrays you.

The way in which you put words together in written communication is also uniquely characteristic of you, just as your handwriting is characteristic of you, and you alone. One who knows how to make a detailed scientific analysis can take a piece of printed literature and determine with a high degree of accuracy whether or not it came from a specific author.

Your speech betrays you in another way. It tells what kind of person you are. Listen to a man's natural, uninhibited conversation for a short while and you can know whether he is moral or immoral, honest or dishonest, careful or careless, intelligent or ignorant, clean minded or filthy minded, reverent or blasphemous. Out of the heart, and out

of the oft-repeated habitual acts dictated by the heart in the past, the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil things. An evil man may pretend to be righteous, and may for a time carefully disguise his real nature with feigned words; but sooner or later his real nature will come out. Jesus said that a good tree cannot bring forth corrupt fruit. James said that a fountain (that is, a "source," or "spring") cannot send forth at the same place both bitter water and sweet.

Most of us talk too much, without thinking enough. Often we say things which it would have been better to leave unsaid -- things which may hurt or offend others, or things which may give wings to dangerous gossip and rumor. We waste the time of ourselves and of others in endless superfluous chatter. We utter countless idle words without really having anything important or profitable to say, and without any consideration of what the ultimate result of our words is going to be. Jesus said that men would be required to give account in the day of judgment for every "idle" word spoken. In most modern translations of the Bible the word "idle" is translated "careless." It also carries some of the meaning of "barren," or "unprofitable." How many of your words are "idle" words?

There are some particular types of "idle" or "careless" speech which we wish

to notice specifically. One of the very common habits of our day is an addiction to profanity. Certainly the habitual, monotonously repeated use of the names of Deity as by-words or oaths is one particularly obnoxious example of "idle" or "careless" words. Such practice violates the third commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. It shows a callous disrespect for Deity, at times verging on the blasphemous.

Habitual use of profanity shows that the person using it is not only idle, careless, barren, and unprofitable towards God, but that he is unclean in mind and spirit. It likewise shows that he is mentally and spiritual lazy, and linguistically impoverished. The English language is particularly rich in words to express exact shades of meaning. A careful man chooses his words, says exactly what he means, and means exactly what he says. The lazy, idle and careless man uses one or two profane and completely meaningless swear words over and over as substitutes for the abundant and much more expressive adverbs and adjectives. Therefore he never really says what he means, or really means what he says. His profanity may be very fluent, but in terms of real meaning he is quite apt to be as inarticulate as a two-year-old.

Another form of idle or careless words is the words spoken in anger, revenge, or malice. Often such words are untruthful. They cut and hurt and wound. They destroy friendship, and widen breaches already made. Once spoken, they can never be recalled. Jesus said concerning this kind of idle words, "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment, and whosoever shall say to his brother, 'Race,' shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say 'Thou fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire." Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth .... Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."

Still another form of idle or careless words is simply using too many words to say what needs to be said. The sin of talking too much, and of using too many words to say what had just as well be left unsaid, is a very old one -- one which frequently drew the attention of the writer of Proverbs. "Seest thou a man who is hasty in his words? There is

more hope of a fool than of him." "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin, but he that refraineth his lips is wise." "A fool also is full of words." "A fool's voice is known by a multitude of words." "Let thy words be few." These and other ancient sayings warn of the danger of careless and excessive speech.

"He that hath knowledge spareth his words: even a fool, when he holdeth his peace is counted wise, and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles." One way to keep our words from being idle, careless, or unprofitable is to use them sparingly -- to choose them carefully, weighing and considering whether they say exactly what we mean, and what will be their effect on those who hear them.

Another way of using words idly, carelessly, and unprofitably is the careless and usually meaningless pagan practice of swearing by some sort of oath to attest the truthfulness and veracity of the most ordinary statements. A man's word should be as good as his bond. If a man "offends not in word," he will have no need to swear "by Jove," or "by George," or "by gum," or "by jimminy," or by anything else to prove that he is speaking the truth. Jesus said: "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

There is a proper place for the solemn inaugural or judicial oath. Jesus himself, when abjured by the holiest and most binding oath known to the Jew -- "by the living God" -- to tell whether he was the Son of God, obeyed the law and replied, "Thou sayest," meaning "I am." But it is idle, careless, unprofitable and verging on the blasphemous to make such oaths the commonplace of our daily conversation.

What do your words tell about you? Your speech betrays you. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Then watch your words, for we shall all give account in the day of judgment for every idle word we have spoken in this life.