

The Ten Basic Steps: Step #6: The Christian and Obedience

Lesson 5-Taming the Tongue

Objective: To obey God in what we say.

Read: Romans 9 & 10

Memorize: James 3:2

1. Effects of the Tongue
2. Sins of the Tongue
3. Significance of the Tongue
4. Life Application

We've all met people with a sharp, critical tongue. Picture this scene. A couple from your Bible study group are having problems, and they have chosen to confide in you.

The man is big, a real outdoorsman, and works hard on a construction job. The wife is petite and frail. But she is as skilled with her tongue as David was with his slingshot against Goliath.

You're not with them long until the man bristles at his wife's verbal jabs.

"I just can't stand it when Karen puts me down in such a sarcastic way!" he complains.

"Oh, great big Mac," she digs, "can't take care of himself!"

Mac purses his lips and shakes his head. "I don't think I can take this much longer. I love my wife, but she's killing me with her tongue!"

Often the hostility in our hearts reveals itself through our words and actions. The word "tongue" is mentioned ninety-three times in the Bible, often referring to its destructive power:

The lash of the tongue (Job 5:21).

Your sin prompts your mouth; you adopt the tongue of the crafty (Job 15:5).

Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue (Job 20:12).

A deceitful tongue crushes the spirit (Proverbs 15:4).

Their tongue is a deadly arrow (Jeremiah 9:8).

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell (James 3:6).

No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:8).

Poisonous Words

James goes on to say, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:9,10).

Few things are more self-contaminating than poisoned words that spring from the depths of a bitter heart.

If we are to please God and maintain a testimony that brings glory to our Lord, we must learn to control what we say. James says, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (James 1:26). How often through an unkind word have we borne unfaithful witness to God's love and forgiveness!

A Test of Love

A test of our love for God comes in the manner of our speech. Can we say with the psalmist, "His praise was on my tongue" (Psalm 66:17), "My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long" (Psalm 71:24), or "May my tongue sing of your word" (Psalm 119:172)?

Will we follow the wisdom of Solomon who said, "The tongue of the wise brings healing" (Proverbs 12:18) and "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life" (Proverbs 15:4)?

And can we say with Samuel, "His word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2)?

The words of Peter hold good advice for us today: "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech" (1 Peter 3:10).

This takes self-control.

Key to Self-Control

Self-control is vital to a fruitful Christian life. After counseling with thousands of people through the years, I am convinced that an undisciplined Christian cannot live a victorious, abundant life or be an effective witness.

The key to self-control is being filled with the Holy Spirit. The reason most of us fail in self-control is that we try to do it in our own strength. You and I know from experience that, apart from God, self-discipline in our tongue is impossible. But "when the Holy Spirit controls our lives he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace,...self-control" (Galatians 5:22, TLB).

We must develop and exercise self-control through daily dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of His Holy Spirit. I encourage you to study this lesson carefully. Prayerfully apply the principles you will learn to your everyday life, and invite the Holy Spirit to take control of your tongue that you may bring blessing to those around you and be a fruitful witness.

Effects of the Tongue

- Read James 3:1-13. Though we may study our Bibles faithfully, attend Christian meetings regularly, and even talk to our friends about Christ, one thing marks us as really mature Christians. What is it?
- When you control your tongue, what else will happen (verse 2)?
- James compares a wicked tongue to an incorrectly handled steering mechanism on a ship. What would happen if the ship were an oil tanker in rocky water? How does this relate to the damage of "spilled" words?
- What does it take to start a forest fire in a drought? What does it take to put out a forest fire? What damage can be caused by just a few words of gossip that you pass on?
- Give an example from your own life in which you suffered from the "fire" of someone's destructive words. How did you respond? How would you respond today? Why?

Sins of the Tongue

- Name the sins of the tongue that are condemned in the following references in Proverbs 6:16-19; 11:13; 15:1; 17:9; 27:2. Give examples of how you may have been hurt by or how you may have offended another in each of these areas.
- Read Ephesians 4:29.
How does this apply to profanity, obscene language, off-color jokes, and so on. What else can you name that could be included here? What does this verse say we should do instead?
- What is the real source of an evil tongue? How does this relate to attitude?
- What is the only solution to taming the tongue for the believer? (Galatians 5:16)

Significance of the Tongue

- Read Matthew 12:33-37. For what shall we give an account to God?
- What illustration does Christ use to explain good and bad words, and how does He apply it?
- What is the real source of an evil tongue? How does this relate to attitude?
- What is the only solution to taming the tongue for the believer? (Galatians 5:16)

Life Application

- How will you obey the instructions indicated in James 1:19 in your own life?
- How about James 1:26?
- Think about the attitudes expressed through your words in the past week. Ask yourself these questions, and answer them honestly.
- What attitude do I need to confess and make right with God? To whom do I need to go and ask forgiveness because he or she has been affected by my words?

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