

Is your Tongue out of Control?

It has been said that the “tongue” is one of the most exercised muscles of our body. It has been estimated that in a typical week, the average person will speak enough words to fill a 500 page book! However, for the Christian, the use of the tongue must be a matter of careful forethought and discipline. The Bible warns that believers who do not bring restraint to their tongue and speech have been deceived — and without such control over their words, their religious acts are worthless and hypocritical. *“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (James 1:26)*. It is a deception for any of us to think that Jesus can be Lord over our life, without also becoming Lord over our tongue.

The reference to a “bridle” in the previous verse is the leather harness and bit placed in a horse’s mouth to control it. In the same manner, Christians must allow the Holy Spirit to bridle their tongue, and bring restraint to their words. David used a similar device as a metaphor to describe his tight control on his mouth to avoid sinning with his tongue, especially when the ungodly were around, where it’s easy to develop a critical tongue, or pick up their bad tongue habits, such as profanity. *“I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me” (Psalms 39:1)*.

Hypocrisy of the Tongue

Elsewhere, James gave a warning of the evil poison of the tongue. He described some who

try to use their tongue as praise and blessing to God, then turn around to use their tongue to speak evil of one another. *“With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:9-10)*. We cannot use our tongue to curse and bad-mouth our brethren, then continue “business as usual” with our relationship with God. The Bible says that such tongue behavior is characteristic of hypocrites. *“The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor...” (Prov. 11:9)*.

Along this same vein, the psalmist warned that the wicked who use their mouth for evil and who speak against their brethren, violate the sacredness of God’s covenant and forfeit their right to use that same mouth as a vessel of God’s Holy Word and promise. Paraphrased, the passage says, *“What right do you have to use your mouth to declare my word and promises? You have used your mouth for evil and deceitfulness, to bad-mouth and slander your brethren” (Psa. 50:16-22)*.

Mouth sins are not Trivial

Unfortunately, mouth sins have somehow been domesticated and entertained by the modern church. Gossip, backbiting, and slander have become viewed as “naughty” little habits that aren’t really so serious. However, when Paul wrote to the church at Rome he sternly contended that gossips, slanderers, and bad-mouthers were in the same league as murderers, sexual perverts, and haters of God. Furthermore, he said such sins are worthy of a death sentence *(Rom. 1:28-32)*.

Some believers have experienced problems and misfortune, or fail to get answers to their prayers, because of their mouth sins. Using their tongue to ridicule, gossip about, or to slander their brothers and sisters is clearly sin — and as we know, unrepentant sin cuts off the flow of God’s answers to their prayers. *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear” (Psa 66:18)*. Those who have mouth problems are destined to experience much trouble in their life and will not find it easy to obtain God’s help with their problems. Satan takes advantage of those whose mouths are undisciplined and that are used wickedly. *“Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles” (Prov. 21:23)*.

The Bible teaches that they who desire to dwell in the presence of God, to experience His blessings, are those who will live righteously and who will not backbite or badmouth their neighbor. *“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle a Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend” (Psa. 15:1-3)*. Furthermore, God promises a long, blessed life to those who keep their tongue from evil. *“Who is the man who desires life, And loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit” (Psa. 34:12-13)*.

Accountable for all our Words

Jesus warned that our words are so important that they will actually determine our condemnation or justification. He said we will

be held responsible for all our words, even our careless, idle words. *“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”* (Matt. 12:36-37).

Elsewhere, Paul cautioned believers to disallow any corrupt or worthless talk to come from our mouth. Only those things which lift-up, encourage, and are gracious should be expressed to others. *“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers”* (Eph. 4:29).

Obscenities, profanity, cursing, dirty jokes, or making fun of others is not something that should ever be found in the mouth of a believer. *“Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving”* (Eph. 5:4 NIV).

Confess and forsake Sin

Thank God there is a remedy for mouth sins. His grace and forgiveness is available for all manner of sin, whatever it may be. Jesus will forgive all sins that we confess to Him (1 John 1:9) — but we must also “forsake” them. *“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy”* (Prov. 28:13).

The scriptures tell us to “repent” of sin (Rev. 3:19), that is to “turn away” from sinful behavior. True repentance means that we will make every effort not to repeat our former sins and will seek to walk in the nature of

Christ. Since mouth sins really originate in the heart (Matt. 12:34), repentance requires a change of attitude within. Such was David’s desire in his repentant prayer. *“Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me”* (Psa. 51:9-10).

If you realize that your tongue is out of control, seek His forgiveness and allow Him to change the attitude of your heart and your mouth, so they will be pleasing to Him. *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer”* (Psa. 19:14).

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