



vulgar

intelligent

# Thy Speech Reveals Thee

*The words you speak can classify and categorize you.*

**BY ELDER L. TOM PERRY**

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

One of the great characters of the New Testament who has always held a special fascination for me is Peter. Peter had to struggle so hard to overcome the things of the world and to prepare himself to be a witness and teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is an interesting lesson to be learned in the relationship between the Savior and Peter during those final hours before the Savior's trial and Crucifixion.

"Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto

thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

"Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matthew 26:34-35).

## **Our Speech Reveals Who We Are**

Then came those fateful hours when Peter did not identify himself with the Savior, but still his love for Him demanded that he be present at those trials to see what occurred.

"Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

"But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

"And when he was



sensitive

caring

rude



**P**eter's speech revealed who he was and where he had been reared. Our speech reflects the kind of person we are, exposing our background and our way of life. It describes our thinking as well as our inner feelings.

gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

“And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

“And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth [reveals] thee.

“Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

“And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:69–75).

Just as a passport photo, a signature, or a thumbprint can identify individuals, Peter's

speech revealed who he was and where he had been reared. Just as surely are *you* classified and put in a special category by those who hear the words you speak. Our speech reflects the kind of person we are, exposing our background and our way of life. It describes our thinking as well as our inner feelings.

### **A Shocking Word**

Today, probably more than in any other period of history, we find more profanity and vulgarity being used. I had a particular experience in my life that showed me how using the wrong word can shock those who do not expect such an utterance to come from you. I was in boot camp in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II. Of course, the language among my fellow Marines was not of the caliber that you would want to repeat. Being a recently returned missionary, I determined I should keep my language above the level they were using. I tried consistently to keep from saying even the simplest and most common of swear words.

One day we were on the rifle range firing for our final qualification scores. I had done well in the 100-, 200-, and 300-yard positions. Now we were back at the 500-yard position. All I needed was a reasonable score—just hitting the target without even having to hit the bull's-eye—and I would make Expert Rifleman. We had been charged up with the desire to excel and be the top platoon in firing for qualifications. I tensed up at the 500-yard standing position and on my first shot threw my shoulder into the rifle. Of course, the flag waved—I had missed the target. And likewise I missed the opportunity of being named Expert Rifleman.

Out of my mouth came a little four-letter

word that I had determined never to use. Much to my shock and chagrin, suddenly the whole range stopped firing and everyone turned and looked at me with their mouths open. Any other Marine firing from that position that day could have used the word I used without anyone paying attention. But because I had determined that I would carry the standards of the mission field into the Marine Corps, everyone was shocked when I forgot myself.

The Savior Himself instructed us concerning the use of our speech. He said, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man” (Matthew 15:11).

Many times in our effort to refrain from improper speech, we find words to substitute. Sometimes they are so close to vulgar phrases everyone probably knows that we are substituting words and have not really improved our vocabulary.

I have been appalled at times as I have listened to returning missionaries speak in sacrament meeting. I have heard the words, phrases, or sentences they have picked up in the mission field that were really substitutes for vulgarity, demonstrating their inability to master a proper vocabulary and give the correct impression of what they had been doing on their missions.

#### How to Improve Your Speech

To anyone who has followed the practice of using profanity or vulgarity and would like to correct the habit, could I offer this suggestion?

1. Make the commitment to erase such

words from your vocabulary.

2. If you slip and say a swear word or a substitute word, mentally reconstruct the sentence without the vulgarity or substitute word.
3. Repeat the new sentence aloud.

Eventually you will develop a nonvulgar speech habit.

I think the instructions Paul gave to the Ephesian Saints would be of value to all of us:

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:29–30).

Have the courage to keep your speech clean and wholesome. Improve your vocabulary—it will place you among those who will be found serving the Lord.

The Savior taught, “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).

May your mouth speak out of the abundance of that which is good in your heart is my prayer for all of you. **NE**

