

## The Mouth

The last few months we have been looking at the eyes and ears as gateways to the heart and considered them to be thermostats for setting the spiritual temperature of the heart. This month let's look at instrument that God gave us for determining what that temperature really is. When we enter a room, we readily realize that it is hot, cold, or comfortable. If it seems a bit chilly or a little warm, the first thing we do is to check the thermometer to see what the temperature is. In our personal lives, our mouths are the thermometers of our hearts. Jesus Himself told us:

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. (Matthew 12:34)

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. (Luke 6:45)

Think of any bottle which you might purchase in the supermarket. When you open the cap and start to pour out the contents, the only thing that comes out is what inside. Now, I'm sure that you are thinking that this is such an obvious truth that it is strange for me to take the space in this lesson to even mention it. However, have you ever stopped to consider that the opening in the top of the bottle is called its "mouth"? If the bottle has pure water in it, only pure water will come out of its mouth. If the bottle contains poison, only poison will come out through its mouth. The same is true with our mouths; what is in our hearts will eventually spill out through our lips. Just as a thermometer tells us whether the furnace is working, our mouths are true indicators of what the spiritual temperature is inside our hearts.

When the fire of the gospel is roaring full blast inside our hearts, the thermometer of our mouths will soar upward. The prophet Jeremiah testifies, "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." (verse 20:9) On the alternate end of the spectrum, the Apostle James teaches us that the mouth can also become a raging fire if the flames of hell itself are boiling in the heart:

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 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 3:1-6)

Of course, it is true that we can sometimes guard our speech so that what is inside our hearts is not revealed through our lying lips which are cautious to conceal the true heart; however, I have observed that there are two situations in which the secrets of the heart are revealed. The first is in a sudden stressful moment. Just think about the last time you hit your thumb with a hammer or when

some careless driver cut in front of you in traffic almost causing an accident. I'm sure that you even shocked yourself with some of the words that erupted from your lips. The other time is when we are on the opposite end of the emotional spectrum -- when we are relaxed and in a totally comfortable, non-threatening environment. I have personally experienced this scenario all too often with ministers as they have gathered for private fellowship after the church service. Men, who just minutes before were preaching faith and love, will often be overheard expressing their doubts and verbalizing criticisms. The relaxed atmosphere of stepping out from in front of the crowd had opened up the gateway of their hearts to expose their true spiritual temperature.

In Psalms 141:3, David expressed his desire to guard his mouth and even acknowledged that his lips were a gateway. "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." However, it is in the following verse that we see that the true heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. "Incline not mine heart to any evil way, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity..." His son Solomon confirmed that the heart is the source in Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Even though he also wrote that life and death are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21), the very wellspring for those issues of life is in the heart of the man.

Jesus gave a very thought-provoking teaching when He admonished us to cut off our hands if they offend us and to pluck out our eyes if they cause us to sin. (Matthew 5:30) If we were to follow this teaching explicitly, I'm afraid that the entire church would be populated with blind amputees. However, even those of us who are not able to translate Greek and exegete the text like Bible scholars sense that the Master must not have been demanding that we begin to mutilate our bodies over every sinful thought or deed. We somehow instinctively understand that Jesus meant that the wickedness resided not in the physical member of the body, but in the sinfulness of our hearts -- exactly what Jesus confirmed in Matthew 15:19. The bottom line is that if it is too cold or hot in a room, the thermometer cannot alter the situation; the problem has to be dealt with at the furnace. So it is with our lives; our mouths are neither our problem nor the solution. They are only indicators of what churns in the heart. Any correction must come in the heart.

Who we are to become is determined by how we think in our hearts. We know that the five-fold ministry is placed within the Body of Christ to help us adjust the way we think in our hearts -- or, so to speak, help us get the truth "into our heads." When I was growing up in the Deep South, we used an expression to describe things which we really didn't want or need: "I need that like I need a hole in my head." Even though I'm not sure where the expression came from or what it meant exactly, I want to use that old expression today to express the opposite of what it communicated back when I was a kid. The next few thoughts are as necessary to our spiritual maturity as having some holes in our heads. You see, there are three gateways to the heart which are entered through the holes in our heads. If we can understand how these gateways work and how they interact with our hearts, we will realize the value of the holes in our heads. Our ultimate goal will be to become like the three little monkeys who speak no evil, see no evil, and hear no evil. In doing so, we will be able to mature into the image and likeness of Christ -- beginning at the inner part of our hearts and working out to the full man.