

Matthew 12:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Analysis

'For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.' Jesus concludes His teaching on speech with sobering principle: words determine judgment outcome. 'Justified' (δικαιωθήση/dikaiōthēsē) means declared righteous; 'condemned' (καταδικασθήση/katadikasthēsē) means judged guilty. Speech reveals heart (v.34-35), and heart determines destiny. Reformed theology clarifies: this doesn't teach salvation by works (words) but that genuine faith produces corresponding speech. Those with regenerate hearts speak accordingly; those without reveal their condition through speech. The verse connects to justification by faith: saving faith produces believing confession (Romans 10:9-10). It also warns: persistent blasphemy, denial of Christ, or evil speech demonstrates unregenerate heart, resulting in condemnation. Believers' careless words don't condemn them (Christ bore that judgment) but do require accounting (v.36). The principle: what you consistently say reveals what you are, and what you are determines your eternal destiny.

Historical Context

Jewish wisdom emphasized speech's importance: Proverbs 18:21 ('Death and life are in the power of the tongue'), Sirach/Ecclesiasticus contains extensive teaching on speech. Rabbinic tradition held that words have power to bless or curse, bind or loose. Jesus takes this further: words reveal heart, and heart determines judgment. The immediate context—Pharisees' blasphemous accusation (v.24)—demonstrates how evil speech manifests evil heart deserving condemnation. Conversely, Peter's

confession 'Thou art the Christ' (Matthew 16:16) manifested regenerate heart. Early church wrestled with this: what of those who denied Christ under persecution? Donatist controversy centered on whether the 'lapsi' (those who denied Christ to avoid martyrdom) could be restored. The church decided: genuine believers may fail temporarily (like Peter) but won't finally deny Christ. Those who do weren't genuinely saved. Throughout history, confession of Christ has been costly—persecution sorted true from false believers.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What do your habitual words—especially when under pressure or unguarded—reveal about your heart's true condition?
2. How does understanding that words reveal heart (rather than determining salvation by themselves) affect your view of this verse?
3. What does it mean practically to be 'justified by words'—how does saving faith produce faithful speech?

Interlinear Text

ἐκ	γὰρ	τῶν	λόγων	σου	δικαιωθήσῃ	καὶ	ἐκ	τῶν
by	For	G3588	words	thy	thou shalt be justified	and	by	G3588
G1537	G1063		G3056	G4675	G1344	G2532	G1537	

λόγων	σου	καταδικασθήσῃ
words	thy	thou shalt be condemned
G3056	G4675	G2613

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 13:3 (Parallel theme): He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.

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