

KEPT FOR THE MASTER'S USE

by

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CHAPTER SIX

OUR LIPS KEPT FOR JESUS

“Keep my lips, that they may be
Filled with messages from Thee.”

THE days are past forever when we said, “Our lips are our own.” Now we know that they are not our own.

And yet how many of my readers often have the miserable consciousness that they have spoken unadvisedly with their lips! How many pray, “**Keep the door of my lips,**” when the very last thing they think of expecting is that they will be kept! They deliberately make up their minds that hasty words, or foolish words, or exaggerated words, according to their respective temptations, must and will slip out of that door, and that it can't be helped. The extent of the real meaning of their prayer was merely that not quite so many might slip out. As their faith went no farther, the answer went no farther, and so the door was not kept. Do let us look the matter straight in the face. Either we have committed our lips to our Lord, or we have not. This question must be settled first. If not, oh, do not let another hour pass! Take them to Jesus, and ask Him to take them.

But when you *have* committed them to Him, it comes to this—is He able or is He not able to keep that which you have committed to Him? If He is not able, of course you may as well give up at once, for your own experience has abundantly proved that *you* are not able, so there is no help for you. But if He is able—nay, thank God, there is no ‘*if*’ on this side!—say, rather, as He is able, where was this inevitable necessity of perpetual failure?

You have been fancying yourself virtually doomed and fated to it, and therefore you have gone on in it, while all the time His arm was not shortened that it could not save, but you have been limiting the Holy One of Israel. Honestly, now, have you trusted Him to keep your lips *this day*? Trust necessarily implies expectation that what we have entrusted will be kept. If you have not expected Him to keep, you have not trusted. You may have tried, and tried very hard, but you have not trusted, and therefore you have not been kept, and your lips have been the snare of your soul (Proverbs 18:7).

Once I heard a beautiful prayer which I can never forget; it was this:

“Lord, take my lips, and speak through them; take my mind, and think through it; take my heart, and set it on fire.”

And this is the way the Master keeps the lips of His servants, by so filling their hearts with His love that the outflow cannot be unloving, by so filling their thoughts that the utterance cannot be unchristlike. There must be filling before there is to be pouring out; and if there is filling, there must be pouring out, for He hath said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

But I think we should look for something more direct and definite than this. We are not all called to be the King’s ambassadors, but *all* who have heard the messages of salvation for themselves are called to be the Lord’s messengers, and day by day, as He gives us opportunity, we are to deliver **“the Lord’s message unto the people.”** That message, as committed to Haggai, was, **“I am with you, saith the Lord.”**

Is there not work enough for any lifetime in unfolding and distributing that one message to His own people? Then, for those who are still far off, we have that equally full message from our Lord to give out, which He has condensed for us into the one word, **“Come!”**

It is an especially sweet part of His dealings with His messengers that He always gives us the message for ourselves first. It is what He has first told us in darkness—that is, in the secrecy of our own rooms, or at least of our own hearts—that He bids us speak in light. And so the more we sit at His feet and watch to see what He has to say to ourselves, the more we shall have to tell to others. He does not send us out with sealed dispatches, which we know nothing about, and with which we have no concern.

There seems a seven-fold sequence in His filling the lips of His messengers.

First, they must be purified. The live coal from off the altar must be laid upon them, and He must say, **“Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged.”**

Then He will create the fruit of them, and this seems to be the great message of peace, **“Peace to him that is far off and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him”** (see Isaiah 57:19).

Then comes the prayer, **“O Lord, open Thou my lips,”** and its sure fulfillment. For then come in the promises, **“Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth,”** and, **“They shall withal be fitted in thy lips.”**

Then, of course, **“the lips of the righteous feed many,”** for the food is the Lord’s own giving.

Everything leads up to praise, and so we come next to **“My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips, when I remember Thee.”**

And lest we should fancy that ‘*when*’ rather implies that it is not, or cannot be, exactly always, we find that the mediation of Jesus throws this added light upon it, “**by Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to (margin, confessing) His name.**”

Does it seem a coming down from the mount to glance at one of our King’s commandments, which is specially needful and applicable to this matter of our lips being kept for Him? “**Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.**” None of His commands clash with or supersede one another. Trusting does not supersede watching; it does but complete and effectuate it.

Unwatchful trust is a delusion, and untrustful watching is in vain. Therefore let us not either willfully or carelessly *enter* into temptation, whether of place, or person, or topic, which has any tendency to endanger the keeping of our lips for Jesus. Let us pray that grace may be more and more poured into our lips as it was into His lips, so that our speech may be *always* with grace. May they be pure, and sweet, and lovely, even as “**His lips, like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.**”

We can hardly consider the keeping of our lips without recollecting that upon them, more than all else (though not exclusively of all else), depends that greatest of our responsibilities, our influence. We have no choice in the matter: we cannot evade or avoid it; and there is no more possibility of our limiting it, or even tracing its limits, than there is of setting a bound to the far-vibrating sound-waves, or watching their flow through the invisible air. Not one sentence that passes these lips of ours but must be an invisibly prolonged influence, not dying away into silence, but living away into the words and deeds of others.

We all know that there is influence exerted by a person’s mere presence, without the utterance of a single word.

We are conscious of this every day. People seem to carry an atmosphere with them, which *must* be breathed by those whom they approach.

- Some carry an atmosphere in which all unkind thoughts shrivel up and cannot grow into expression.
- Others carry one in which thoughts of Christ and things divine never seem able to flourish.

Have you not felt how a happy conversation about the things we love best is checked, or even strangled, by the entrance of one who is not in sympathy? Outsiders have not a chance of ever really knowing what delightful intercourse we have one with another about these things, because their very presence chills and changes it. On the other hand, how another person’s incoming freshens and develops it and warms us all up, and seems to give us, without the least conscious effort, a sort of *lift*!

If even unconscious and involuntary influence is such a power, how much greater must it be when the recognized power of words is added!

It has often struck me as a matter of observation, that open profession adds force to this influence, on whichever side it weighs; and also that it has the effect of making many a word and act, which might in other hands have been as nearly neutral as anything can be, tell with by no means neutral tendency on the wrong side.

The question of Eliphaz comes with great force when applied to one who desires or professes to be consecrated altogether, life and lips: **“Should he reason with unprofitable talk and with speeches *wherewith one can do no good?*”**

There is our standard! Idle words, which might have fallen comparatively harmlessly from one who had never named the name of Christ, may be a stumblingblock to inquirers, a sanction to thoughtless juniors, and a grief to thoughtful seniors, when they come from the lips which are professing to feed many. Even intelligent talk on general subjects by such a one may be a chilling disappointment to some craving heart, which had indulged the hope of getting help, comfort, or instruction in the things of God by listening to the conversation. It may be a lost opportunity of giving and gaining no one knows how much!

How well I recollect this disappointment to myself, again and again, when a mere child! In those early seeking days I never could understand why, sometimes, a good man whom I heard preach or speak as if he loved Christ very much, talked about all sorts of other things when we came back from church or missionary meeting. I did so wish he would have talked about the Saviour, whom I wanted, but had not found. It would have been so much more interesting even to the apparently thoughtless and merry little girl. How could he help it, I wondered, if he cared for that Pearl of Great Price as I was sure I should care for it if I could only find it! And oh, why didn't they ever talk to me about it, instead of about my lessons or their little girls at home? They did not know how their conversation was observed and compared with their sermon or speech, and how a hungry little soul went empty away from the supper table.

The lips of younger Christians may cause, in their turn, no less disappointment.

One sorrowful lesson I can never forget; and I will tell the story in hope that it may save others from causes of similar regret. During a summer visit just after I had left school, a class of girls about my own age came to me a few times for an hour's singing. It was very pleasant indeed, and the girls were delighted with the hymns. They listened to all I had to say about time and expression, and not with less attention to the more shyly-ventured remarks about the words.

Sometimes I accompanied them afterwards down the avenue; and whenever I met any of them I had smiles and plenty of kindly words for each, which they seemed to appreciate immensely. A few years afterwards I sat by the bedside of one of these girls—the most gifted of them all with both heart and head. She had been led by a wonderful way, and through long and deep suffering, into far clearer light than I enjoyed, and had witnessed for Christ in more ways than one, and far more brightly than I had ever done. She told me how sorrowfully and eagerly she was seeking Jesus at the time of those singing classes. And I never knew it, because I never asked, and she was too shy to speak first!

But she told me more, and every word was a pang to me—how she used to linger in the avenue on those summer evenings, longing that I would speak to her about the Saviour; how she hoped, week after week, that I would just stretch out a hand to help her, just say one little word that might be God’s message of peace to her, instead of the pleasant, general remarks about the nice hymns and tunes. And I never did!

And she went on for months, I think for years, after, without the light and gladness which it might have been my privilege to bring to her life. God chose other means, for the souls that He has given to Christ cannot be lost because of the unfaithfulness of a human instrument. But she said, and the words often ring in my ears when I am tempted to let an Opportunity slip:

“Ah, Miss Frances, I ought to have been yours.”

Yes, it is true enough that we should show forth His praise not only with our lips, but in our lives; but with very many Christians the other side of the prayer wants praying—they want rousing up even to wish to show it forth not only in their lives, but with their lips. I wonder how many, even of those who read this, really pray, **“O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise!”**

And when opened, oh, how much one *does* want to have them so kept for Jesus that He may be free to make the most of them, not letting them render second rate and indirect service when they might be doing direct and first-rate service to His cause and kingdom!

It is terrible how much less is done for Him than might be done, in consequence of the specious notion that if what we are doing or saying is not bad, we are doing good in a certain way, and therefore may be quite easy about it. People are not converted by this sort of work; at any rate I never met or heard of any one.

“He thinks it better for his quiet influence to tell!” said an affectionately excusing relative of one who had plenty of special opportunities of soulwinning, if he had only used his lips as well as his life for his Master. “And how many souls have been converted to God by his quiet influence all these years?” was my reply. And to that there was no answer! For the silent shining was all very beautiful in theory, but not one of the many souls placed specially under his influence had been known to be brought out of darkness into marvelous light. If they had, they must have been known, for such light can’t help being seen.

When one has even a glimmer of the tremendous difference between having Christ and being without Christ; when one gets but one shuddering glimpse of what eternity is, and of what it must mean, as well as what it may mean, without Christ; when one gets but a flash of realization of the tremendous fact that all these neighbors of ours, rich and poor alike, will have to spend that eternity either with Him or without Him—it is hard, very hard, indeed, to understand how a man or woman can believe these things at all, and make no effort for anything beyond the temporal elevation of those around, sometimes not even beyond their amusements!

“People must have entertainment,” they urge. I do not find that must in the Bible, but I do find, **“We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”**

And if you have any sort of belief in that, how can you care to use those lips of yours, which might be a fountain of life to the dying souls before you, merely to entertain them at some entertainment? As you sow, so you reap. The amusing paper is read, or the lively ballad recited, or the popular song sung, and you reap your harvest of laughter or applause, and of complacency at your success in entertaining the people. And there it ends, when you might have sown words from which you and they should reap fruit unto life eternal. Is this worthy work for one who has been bought with such a price that he must say,

“Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all”?

So far from yielding “all” to that rightful demand of amazing love, he does not even yield the fruit of his lips to it, much less the lips themselves.

After all, nothing really pays like direct, straightforward, uncompromising words about God and His works and Word. Nothing else ever made a man say, as a poor Irishman did when he heard the Good News for the first time:

“Thank ye, sir; you’ve taken the hunger off us to-day!”

Bearing in mind that it is not only the words which pass their lightly-hinged portal, but our literal lips which are to be kept for Jesus, it cannot be out of place before closing this chapter, to suggest that they open both ways.

What passes in should surely be considered as well as what passes out. And very many of us are beginning to see that the command, “**Whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,**” is not fully obeyed when we drink liquor, merely because we like it. What matter that we prefer taking it in a more refined form, if the thing itself is daily and actively and mightily working misery, and crime, and death, and destruction to thousands, till the cry thereof seems as if it must pierce the very heavens! And so it does—sooner, a great deal, than it pierces the walls of our comfortable dining room!

I only say here, you who have said, “Take my lips,” stop and repeat that prayer next time you put that to your lips which is binding men and women hand and foot, and delivering them over, helpless, to Satan! Let those words pass once more from your heart out through your lips and I do not think you will feel comfortable in letting the means of such infernal work pass in through them.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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