

# Matthew 12:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

## Analysis

'O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' Jesus addresses Pharisees harshly: 'generation of vipers' (γεννήματα ἔχιδνῶν/gennēmata echidnōn, offspring of snakes)—John Baptist's same epithet (Matthew 3:7). The rhetorical question: 'how can ye, being evil, speak good things?' expects answer: you can't. Evil nature produces evil speech. The principle: 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh' (ἐκ τοῦ περισσεύματος τῆς καρδίας τὸ στόμα λαλεῖ/ek tou perisseumatos tēs kardias to stoma lalei)—whatever fills the heart overflows through speech. Reformed theology sees this as demonstrating total depravity: evil heart inevitably produces evil expression. It also teaches that speech reveals character—what we say indicates what we are. The Pharisees' accusation (attributing Jesus's works to Satan) revealed their evil hearts. Modern application: our words—criticism, gossip, lies, blasphemy, or alternatively worship, encouragement, truth—reveal our hearts' condition.

## Historical Context

Vipers were venomous snakes common in Palestine—deadly, deceptive (striking from concealment), and associated with evil. Calling Pharisees 'generation of vipers' was devastating insult questioning their spiritual legitimacy. They claimed Abraham as father; Jesus and John implied Satan was their true father (John 8:44). The heart/mouth connection was axiomatic in Jewish wisdom: Proverbs 4:23 ('Keep

thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life'), Proverbs 12:14 ('A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth'), Proverbs 18:21 ('Death and life are in the power of the tongue'). Jesus applied this: speech diagnostic of spiritual condition. Pharisees' evil words (attributing Spirit's work to Satan) proved evil hearts. Early church took this seriously: James 3:1-12 extensively discusses tongue's power and its revelation of heart. Throughout history, heresy trials often examined words carefully—what people say reveals what they believe. Modern psychology confirms: speech patterns reveal underlying attitudes, beliefs, values. Jesus's principle remains: listen to what people consistently say to understand their hearts.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. What does your habitual speech—words you use when unguarded—reveal about your heart's condition?
2. How do you cultivate heart purity knowing that speech inevitably reveals inner reality?
3. In what ways do Christians sometimes maintain external religious vocabulary while hearts remain far from God?

## Interlinear Text

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γεννήματα	ἐχιδνῶν	πῶς	δύνασθε	ἀγαθὰ	λαλεῖ	πονηροὶ	
O generation	of vipers	how	can ye	good things	speak	evil	
G1081	G2191	G4459	G1410	G18	G2980	G4190	
ὄντες	ἐκ	γὰρ	τοῦ	περισσεύματος	τῆς	καρδίας	τὸ
being	out of	for	G3588	the abundance	G3588	of the heart	G3588
G5607	G1537	G1063		G4051		G2588	
στόμα	λαλεῖ						
the mouth	speak						
G4750	G2980						

## Additional Cross-References

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**Luke 6:45** (Evil): 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.

**Matthew 15:18** (Parallel theme): But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

**Ephesians 4:29** (Good): 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.

**1 Samuel 24:13** (Evil): As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

**1 John 3:10** (Evil): In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

**Matthew 12:35** (Evil): A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

**Isaiah 32:6** (Parallel theme): For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.

**John 8:44** (Evil): Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

**Matthew 23:33** (Parallel theme): Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

**Isaiah 59:14** (Parallel theme): And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.