

**Mark 8: 34-38; “The Parlor of Christian Discipleship”, Sermon # 58 in the series –
“Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on May 15th, 2016, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We have now toured 3 of the rooms of the house of Christian Discipleship; the Living Room, and the Kitchen, and the Dining Room. They have to do with self-denial, the preparation of spiritual food for yourself and others, and your learning to dine spiritually with Christ; that is, to have spiritual fellowship with Him as you go through your day. The last time I spoke to you, we saw the importance of coming to church and receiving the Word of God as an act of worship. We saw the importance to God of His worship being upheld by us. This is a great part of what it means to be Christian disciple. We follow Christ by upholding the worship of God; by receiving His Word and then going out from this place to live out the truth that we have received. Now, today, we have another room, which at first glance, may not seem to be all that important, but it really is. It is the Parlor of the Christian life. A parlor, in times past, was a room used primarily for conversation or the reception of guests. It was there that much important information was relayed and where much significant discussion took place. I want you to give me your attention now as I ask you three questions related to your initiating and having holy conversation with other Christians. I am speaking now, of that conversation that believers are to engage in with other believers as a part of their becoming more Christ-like. 1st of all - I would like to ask you if you are learning to discourse with God’s dear people unto their edification? 2nd - Whether you know what the subject matter of your conversations should be in this room? And 3rd – I want to ask you whether you know what kinds of holy entertainment there are, that you might lead others into, while they are under your roof; activities which would be conducive to their godliness? Answering these 3 questions will form an important part of your making progress in being Christ’s disciple.

1st of all - Let us ask ourselves the question - Am I, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, cultivating the holy art of discoursing with God’s dear people, unto their edification?

It is very interesting, is it not? In our generation you don’t often hear of a room called a parlor. And again, just like the formal Dining Room, not having a parlor when houses are designed and built, only shows the declension of the state of true religion in the day in which we live. The reason that there are not parlors any longer is not because people do not sit down to talk much with each other about things which concern them. It’s not as though they do not speak of things which they are be concerned about. They do sit down together; they do talk with each other. But they do not, very often, from what I have observed, speak to each other so as to give wholesome instruction to each other, in the times of their having fellowship together. It is hard for many people, even believers, to talk seriously about the meaning of life, and what is most important to their eternal souls. And so, many people in our day do not listen to each other as if there might be something to learn from a godly person. And perhaps they seldom think about words which they might give to them, in return. It is because people very rarely talk with each other about things that are of lasting, or eternal importance any more, except in a passing fashion. This was not the case of the godly, in past generations, and I am hoping that we as a church might become a people who would, by the grace of God, learn to do this very thing. When we have fellowship with each other, may it be, that we would cultivate our speech and our entertainments with others, so that God as well as those whom we are having fellowship with, will be profited by them.

I am speaking now about having serious conversation with other Christians and with other people in your family about spiritual things; the things of holiness and righteousness, the things of Christ and His glory, and the advancement of His kingdom in your heart. Many people, even

many Christians I believe, struggle to be able to do this. I hope that they are not those who are ashamed of Christ and the spiritual things which their regenerated minds are supposed to be dwelling upon. The Lord Jesus puts these two truths in juxtaposition with each other in verses 36-38 of our text: Pursuing the World to obtain wealth and riches and earthly security, and pursuing the spiritual truths and realities which will last forever. These are two different things. “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?” “Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” Holy conversation is not only good for Christians to engage in, but it is also good for those who are not Christians to overhear, so that they might understand something more about spiritual things and think for themselves that they have a need of Christ and His grace.

I am thinking about John Bunyan now. Listen to what he says in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. “But upon a day, the good providence of God did cast me to Bedford, to work on my calling; and in one of the streets of that town, I came where there were three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun, and talking about the things of God; and being now willing to hear them discourse, I drew near to hear what they said, for I was now a brisk talker also myself in the matters of religion, but now I may say, I heard, but I understood not; for they were far above, out of my reach; for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature; they talked how God had visited their souls with His love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and supported against the temptations of the devil.” “Moreover, they reasoned of the suggestions and temptations of Satan in particular; and told to each other by which they had been afflicted, and how they were borne up under his assaults.” “They also discoursed of their own wretchedness of heart, of their unbelief; and did condemn, slight, and abhor their own righteousness as filthy and insufficient to do them any good.” “And I thought they spoke as if joy did make them speak; they spoke with such pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me, as if they had found a new world, as if they were people who dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their neighbors.”

“At this I felt my own heart began to shake, as mistrusting my condition to be nought; for I saw that in all my thoughts about religion and salvation, the New Birth did never enter into my mind, neither knew I the comfort of the Word and promise, nor the deceitfulness of my own wicked heart.” “As for secret thoughts, I took no notice of them; neither did I understand what Satan’s temptations were, nor how they were to be withstood and resisted.” “Thus, therefore, when I had heard and considered what they said, I left them, and went about my employment again, but their talk and discourse went with me; also my heart would tarry with them, for I was greatly affected with their words, both because by them I was convinced that I lacked the true tokens of a truly godly man, and also because by them I was convinced of the happy and blessed condition of him that was such a one.” “Therefore I should often make it my business to be going again and again into the company of these poor people, for I could not stay away; and the more I went amongst them, the more I did question my condition; and as I still do remember.”

I would say that this is a very beautiful passage. It shows us the power of godly speech, and godly experience being related from one believer to another. It has a real effect on unbelievers, even, when the Holy Spirit is at work. It shows us how much God approves of it; how much He honors it to the blessing of other people’s souls. We must stop and think to ourselves; what if they had been ashamed of Christ and His words? They would never had been so free to speak, as they were. But they were faithful, as Christ’s disciples, to discourse with each other about spiritual truths and realities. Let me ask you whether you are doing this; whether you consciously are thinking of what you could say to other believers which would build them up?

There is Scriptural warrant for this. I have mentioned these verses before to you, but let me mention them again. Turn with me over to Malachi Chapter 3, and verse 16. I think that the King James Version is the best on this verse. It says, "Then they who feared the Lord spake often to one another, and the Lord hearkened (He listened) and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name." (who meditate on His name) Now notice that it is "those who feared that Lord" who spoke often to one another. To fear the Lord is to have regard for Him in order to keep His word and His commandments. In this case it is to have such a regard for Him that you speak about Him to others who fear Him, to others who have regard for Him. He greatly approves of such speaking. He is listening, the verse says. He hearkens to it, it says. He draws near to the conversations and the discourse of the godly to listen to them. And not only this, but it also says that our God writes these godly conversations down in a book of remembrance. To Him it is something that He will remember eternally. To Him it is precious. The very words; the very thoughts behind them, He will take notice of them all. The people who speak in this holy way, He will bless with the eternal blessing of holding them near to Himself; wearing them as Jewels on His robe. Look at verse 17. "And they shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him."

You see, one of the chief ways that you can tell the difference between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him, is that the servant speaks of His Master, and wants to converse with other godly people about Him. And the reason that he wants to do this, is because He delights in God, and he is eager to speak of the greatness of His person and the greatness of His works. And he doesn't mind if others who do not know the Lord overhear, although he will not throw his pearls before swine. Psalm 145, verse 10 and following says, "All Your works shall praise You, O Lord, and Your saints shall bless You." "They shall speak of the glory of Your Kingdom, and talk of your power, to make know to the sons of men His mighty acts., and the glorious majesty of His kingdom." Let me ask you if you do this? Do you do this in your own way, according to the life and personality that God has given to you? Perhaps you are not given to much speaking; perhaps you are shy. But do you try, by the grace of God, in your own feeble way to speak to others who are godly, and others who may not know your Savior, but are curious about what He has done for you. Do you speak to them about what He has done for your soul? Psalm 66, verse 18 says, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul." Ask yourself if this is the attitude and the intention of your heart; to bear testimony to what He has done for your soul?

2nd – Let us ask ourselves: What should be the subject matter of the conversations and discourses which we will speak together about, when other godly people come to our home?

Well turn with me to Psalm 119, verse 171. The Psalmist, who I believe is David, says, "My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes." "My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness." "Let your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts." The Christian disciple is one who is always praising God for having given him the best of books. The subject matter which he will speak upon will be related to the truth of the Bible. He obviously will not be talking about it all the time, but all of his thoughts are caught up with the truth of God's Word. He meditates upon it day and night. But, as he does this, he is trying to tie the word of God together with the most practical things that he is doing in his life. The words of the Bible are Spirit and they are life. They speak to us of what God is like and what He requires, and how He comes to give grace to those who are unworthy and undeserving. They speak to us of our duty to God and man. But they speak to us in such a way that, when the Holy Spirit is working, we come to understand that being able to keep them is our delight. We keep

them for the sake of knowing and serving God through Jesus Christ; because of what He has done for us in dying for our sins.

As Christians, we praise God for teaching us by His Spirit the value of Christ. We praise Him for the value of His Word. If you believe in the Lord Jesus, He saves you and comes into your heart and becomes your constant companion. But He comes in, in order that He may teach you His ways. "They shall all be taught of God" is the precious privilege of all of those who believe in Jesus. But what Christ aims at in this teaching is the establishment and growth of faith in Himself, and the keeping and observing all of His commandments. "My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all your commandments are righteousness." This one of the great things that we speak of in the Parlor of Christian discipleship. We speak of God's commandments. We discourse with other people around us about the right way to live. We speak of the rightness of God's commandments, and we speak of how they might be fulfilled by ourselves and others by faith in God, and by looking for the grace of Christ to come to our hearts. A Christian is ultimately very concerned that other people would come to believe in Jesus so that they might be saved. But they are also interested in seeing those same people come to learn how to do the right thing in the various situations of their life. They see it as their wisdom to discuss these matters in their family, and with those who might come to their house to visit them. They want to discuss matters of righteousness, both at church and at home. These verses are telling us that our God will help us to speak to others about these important matters of righteousness when we choose to think upon the righteousness of God's commandments, when we choose to live our lives in this way that leads to holiness.

This is the way to become a good witness. It is also the way to become a good example to your children. You teach them the rightness of the commandments which are found in the Word of God. You pray as you teach: "Let your hand become my help; for I have chosen your precepts." God's hand becomes your help, not only in helping you to go about to do and to keep His commandments to the glory of God, but His hand becomes your help in speaking to others about them. "My tongue shall speak of Your word..." Let us think for a few moments about parents speaking together with their children, teaching them the Word of God. Let me ask you, dear parents. Are you actively involved in trying to catechize your children? Do you actively set aside time to ask them questions about the truth of God and Christ and the Bible, so that you can see that they know the Bible answers? This kind of question and answer is done in the Parlor of Christian Discipleship. There are a number of tools which are available for this. The Baptist version of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is good. Matthew Henry also has an excellent catechism in the second volume of his works entitled, *A Scripture Catechism*. My son Benjamin and I went through many of the questions and answers to many questions of doctrine together in his last two years of high school. I believe that it is very profitable for parents to try to do this. Of great benefit, also, is the Puritan Hercules Collins' *An Orthodox Catechism, Being the Sum of Christian Religion, contained in the Law and the Gospel*. He saw the potential benefits of the Heidelberg Catechism for the people under his pastoral care. He edited it, and he published it in 1680. It has recently been republished and I have been studying it with great profit.

For those of you who have appreciated *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it is wonderful to read also of Christiana, the wife of Christian, in the second part, when she arrives at the Porter's Lodge and they stay at the Palace Beautiful; when she and her children, and her friend Mercy, meet up with 3 wise women there: Prudence, Piety, and Charity. This is what Bunyan writes: "Then said Prudence and Piety, if you will be persuaded to stay here awhile, you shall have what the house will afford." "Charity: 'Aye, and that with a very good will.'" "So they consented and stayed there about a month or above, and became very profitable one to another." "And because Prudence would see how Christiana had brought up her children, she asked leave of her to catechize them." "So she gave her free consent." "Then she began at the youngest who name was James." "And she said, 'Come, James, canst thou tell me who made thee?'" "James – God the Father,

God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.” “Good boy.” “And canst thou tell me who saves thee?” “James – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.” “Good boy still.” “But how doth God the Father save thee?” “James – By His grace.” “How doth God the Son save thee?” “James – By His righteousness, death, and blood, and life.” “Prudence – And how doth the Holy Ghost save thee?” “James – His illumination, by his renovation, and by his preservation.” I haven’t time to relate her conversation with the next oldest boy Samuel. But listen to her questioning of the oldest boy, Matthew.

“Come, Matthew, shall I also catechize you?” “Matthew - With a very good will.” “Prudence – I ask you then, if there was ever anything that had a being antecedent to, or before God?” “Matthew – No; for God is eternal nor is there anything excepting Himself, that had a being until the beginning of the first day.” “For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that in them is.” “Prudence – What do you think of the Bible?” “It is the Word of God.” “Prudence – Is there nothing written therein but what you understand?” “Matthew – Yes.” A great deal.” “Prudence - What do you do when you meet with such places therein that you do not understand?” “Matthew – I think that God is wiser than I.” “I pray also that he will please to let me know all therein that he knows will be for my good.” “How believe you, as touching the resurrection of the dead?” “Matthew – I believe they shall rise, the same that were buried; the same in nature, though not in corruption.” “And I believe this upon a double account: First, because God has promised it; secondly, because he is able to perform it.” “Then Prudence said to the boys, ‘You must still hearken to your mother, for she can learn you more.’ “You must also diligently give ear to what good talk you shall hear from others; for, for your sakes do they speak good things.” “Observe, also and that with carefulness, what the heavens and the earth do teach you; but especially be much in the meditation of that Book that was the cause of your father's becoming a pilgrim.” (that is: the Bible) “I, for my part, my children, will teach you what I can while you are here, and shall be glad if you will ask me questions that tend to godly edifying.”

You see how important it is for each of us that we learn the value of godly conversion to the salvation of our soul, and the strengthening of our soul in the way which leads to heaven. It says in Proverbs 1, verse 8. “My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck.” Seek out godly counsel from your parents and do not despise the wisdom which they have obtained by many years’ experience. They will be able, by grace and by the Word of God, to guide you well, if only you will want to listen to them. Their counsel will be a law to you in the eyes of God. It will become a law of liberty for you if you will only believe.

And now, 3rd, I want to ask you whether you know what kinds of holy entertainment there are, so that you might lead others into it?

When I say entertainment, you are probably thinking of worldly entertainment, which our society is full of, these days. But I would urge you to consider; whatever recreations that a Christian may engage in; he or she has a responsibility to see to it that they are godly and not sinful. Your entertainments should not lead you to forget God while you are watching them or doing them. They should be a help to your becoming more godly, and less worldly, in your participation in them. You do not, as a Christian want to come to Day of Judgment, and have to try to explain to the Lord of Glory how it was that you led your whole family and all of your friends into worldly and unholy entertainments; and that this was how you spent your spare time for Him. Ask yourself: Will what I am doing, and participating in, help to earn me the “well-done, thou good and faithful servant”, when I see my Lord face to face? There is only one verse in the whole Bible that uses the word entertainment in it. And that is Hebrews 13: 1. “Let brotherly love continue.” “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” They have “entertained angels unawares,” as it says in the King James. The verse is referring to the time in Genesis 18 when the Lord and two holy angels came

down to Abraham. The entertainment that Abraham gave to them was some food, and some holy conversation. They had come down in order to see if Sodom and Gomorrah were really as bad as it had been reported to them. Will you not remember, that in the Parlor of Christian Discipleship, that “Christ is the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent Listener to every conversation?”

Abraham did not have any movies for his guests to watch or any games to play, or any computer which he could work with, so that he might politely ignore his guests. No, there were matters of judgment at hand. And those matters of judgment were at hand because the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had made their sensual pleasures their god. But homosexuality was not the only great sin of Sodom. It says in Ezekiel 16, verse 49 – “Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.” “And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.” But when the grace of God is at work in the lives of Christian people, Christian families and Christian churches, their entertainment is to serve Him by serving others, and to be able to initiate holy conversation; so that a thoughtful consideration of what is right to do, is brought out. And then when godly people have left each other’s presence godly living is pursued. Let it be so with us, as a people. May we be more concerned with people than with televisions and computers. May we be concerned to talk with them seriously about the things of Christ and His Word. And let no worldly entertainments derail us from doing the Lord’s good will. Let those of us who fear the Lord speak often with one another, and let us diligently pursue that kind of entertainment, so that people around us would be saved and other Christians built up in their faith.