

“These are the things which defile a man”

(Matthew 15: 10-20)

“And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”

This is the parable of true cleanliness. Jesus gave it after the scribes and Pharisees had come to him and complained that his disciples went against “the tradition of the elders” by not washing their hands before eating bread. In his reply he showed that his critics were dressing up “the commandments of men” as “doctrines” and then went on to explain what true cleanliness is.

He was contrasting the pettifogging ritual of physical thought-taking with the vital necessity of mental or spiritual cleanliness. He

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shows that we have both the ability and the need to express a flow of pure thinking, whereas the dogmatic demand for mere purification of the physical concerns something of no real importance. The true cleansing process is essential and defines the character of the individual. All the teachings of Christian Science as set out in Mrs Eddy's writings and the teachings of the great Master relate to the cleansing of thought-expressions and realizations, even while they also show that this is bound to reflect itself in the pleasantness of what is generally regarded as cleanliness.

It may be helpful to try to arrive at the meaning of the key words used by Jesus in this parable. He employs “mouth” to signify the channel through which we take in and give out all our conscious experience. “Belly” stands for the Christ Mind inherent in us all which (like the belly in the physical body) receives the intake and deals with it satisfactorily by discharging the unwanted and retaining the good for sustenance. “Cast out into the draught” represents the instant dismissing of error and having no more to do with it after such dismissal. The “heart” symbolizes the false education of mortal mind forever trying to impose itself upon the individual and subjugate his true experience as the expression of “the great heart of Love” (S&H 448:4).

Jesus was employing a simple illustration taken from the physical activity of the body to underline a very important point of which everyone should be aware. Using the mouth as a symbol of the avenue of consciousness through which daily and hourly we have an intake of impressions and thoughts of every kind, he states emphatically that this intake need do us no harm, because our “belly” or Christ consciousness, constituting our whole system of spiritual digestion, deals with impressions both to accept what good they bring and let it fulfil its purpose and reject through “the draught” that which has no purpose for us. But what the individual takes from that whole digestive process and identifies himself with in thought, word, and action — that is crucial. Unless we pay attention to this and see that we identify ourselves with what our Christ Mind has declared, the outflow from our thinking can become what Jesus

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here lists: “evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” These are the things which, if allowed, defile us. defile our character-expression. The Master wanted men to see how to ensure that the outflow from their consciousness directly reflected the inflow of pure good given them by the continuous activity of their Christ Mind.

Before he left them, Jesus said to his disciples: “these signs shall follow them that believe . . . if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.” Does not this indicate that he knew that in every man there is the inherent Christ of his nature which deals with the entire intake of thoughts? If this were not true, how would we know by instinct and with certainty what is right and what is wrong? What is it that meets the intake of thought and immediately tells us that which is from Principle and that which is un-Principled? Even a dog slinks round the corner and hides from the butcher if he has taken a bone from his shop; why should this be, unless by instinct, by the presence of the ever-present Christ Mind, something has told him that he has been influenced by un-Principled motives? And so our inherent Christ acts as our means of spiritual digestion and this Christ is continually active, whether or not we are aware of it — or if we are aware of it, whether or not we refuse to accept its health-giving directions. Subconscious though it may appear to us, our instinctive Christ consciousness always knows what is true and right and throws out all unwanted or negative stuff. There is therefore no need to fear anything at all which comes *into* our thought, however “deadly” or aggressively evil it appears, because it can do no harm and need cause no disturbance if we allow full play to our Christ Mind, whereby only that which is good is retained and every bad effect is annulled.

Even something which makes an initial impression as “horrible” or “distressing” can have no effect or influence if we do not give it entity, through listening to our Christ Mind. We should realize that we are the individual expressions of the Christ Mind and that this Christ, when allowed full scope, will protect us from the bad effect of any impressions taken in at the “mouth” of our cognizance. The

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very fact that something is disquieting and upsets our normal way of thinking shows that it is not acceptable to our better selfhood and consciousness, and that better selfhood will finally be seen as our Christ consciousness. Even if at first something does not perturb us and we appear to take it into our thinking without any effort at dismissal, nevertheless (whether we know it or not) every one of us is a direct expression of Life and Truth and Love and the “belly” of our Christ Mind operates of its own free will, like the belly of the physical body, to accept good and discard what is not good; and just as we are not aware of how our physical “belly” is operating, but admit that it is doing so, we shall learn that our inherent Christ Mind is operating on our behalf even when we may not be conscious of it. The Psalmist implied this when he declared, “if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there.” So whether our individual rejection of error is apparent to us or not apparent, this does not alter the fact that it is impossible for man as the expression of Truth either to accept error or even cognize it as something real awaiting his acceptance or rejection. A lie is not something real, or else it would not be a lie, and the sooner we forestall its claim to existence by realizing this, the freer and happier we shall be in our natural selfhood, which is the expression of Truth fully, finally, and effortlessly, for that is how God knows us and there is no other knowing but His.

Of its own accord evil has no power to impart itself, to affect us, or cling to us — it goes through the “mouth” into the “belly” and out. But what we make of it and the power we give it through our own avenue of consciousness — that is where our responsibility lies. We cannot escape the fact that every thought we have goes out through the “mouth” into the atmosphere of consciousness and makes an impression for good or ill, whether or not we are aware of it. We sometimes imagine that we can bury an un-Principled thought merely by not speaking it out loud, but this is a delusion, because all that we think goes out and has an effect. We cannot keep it to ourselves. It is not possible for error of any kind to lie fallow in our mental stomach, and if we try to let it do so without any attempt to counter it, we get a disturbed thought and a disturbed physical experi-

ence. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” and it keeps us busy, for it stimulates us to accept Truth more vigorously, but the work is no more arduous than that of the housewife daily keeping the house clean and orderly or the business man daily running his business along sound lines.

What Jesus warns against is deliberately ignoring the dictates of our inherent Christ consciousness. The paramount need is to listen to and obey our Christ Mind, which deals perfectly with the intake of daily impressions and which is with us every moment of the day to be heeded. By not paying heed to it we allow impressions from the world of mortal mind to register and influence us, so that temporarily and until the lessons are learned we are activated by thoughts which are the exact opposite of our real nature. This lack of the right activity of manhood condemns us for that very lack and for neglect of expressing what we truly are and have truly gathered from our conscious experience. What our Christ Mind offers us is the pure outflow of our individual ability to reflect good. The call is imperative and accepts no excuses.

Constipated or uninspired and heavy thinking can be experienced by the student who makes too heavy a meal of error, instead of allowing the belly-process (the Christ Mind) to deal with it quickly, cast it out into “the draught,” and have nothing more to do with it. If an error has been spoken about us, our friend, or our world, our Christ Mind immediately defines it as error, but, more than this, it will tell us that the individual or group of individuals supposed to have voiced it could not have done so, since man is nothing more nor less than the individual expression of the voice of Truth. Accepting this promptly and refusing to entertain thoughts based on “self-will, self-justification, and self-love” (S&H 242:18), we have allowed our “belly” free play in its inherent ability to deal with error and cast it out into “the draught;” and our thinking can then go on to function naturally with its processes of love and the unweighted happiness which these processes carry with them.

We all need quicker dismissals of error and deeper convictions of Truth. If someone is doing a sum in arithmetic and the result

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reveals an error in the computation, no sensible mathematician spends time ruminating as to how the error could have come about, but dismisses it at once and gets on with the freedom and joy of allowing his thought to be controlled by the mathematical idea.

Mrs Eddy would not have included in her most important book, the textbook of Christian Science, the story of the little girl who wounded her finger unless it conveyed a lesson as to the quick dismissal of error which is much deeper than appears on a superficial reading of the passage: “Jesus loved little children because of their freedom from wrong and their receptiveness of right. While age is halting between two opinions or battling with false beliefs, youth makes easy and rapid strides towards Truth. A little girl, who had occasionally listened to my explanations, badly wounded her finger. She seemed not to notice it. On being questioned about it she answered ingenuously, ‘There is no sensation in matter.’ Bounding off with laughing eyes, she presently added, ‘Mamma, my finger is not a bit sore.’ It might have been months or years before her parents would have laid aside their drugs, or reached the mental height their little daughter so naturally attained” (S&H 236:28-10).

The best thing to do with error is to dismiss it quickly with the truth and, best of all, before it has registered as error.

If we *have* heeded our individual Christ ability to deal with the hourly intake of thoughts and impressions and have identified ourselves with the discriminations it has made for us, then what goes out of our mouth both in speech and through the mental mouth of thought is the imparting of “truth, health, and happiness,” which is our rock of salvation and our reason for existing (see My. 165:18-22).

“Out of the heart” — obviously Jesus was not referring to the physical heart, but it should also be obvious that he was not speaking of a power within the individual’s mind to create evil. What he was referring to is the very heart of the whole matter, namely, evil’s claim that it does exist and has power within itself. That is the essence of its claim, just as the physical heart is accepted to be the centre or essence of the individual’s physical life. What Mrs Eddy called “the great heart of Love” stands in contrast as the impelling

purposefulness of good for every individual. Jesus was here pointing to the heart of the matter in evil's attempt to impose itself and thereby cause us to accept it as a reality in some form or other, instead of as an absolute unreality. At the very heart of evil has always been its audacious claim, "I am a something, entirely separate from God, and you must listen to me if you wish to express intelligence." We all have to supplant this claim of a mind apart from God.

What Jesus now shows is how to make sure that out of our heart, the heart of divine Love individually reflected and not the so-called heart of mortal reasoning, there proceeds the very opposite of the evil thoughts and so on which he lists and to which we have to be alert only in order to recognize and expel them as intruders.

There is not space here to do more than comment briefly on the specific categories given by the Master, but their scope is obviously so great that the individual is bound to find fuller explanations coming to light in his own mentality.

Jesus begins with "evil thoughts." We should realize that we have the inherent ability to turn these into the positive of *good* thoughts, for "by reversal, errors serve as waymarks to the one Mind, in which all error disappears in celestial Truth" (S&H 267:24-25). The first thing to note is that our thinking constitutes us in this human experience; in other words, our thinking is either good or bad (evil) and according to this our human experience is shaped, both as regards our own health and happiness and our relationships with others. Through mortal education we are subject to everything to which mortal mind bears testimony and therefore have to be on guard to protect ourselves against this intrusion, for it is an intrusion — it is not us, and this should be recognized. It is an enemy trying to enter and disturb or destroy the integrity of spiritual thinking derived from Principle. "The sinner created neither himself nor sin, but sin created the sinner" (Ret.67:18-19). If we acknowledge this, we shall not condemn ourselves and feel that we ourselves originate the evil thoughts; we shall also be more alert to see that the city of our consciousness is defended against such invaders and becomes a state of consciousness such as John the Revelator described in his

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picture of the holy city, the pure conscious experience of every man, where nothing can enter which “defileth, . . . or maketh a lie.” This also helps in our estimate of others, for we realize that any “evil thoughts” apparently expressed by them are enemies and not they themselves. A mother generally holds her child blameless for errors, but blames others or alien influences for their part in attacking the integrity of the child. Jesus had this attitude when he said to the Pharisees, “ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do;” he was referring to the false influences fathering or controlling their thinking. This clear understanding, whereby he loved every man but rejected every evil attempting to attach itself to that man — he “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity” — enabled him to help the centurion who represented the domination of Rome and to heal the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. An understanding that evil is never man but is the activity of ignorance, which on this human plane is forever endeavouring to attack that manhood, puts us in a strong position to deal with it impersonally, with regard both to ourselves and others, and also to rouse in us that sense of love and compassion which is essential if we are to guide ourselves out of the human into the divine and so learn how to do it for others. There is no mortal mind because there is no mortality; it is a lie and the father of all the lies which follow in consequence. This attitude towards “evil thoughts” so alerts the individual that his true self comes to the fore in the ratio of his developing habit of rejecting lies as lies, and this proves to him not only that evil is unreal, but also that good and its naturalness is very real. Handling and rejecting the evil which is *never* there releases us to the experience of good which is *always* there. And so Jesus not only warns us against the habit of accepting evil thoughts without challenge and dismissal, but implies that rejecting them brings the individual to a great release of good and consequent happiness.

“Murders” — instead of harbouring thoughts leading to words and deeds which would kill hope and joy in others, we can see to it that we think and express that which gives life to them and enhances and multiplies their joy.

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“Adulteries” — we have married ourselves to the ideal of Christian Science and must be on guard that we do not adulterate that marriage through not being loyal in practice to what Christian Science teaches. To take a simple example: we adulterate the truth that man is fully employed and fully productive every time we think of employment as confined to material motions and processes, and we cleanse it of adulteration when we acknowledge the pure truth that all activity is mental and is therefore subject to Mind alone and reflected in the hourly experience of man. That is the standard of thinking to which we have married ourselves, and fidelity to that standard, no matter what the senses may say, is an essential of this divine marriage covenant.

“Fornications” — we must watch that we draw all our impressions from our marriage with Principle and therefore that there comes out from us that flow of sweetness and goodness towards others which blesses them. When we do that, we have no part in that “fornication” which disturbs the sacred relationship between the individual and his Principle, the relationship which the individual must himself develop and protect and which no one else can share. There is “fornication” if anyone turns continually to another in order to lean on his understanding for creative thoughts, rather than gleaning from it his own ability to lean on Principle. The friendship of the Master would have wakened in us our own abilities and the wonder of our own relationship to God, as it did with those who learnt from him. When our relationship with others has no other purpose than to do this for them, not only will it be a wonderful relationship but we ourselves shall find our marriage with Principle more clearly consummated.

“Thefts” — we must take care that we give full recognition both in thought and deed to everyone for what they are and what they do and watch that we do not sneakingly and underhandedly deny them any of the praise due to them for their individual expression of Principle.

“False witness” — we need to be alert that we witness only to the truth for ourselves and everyone else and stand in strong witness to

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that truth. This means rejecting opinions emanating from the falsities of sense testimony, for they endeavour to identify us with that testimony against the interests of others and of the continual development of Truth for mankind.

“Blasphemies” — we should be vigilant that our recognition of God is endowed with a deep humility and love, until Jesus’ words in the Lord’s Prayer and Mrs Eddy’s interpretation of them continually possess us whenever we think of God: “Hallowed be Thy name. *Adorable One*” (S&H 16:28-29). How often do we pause in our thought-processes and say those words until they fully embrace our thinking in true adoration?

The more we identify ourselves with good thoughts, with life-giving ideas, and so forth, the more natural it will become, until they are part and parcel of our normal being. Through the challenges Jesus presents he is wakening thought from ease in self to active rest in God and godliness, for godly we are and godly we have to learn to be.

Mrs Eddy quotes this very verse about evil thoughts and so on proceeding from the heart as the Scriptural heading to her chapter “Animal Magnetism Unmasked.” She thereby removed or unmasked the mystery surrounding the term “animal magnetism.” In that chapter she brings out that the whole heart of mortal existence (that which makes it pulse and pushes its concepts through the entire system of its existence) is nothing more nor less than mortal mind, therefore we have to watch the suggestions coming from this so-called mind and translate them into the impulses of the divine Mind. If we pay careful attention to this verse, we have no excuse if we become a servant to the activities of error, and we have no need to be frightened by the work required of us. If we are alert to the attempts of false inclinations and thought-processes to assert themselves, this will guard from deviations the pure flow emanating from that deep and genuine desire for goodness and its expression which is at the very heart of every individual in his forward responses to the call of his spirituality. That pure flow will thereby be protected and kept straight on course, straight along the channels of Principle to fulfil

the purposes of Principle. For instance, anyone who starts his day with a paramount desire to be loving finds that in the ratio of his sincerity pitfalls and various pulls present themselves in an attempt to destroy or disfigure that original divine impulse to be loving. But if he is watchful about this and rejects the un-Principled suggestions and tendencies, then his purpose is safeguarded and nothing impedes the realization of his natural and beautiful original heartfelt desire. Error is error — not something true, real, or operative — and therefore it is powerless in itself.

We may ask ourselves why between his first statement of this parable and his later explanation Jesus advised his students not to be concerned with the reactions of others. In effect what he said to his disciples when they told him that the Pharisees were offended at his words was this: “Let them alone, do not be concerned about how others are doing their part, because everything that is not of Principle is bound to be rooted up, but watch that you yourselves do not follow any blind leadership.” The phrase “blind leaders” implies that the Pharisees were deliberately turning their backs on the light which was as much present for them as for everyone else. Jesus was pointing out that stubbornness is something we should all avoid, because it blinds us to reason and in this case caused those influenced by it to be angry, just as a student may find himself disturbed if he turns a blind eye to the obvious truth of Truth. This form of self-will can temporarily hide from us the natural action of the Christ Mind (the “belly”) inherent in us all and already operating on our behalf by its separation of Truth from error.

This parable surely emphasizes our individual importance to the world in which we live and stimulates a realization of that importance and the part it has to play, the good it can do and the evil it may temporarily do unless we have that realization and therefore watch our thinking. A truth which false education may cause us to find hard to accept, but which we need to accept, is that in a degree we are as important to God as God is important to us, for we are God’s expression, and without His expression how would He be known or even exist for mankind to know? “God, without the image and like-

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ness of Himself, would be a nonentity, or Mind unexpressed. He would be without a witness or proof of His own nature” (S&H 303: 25-28). It is a wise man who acknowledges that he is important to mankind and to God and that he is *wanted* by mankind and by God. Because Jesus felt this, there became articulate to the surrounding consciousness the words, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Should we not endeavour to hear those words of our own selves? And should we not feel the inspiring call upon us to be what we are, by watching the intake of our consciousness? It is an intake we cannot stop, for it is forever going on, but through our inherent and every-moment-with-us Christ Mind we can deal with it so that only good is left and possesses us, allowing us at last to be what we truly are — God’s expression of His own wonderfulness.

Look at a flower, and if you look rightly, you will see something that is saying, “I am wonderful and I know it. I am not troubled about the intake from the earth, for I have dealt rightly with it, taken from it what is good and beautiful and real, and that is what you are now looking at as me. I am glad to be what I am because I have seen to it that I am just that through those processes which men call nature and which are really the same activity of the same Christ Mind which everyone enjoys. I am now showing you the wonderful result and bringing to you what you need — otherwise I would not be here. I am wanted and I know it, and I am ensuring that that want is rightly fulfilled for mankind, but all this is the activity of the Mind which made me and holds me to this lovely purpose for its own glorification.” No wonder the Master, the great scientific metaphysician, found Science active where it is always active — in the expression of its presence — and so he said, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.” He could have said, “Through the presence of the Christ Mind they naturally take only good and do not get disturbed or laboured by the attempt of anything else to impress them. They reject it out of hand and go on with what *is* at hand.” And so Jesus continued, “I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Therefore when we look at a beautiful flower, we

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should take the lesson from it — accept what it is saying to us, what it is giving to us, what it is so proud to exhale and so beautiful in exhaling. Often the aroma of that justified spiritual pride reaches us with further blessing as we drink it in, just as the beauty of its expression is there for us to receive in all its spiritual glory and its spiritual consciousness of how important it is and therefore how careful it will always be to be nothing but beautiful, nothing but good.

We may well ask ourselves: Do I really believe that I am important? Do I really know that I am very much wanted? Why did one of the most beautiful illustrations of the Bible take form in these words, “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”? It conveys a picture of being wanted and of feeling the value of being wanted and therefore adorning consciousness with the qualities which are the best we have to give.

If we study the life of the Master, we see a superb blending of true manhood and womanhood and we see that he knew that he was wanted by God as much as he knew that he wanted God. He said, “I do always those things that please Him” and he also said, “The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that Himself doeth.” He certainly was “a bride” adorned for the husbandry of Principle, and he acquiesced in a full and loving service, endowed with all the happiness and joy and loss of personal responsibility which we associate with those words, “a bride adorned for her husband.”

What good effects would follow if our first waking thought was “I am really wanted, wanted by God to express His being and wanted by mankind to *feel* that expression and therefore through it to know of His presence.” Jesus once said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” How excellent it would be if we, like him, felt the truth of this and like him responded to its call.