

CONTROLLING THE TONGUE

Proverbs 6:16-19

As Bible believing Christians, we know that the Bible teaches that God hates as well as loves. He hates evil acts and evil men who trample under foot the Son of God. Upon deep contemplation, we are glad that God has a holy hatred towards sin and sinners because His holiness, righteousness and justice will one day wipe this world free of all sin. Then God will be with His people and His people will be with their God.

However, as Bible believing Christians, we sometimes forget that God also hates a wicked tongue whether this evil tongue is in an unsaved or a saved person.

“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” (Prov. 6:16-19).

The Lord definitely states seven sins that He hates and three of these sins deal with the misuse of the tongue: lying, false witnessing and sowing discord.

If sins could be classified by how great they were, the sin of the misuse of the tongue would head the list. An evil tongue is just as bad as adultery or murder. Yet the Christian society puts its approval upon “gossipers” and scorns the adulterer and murderer. Christians should hate an evil tongue as much as they hate adultery or murder. While God hates all sin, it must be remembered that the sin of the tongue has greater effects negatively than other sins. A wicked tongue is a destructive force!

Evil speaking is a problem that every Christian has to face honestly. What Christian can claim total victory over a vicious tongue? Not one, but the tragedy is that many Christians do not even see the wickedness of evil speaking or they so rationalize their evil tongue that they persuade themselves that what they are doing is not evil. Could it be that many Christians do not have a biblical viewpoint concerning what sin really is? Could it be that the average Christian’s scale of values is based on what society approves and not what God approves according to the Scriptures?

Christians are constantly looking for a joyous and prosperous life, but often fail to see that it is related to obedience to God as found in the Bible. One of the ways to have a joyous and prosperous life is to control the tongue. *“Whoever would love*

life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.” (1 Pet. 3:10). God is not going to bless a Christian if he has a wicked, vicious and perverted tongue!

EXHORTATIONS ABOUT THE TONGUE

The most convicting force against sin, namely the misuse of the tongue, is the Word of God itself. The Bible speaks against the misuse of the tongue better than all the excuses men can dream up. Each Christian is responsible to do God’s will in relation to the tongue.

“To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.” (Prov. 8:13).

“He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value. The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment” (Prov. 10:18-21).

“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.” (Prov. 10:31-32).

“The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.” (Prov. 12:22)

“He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.” (Prov. 13:3).

“He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” (Prov. 17:9).

“A fool’s lips bring him strife, and his mouth invites a beating. A fool’s mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.” (Prov. 18:6-8).

“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.” (Prov. 27:2).

“He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.” (Prov. 28:23).

The Book of Proverbs tells us over and over again that the tongue must be controlled or we can destroy ourselves and others. Many have fallen by the edge of a sword or a bullet but not so many as have fallen by the tongue.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR CONTROLLING THE TONGUE

Controlling Gossip. Gossip is a sin that most Christians are guilty of committing, and it should be stopped. Gossip is sin and God hates gossip.

If you have a complaint against another brother, go directly to that brother and air your feelings. *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).* If the situation permits it, wait one week before you go to the brother about the thing that is bothering you. If you are in prayer about this thing for a week many times the problem passes away.

Be careful not to go to some other Christian about a brother who is irritating you. Sharing with others the faults of a Christian is merely adding coals to the fire and in one sense this is gossip. Be careful not to pass on information to others which you have not checked out first. It is wrong to judge a person on second-hand information. Gossip and second-hand information is always twisted and perverted. All information that is rumor should not be taken seriously, for there is usually very little truth in it. Christians are very guilty of talking about other people concerning their theology, methods or personality without ever confronting that person personally. This is information based on rumor, which is never reliable.

If you have heard gossip about a person and you wonder if it is true, go to the person involved and ask him about it. Never say anything behind a person's back that you would not say to his face.

If someone is gossiping to you about someone else, the nicest thing you can do for that person who is gossiping is to say, "I'm sorry what you are telling me is gossip and I would rather not talk about it. I am responsible to God and so are you as a Christian for every idle word we speak or give ear to!"

If a person is an habitual gossip with no desire to control the tongue, the right thing to do is to avoid this person. *"A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much."* (Prov. 20:19).

Be very careful not to turn prayer meetings and sharing times into gossip sessions. "Pray for sister Gertrude. You know she has fallen into deep sin and is guilty of this and that and so on. Poor sister Gertrude!" I sometimes think Christians get some kind of inward thrill in sharing or hearing about the sins of other people. How sad! And what have we done to the reputation of that person?

Sometimes we have to speak about a person if we are asked to make an evaluation or give a reference on that person. There is a great difference between volunteering information about someone when you have not been asked and being asked to evaluate a person. However, even when you must evaluate a person or a situation, you should try to be objective, fair and honest and do not exaggerate. Tell only those things you know for sure and never evaluate a person on rumor.

"Keep your words soft and sweet; you never know when you may have to eat them!"

Controlling the Tongue. Christians can control the tongue because they have the power of the Holy Spirit working in them. By faith and obedience, the true believer can train his tongue to refrain from evil and to speak good. But the Christian has to work at this all the days that he lives, for sins of the tongue are always a threat to a believer's fellowship with Christ.

Memorize Scripture so as to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. The tongue only moves at the command of the mind. The mind filled with Christ and the Bible will not allow the tongue to speak evilly of another.

Pray that God will teach you to control the tongue and make you sensitive to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Only God can convict you of an evil tongue.

Before you say something evil about another person, consider the damage that might be done to that person. You might be guilty of ruining another person's reputation and that would be on your conscience for the rest of your life.

Bite your tongue if you are tempted to say something that is wrong. A wise man bites his tongue until it bleeds whenever he is stirred.

Try to remember that people who gossip are basically insecure people who may have some serious psychological problems. They are insecure because they do not have enough positive things filling their minds; therefore, their minds are filled with negative things and they are critical people who thrive on the evil side of life.

Be sure you are getting the proper amount of physical rest. We often say things we do not mean when we are tired. More harsh things are said between a husband and wife when one or both are physically worn out. Parents are much more ill-tempered with their children when they are tired.

As a Christian, learn to be obedient to God's commands concerning the tongue.

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Eph. 4:29).

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Eph. 5:3-5).

Train your tongue to say good things or do not say anything at all. *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." (Col. 4:6).*

Do not fight back when another person says something evil about you. Two wrongs never make a right. The Lord will take care of the gossiper. You must learn to rest back in the promise of God who said, *"Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*