

Sunday, July 7, 2013

A useless religion

“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.” (James 1:26) This verse reveals the danger of uncontrolled tongue. If a man doesn’t restrain his tongue, his whole spiritual life would come to ruins. His worship, ministry, and strive would be all in vain.

In chapter three, St. James also explains the importance of the tongue: Although a small member, it can lead man either to life or destruction. Like the rudder of a ship, though small compared to the size of the vessel, it controls its path and can either lead it to shore safely or send it to its demise.

Now, let’s go back to the first verse (James 1:26), it shows how one’s religion could be in vain because of an unrestrained tongue. Thus we ought to be vigilant to the following serious issue: **All our stockpile of spiritual strife, our toil, fasting, and prayer are all in vain if this spiritual effort is mixed with an unrestrained tongue that slips with satiric comments, undue critiques, or slandering others... A tongue that doesn’t mind its own business, doesn’t care to use words of edification, words that make peace, strengthens love, and encourages others in the road of righteousness.**

Bridling one’s tongue doesn’t only mean restraining it from saying evil words, but also guide it to utter what is beneficial as the Bible teaches us: ***“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification.”*** (Ephesians 4:29), ***“Bless and do not curse.”*** (Romans 12:14), ***“Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”*** (Ephesians 5:4), ***“Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.”*** (1 Peter 3:9-10), ***“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things.”*** (Ephesians 5:19-20).

Thus, the Bible warns us to use our tongue for that which edifies and benefits not that which harms and destroys. Perhaps we should always remember that sayings of the Fathers that the **fasting of the tongue** (from evil words) is better than the **fasting of the stomach** (from food) and that the **fasting of the heart** (from the love of the world) is better than both.

The slips of the tongues can be very serious and often very difficult to fix. In that St John Climacus says: **It is better for a man to fall from a high place rather than to fall from his tongue.**

In fact we must admit that we are very weak and often do a poor job in controlling our tongue. We need a great deal of exercise and strife to improve on our language and tone of voice such that our religion doesn’t go in vain, ***“For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.”*** (James 3:2).

LORD JESUS:

O You who said ***“By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*** (Matthew 12:37) and that ***“for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.”*** (Matthew 12:26).

You gave me the parable of the publican who uttered few words asking for your mercy so he became justified (Luke 18:9-14).

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

Keep my tongue from slipping with evil words so my religion may not be in vain.

Grant me words that are seasoned by the salt of your Holy Spirit (Colossians 4:6) so they may be beneficial to everyone and it prepares me to attain your peace and forgiveness.

Forgive me for the slipping of my tongue in the past. Cleanse my unclean lips with the live coal of your holy altar as you cleansed the lips of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5-7).

Open my lips so my mouth can declare your praise, so I may bless you and glorify you all the days of my life. Amen.

Fr. Yohanna Naseef

fryohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL