

## Moral Issues

### *Taming the Tongue*

God's Word is candid about the priority Christians should place on controlling their tongues. James tells Christians their "religious is useless" if one "does not bridle his tongue" (James 1:26). Jesus said, "...by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). Thus, using your tongue wisely is more than good advice it is an issue directly attached to your salvation.

Unfortunately, many think very little about how they use their tongues. Yet, the Bible details several ways we can misuse our mouth.

**Lying.** John declares "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). Paul demanded of the church at Ephesus, "...put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, 'let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor'" (Ephesians 4:24-25). Many try to justify lying if the situation is right. However, the New Testament offers no such loophole. The severity of lying is seen as Jesus calls Satan "the father" of liars (John 8:44-45).

**Cursing.** The Old Testament law demanded death to a child who cursed his father or mother (Exodus 21:17). The meaning of "curse" as it is used in the New Testament means "'to curse, doom, imprecate evil upon" (Thayer). Since we are all made in God's image we should never speak words which devalue

another human being. James writes of the inconsistency of pretending to praise God and curse His creation. He says, "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). While some may curse and demean us with four-letter or insulting words, we are to do the opposite for others. Jesus says, "...love your enemies, bless those who curse you..." (Matthew 5:44).

**Taking the Lord's name in vain.** Our culture is too flippant about the way they use the name of God. We swear by God's name. We holler out his name as an expletive. One of Moses' "Ten Commandments" was "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Simply put, if you are going to call out God's name it had better be in prayer or in teaching someone His Word. Jesus repeats the heart of this commandment in Matthew 5:33.

**Gossip.** In the Old Testament, one of the more common words used to describe the gossip is the word "talebearer" (Leviticus 19:16). Paul rebuked the women who were idle "gossips" (1 Timothy 5:13). Further, those who spent their time as "whisperers" or "backbiters" were condemned by the apostle Paul (Romans 1:29-30). Too often, we try to divi-

sively ruin reputations and cause trouble by speaking of others in a negative light. God expects our speech to "impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29-31).



**Slander.** While gossip may be true stories with negative implications, slander includes false accusations (Titus 2:3). Just one false accusation can create a whirlwind of trouble. Ultimately, the one who slants the truth is despised by God (Proverbs 6:16-19).

**Coarse Jestings.** The Bible even covers the "dirty joke." We live in an age where it is popular to be crude. Very few comedians can go through an entire act without sexual innuendo, toilet humor, stories of drunken revelry or racist remarks. Paul writes, "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but giving of thanks" (Ephesians 5:3-4).

Those who try to teach the gospel will always be judged by a higher standard (James 3:1). Be careful of your language. The failure to speak with dignity not only reveals a lack of class, it can ruin our influence with others.

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