
TALKATIVE

TALKATIVE is one of Bunyan's most interesting character studies. Maybe it's because we all see a little bit of ourselves in him, or possibly it calls to mind someone we know or have known in the past.

There is much written in Scripture on the use and misuse of the tongue. The Psalmist frequently laments his sufferings from the evil speech of both friends and enemies. Proverbs likewise is replete with admonitions and warnings of the same. James the Just refers to the bridling of the tongue as an indicator of true religion residing in the heart. We are soberly reminded that talebearers, slanderers, backbiters, gossip-mongers and liars face the harshest of judgments.

With Talkative, Bunyan moves in a little different direction. Our garrulous friend does not seem to be guilty of any of the above, for the issue addressed is not the deliberate personal slander of a friend or brother. Instead, Talkative loves to engage in long and varied discussion on a wide range of religious subject matter, displaying his gifts and talents over the "history and mystery of things ... miracles, wonders or signs ... things moral, things evangelical; things sacred or things profane; things past or things to come." All these and more are his meat and drink, yet he remains devoid of true and practical godliness. He professes the same destiny as Christian and Faithful, and it is obvious he loves the Bible, he understands the principles of salvation and he certainly knows the differences between grace

and works. But Christian is not willing to give Talkative a minute's worth of his time.

By the disproportionate amount of discussion given to Talkative over the other characters, one wonders if Bunyan is underscoring the prevalence of the problem in the church in his day ... and in ours as well.

It is interesting that Faithful was quite taken in by Talkative. He was greatly impressed by the depth and breadth of his understanding of spiritual things. Talkative's worldview is rather impressive. To him, discussion of these things is made to the end that we profit by it. Here "a man may learn what it is to repent, to believe, to pray, to suffer ... also what are the great promises and consolations of the gospel ... further a man may learn to refute false opinions, to vindicate the truth, and also to instruct the ignorant."

This walking "encyclopedia of facts" is identified by Christian as "son of one Saywell of Prating-Row ... religion hath no place in his heart, or house or conversation; all that he hath lieth in his tongue and his religion is to make a noise therewith." Then Christian delivers a blow from which Talkative never recovers. He instructs Faithful to "go to him and enter into some serious discourse about the power of religion." There's the catch—Bunyan tells us "the soul of religion is the practical part."

The Psalmist prays, "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Psalm 119:34). He asks for the kind of knowledge that would make him obedient.
