



The Power of the Tongue: James 3:1-12

Daniel H. King, Sr.

According to James there is nothing more powerful in the human social experience than the tongue. The rhetorical skills of human beings have often been used for the betterment of mankind, to encourage and embolden in times of national tragedy, to comfort and console when hearts are breaking, to motivate great acts of gallantry when the mind is quaking and the knees shaking. But the tongue has also frequently been a tool of satanic evil, fixated upon death and destruction, and contributing to the pain and suffering of the human race.



breaks the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword; but not so many as have fallen by the tongue.” A Latin proverb says, “The tongue is a wild beast; once let it loose, it is difficult to chain.” Sayings in the English language abound: “Let not your tongue cut your throat”; “A slip of the foot may be soon recovered; but that of the tongue, perhaps never”; “A sharp tongue is the only edge tool that grows keener with constant use” (Washington Irving); “The first virtue, son, if thou wilt learn, is to restrain and keep well thy tongue” (Chaucer).

The scorpion carries his poison in his tail; the liar, slanderer, false accuser, tail-bearer, and gossip carry theirs in their tongues. At the last, theirs can be far more destructive and long lasting. The wise man in the Old Testament counseled, “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Ps. 34:13).

The human family has long understood the power of this tiny member and has therefore often meditated upon its interesting contradictions. Ecclesiasticus (18:17) says, “The stroke of the tongue

Without the tongue a mother could not sing to her newborn, or teach it the first rudimentary sounds of this world. Without it there would be no oral instruction in the word of God, no words of comfort for the grieving child, no pleasant conversation among friends or brethren, no happy congratulations, and no final goodbyes. Yet, the tongue is both a blessing and a curse. This section of the book of James brings these truths out plainly. In James 1:18 and 26 this author had indicated the power of the spoken word in that it is involved in the
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Lying, Bearing False Witness, and False Swearing

Bobby Witherington

By simply taking a concordance and running the references, one becomes amazed at the number of warnings contained in the Bible with regards to the misuse of the tongue. Many are the passages which speak of the evils of “a lying tongue” and a “flattering mouth” (Prov. 26:28), whispering (Prov. 16:28), “corrupt speech” (Eph. 4:29), and “evil speaking” (Eph. 4:31), backbiting (Rom. 1:30), “blasphemy” and “filthy language” (Col. 3:8), “foolish talking” and “coarse jesting” (Eph. 5:4), tale bearing (Lev. 19:16), slander (1 Tim. 3:11), gossips (1 Tim. 5:13), murmuring or complaining (1 Cor. 10:10), etc. In view of the many ways whereby a person can sin with the tongue, one should not be surprised to note that the Holy Spirit described the tongue as “a world of iniquity,” and “an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas. 3:6, 8). Perhaps that is why one wit made the observation that “a dog has many friends because the wag is in his tail, and not in his tongue.”

Yes, there are many ways whereby one can sin with the tongue. In this article we shall consider three such ways; namely: lying, bearing false witness, and false swearing.

LYING

Lying, when used as a noun, is defined as “the act of telling a lie; the habit of telling lies” (*World Book Dictionary*). A lie is defined as “something that is not true, said to deceive; false statement known to be false by the person who makes it” (*Ibid.*). A liar is “a person who tells lies” (*Ibid.*). Charitably speaking, it is appropriate to make a distinction between innocently passing on misinformation and actual lying. While one should be careful to check on the authenticity of the information he shares with others, it should be noted that a lie is both something that is not true and which is said with the intent to deceive. Possessing and sharing misinformation may primarily reflect a lack of understanding, whereas the act of making a statement which a person knows to be false becomes a *character* issue!

Unless he repents and bears “fruit worthy of repentance” (Matt. 3:8), the Bible offers no hope for a liar! Scripture could not be plainer than Revelation 21:8 wherein we read that “all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Whereas it is the tendency of man to color-code lies, calling them “white” lies and “black” lies, the Bible makes no such distinction.

see “Lying” on p. 7

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Slander

Mark Mayberry

Webster defines “slander” as “the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another’s reputation.” Nelson’s *New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says it refers to “evil, malicious talk (that is) intended to damage or destroy another person” (Ps. 31:13; 50:20; Ezek. 22:9).

Numerous Hebrew and Greek words are translated “slander.” In the New Testament, three word families are of particular significance.

The verb *blasph mei*, which occurs thirty-four times, means “to slander, hence to speak lightly or profanely of sacred things” (Thomas 987). BDAG say it means “to speak in a disrespectful way that demeans, denigrates, maligns.” The noun *blasph mia*, occurring eighteen times, refers to “slander” (Thomas 988) or “speech that denigrates or defames, reviling, denigration, disrespect, slander” (BDAG). The adjective *blasph mos*, which occurs four times, communicates the same ideas.

The noun *diabolos* identifies one who is “slandorous” or is guilty of “accusing falsely” (Thomas 1228). BDAG say it “(1) pertains to engagement in slander, slanderous; (2) substantively (it refers to) one who engages in slander, in our literature as title of the principal transcendent evil being the adversary/devil.” This word occurs thirty-seven times, usually with reference to the devil, but occasionally identifying those who are “malicious gossips” (1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 2:3).

The verb *katalalei*, which occurs five times, means “to speak evil of” (Thomas 2635) or “speak ill of, speak degradingly of, speak evil of, defame, slander” (BDAG). The noun *katalalia*, occurring twice, signifies “evil-speaking” (Thomas 2636). It refers to “the act of speaking ill of another, evil speech, slander, defamation, detraction” (BDAG). Again, the adjective *katalalos*, which occurs once, conveys the same idea.

CONDEMNED

Slander was generally prohibited by the ninth commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16; cf. Deut. 5:20). Slander was specifically condemned in Leviticus 19:16, which says, “You shall not go about as a *slanderer* among your people.”

In describing the citizen of Zion, the Psalmist said, “He does not *slander* with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend” (Ps. 15:3). Standing against corrupt thought and speech, he says,

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“A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will know no evil. Whoever secretly *slanders* his neighbor, him I will destroy (i.e., cut off, put to silence)” (Ps. 101:4-5). Praying for protection against the wicked, David says, “May a *slanderer* not be established in the earth” (Ps. 140:11).

Slander is a characteristic of fallen humanity: “Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, *slanderers*, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful” (Rom. 1:29-31). Paul declares that those who engage in such behavior are “worthy of death” (Rom. 1:32).

Such shameful behavior may also creep into the church. The apostle feared the Corinthian congregation would be torn asunder by “strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, *slanders*, gossip, arrogance, disturbances” (2 Cor. 12:20).

Yet, despite its prevalence, slander is both immoral and imprudent: “He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads *slander* is a fool” (Prov. 10:18).

DESCRIBED

Sinful speech is degenerative, proceeding from bad to worse. Of the wicked, God says, “You let your mouth loose in evil and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you *slander* your own mother’s son” (Ps. 50:19-20).

Slander is dishonest. “He who goes about as a *slanderer* reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip” (Prov. 20:19). It is a manifestation of covenant-breaking.

Slander is deceitful. In Galatians 3:1, Paul said, “You foolish Galatians, who has *bewitched* you?” The Greek word *baskainō*, which occurs only here in the NT, means “to slander, hence by ext. to bewitch” (Thomas 940). In other words, false accusations are often quite believable.

Slander is divisive. “A perverse man spreads strife, and a *slanderer* separates intimate friends” (Prov. 16:28). Brethren become alienated. Friendships and family are torn asunder by such talk.

Slander is destructive. Describing the instruments of churlish men, Isaiah says, “He devises wicked schemes to destroy the afflicted with *slander*, even though the needy one speaks what is right” (Isa. 32:7). Ezekiel echoes the same theme: “*Slanderous* men have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood” (Ezek. 22:9).

Participation in such not only harms others — it also destroys one’s credibility. In his lament over Zion, Jer-

emiah says, “They bend their tongue like their bow; Lies and not truth prevail in the land” Caution is thus required: “Let everyone be on guard against his neighbor, and do not trust any brother; because every brother deals craftily, and every neighbor goes about as a *slanderer*” (Jer. 9:3-4). In other words, trust is destroyed.

EXAMPLES

The greatest slanderer of all is the Devil and Satan, the adversary and accuser of God’s people (Job 1:9-11; Zech. 3:1-2; Rev. 12:9-10). Sadly, many adopt the tactics of Satan: Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44).

Ziba, a servant of the house of Saul (2 Sam. 9:2), acted treacherously toward Mephibosheth, whom he slanderously misrepresented to King David (2 Sam. 9:2; 16:3; 19:27).

In Psalm 31, David cries out in distress (v. 9), saying, “I have heard the *slander* of many, terror is on every side; while they took counsel together against me, they schemed to take away my life (v. 13). Again, in Psalm 35:15, he says, “They *slandered* me without ceasing.”

Some slanderously reported and claimed that Paul said, “Let us do evil that good may come” (Rom. 3:8). He was also misrepresented on the subject of meats: “If I partake with thankfulness, why am I *slandered* concerning that for which I give thanks?” (1 Cor. 10:30).

As previously noted, sinful men are given to slander, and other sins of the tongue (Rom. 1:29-30). Through obedience to the gospel, sinners die to the old man of sin, are buried with Christ in the watery grave of baptism, and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). This dramatically affects one’s speech, thought, and action. Believers no longer live to satisfy the lusts of the flesh, but seek to do the will of God.

Unfortunately, former sinful companions may not appreciate the change: “They are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they *malign* (blasphōmē) you” (1 Pet. 4:4). What is the required response? We should sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that is in us, yet with gentleness and reverence; keeping a good conscience so that in the thing in which we are *slandered*, those who revile our good behavior in Christ will be put to shame” (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

Those who advance doctrines that differ from the divine standard create a divisive environment “out of which arise envy, strife, *abusive language* (blasphōmia), evil suspicions” (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

Slander is a marked characteristic of the false teachers described in 2 Peter 2 and Jude. Secretly introducing destructive heresies, they deny the Lord who bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. Sadly, many will follow their sensual path, and because of them “the way of the truth will be *maligned* (blasphŭmeĭ)” (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

Note the repeated use of *blasphŭmeĭ*, etc. in verses 10-12: “and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they *revile* (blasphŭmeĭ) angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a *reviling* (blasphŭmos) judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, *reviling* (blasphŭmeō) where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed” (2 Pet. 2:10-12). The parallel passage in Jude 8-10 has the same emphasis.

SOLUTION

First of all, we must recognize that slander comes from within. Jesus said, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, *slander*, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.” (Mark 7:20-23; see also Matt. 15:19-20). Let us, therefore, heed the admonition of Solomon, who said, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23, KJV).

Paul said the sin of slander must be put away/laid aside: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Eph. 4:31). Again, “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, *slander*, and abusive speech from your mouth” (Col. 3:8). Peter echoed the same theme: “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all *slander*, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Pet. 2:1-2).

However, a qualification is in order. Paul said, “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to *malign* (blasphŭmeĭ, i.e., to slander) no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men” (Tit. 3:1-2). Nevertheless, this charge does not disallow the duty of exposing false teachers (Tit. 1:10-16). Paul identified the proponents of error, and exposed their damnable heresy (1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 4:14-15; etc.).

When questions arise about someone’s teaching or

practice, open and honest investigation is demanded (Deut. 13:12-15; Ezra 10:10-17; 1 Tim. 5:19-21). The house of Chloe was not guilty of gossip or slander in reporting the division at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11-12). Paul was not aiding or abetting gossip or slander in receiving such reports (see also 1 Cor. 5:1; 11:17-18).

Faithful Christians are often subjected to slander. Nevertheless, maintaining one’s integrity is key to overcoming mistreatment and misrepresentation. Peter said, “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they *slander* you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12). When Paul was confronted with such sinful tactics, he did not respond in kind: “when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are *slandered*, we try to conciliate” (1 Cor. 4:12-13).

Sources

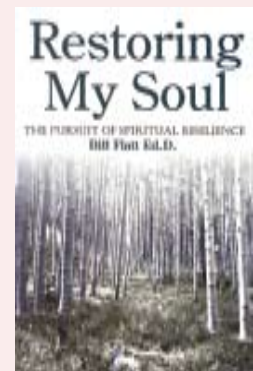
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Cursing

Joe R. Price

Controlling the tongue requires constant surveillance of the heart: “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you” (Prov. 4:23-24).

The wise man Agur wrote, “There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness. There is a generation — oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up” (Prov. 30:11-13; see Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). We live in the midst of such a generation. The filth that flows from the mouths of youth and aged, male and female, floods our land. Profanity is commonplace in our schools, on the job, in the marketplace and in the media. Its influence rots any society where the hearts of the citizenry are given over to selfish and prideful aspirations. Cursing is one example of such profanity.

CURSING IS SIN

Where I grew up in Texas it is called “cussing” (or more precisely, “cussin”). Anyway you pronounce it, cursing is sin. God’s word describes the wicked man as one whose “mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity” (Ps. 10:7). The apostle Paul used this same verse to help describe the sinfulness of “both Jews and Greeks” (Rom. 3:9, 14).

We commonly think of profanity and vulgarity when “cursing” is discussed. The word translated “curse” in the New Testament signifies “to pray against, to wish evil against a person or thing; hence to curse” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*

141). To curse, therefore, is to invoke or call down evil upon a person; it is the denunciation of one’s fellow man. Profanity may be an element of cursing, but not necessarily so. Still, most of the cursing that occurs today is laced with profanity and vulgarity. All “filthy language” must be eliminated from our mouths, which includes cursing, profanity, and vulgarity, as well as using euphemisms in the place of curse words (Col. 3:8). (One person called such euphemisms “Christian Cursing” — a curious and correct description. These, too, must be eliminated from our speech.)

CURSING WORDS ARE IDLE WORDS

Jesus said, “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). Idle words include those spoken rashly, hastily, lightly, and angrily. Idle words are barren of moral goodness and useful fruit. They tear down kindness, friendship, brotherly love, and everything that is good and decent among men in the sight of God (Eph. 4:29-32). Curse words are *worthless* words that condemn the user. The user of them is *powerless* to execute the threatened curse. Curse words are *godless* words that promote selfishness. Using such idle words will cause one to be condemned on Judgment Day.

CURSING EXPRESSES HATE

The verbal denunciations of curs-

ing proceed from a heart that detests its object. Thus, to curse another is the antithesis is love. Goliath exemplified the hatefulness of cursing when he said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods (1 Sam. 17:43). Peter, when denying knowledge of Jesus, “began to curse and swear” (Matt. 26:74). Little wonder that this tenderhearted disciple “wept bitterly” when he realized his sin against the Savior (Matt. 26:75).

Jesus teaches to “bless those who curse you,” and shows us by his example how such is accomplished (Matt. 5:44; Rom. 12:14). When Jesus was reviled, he “did not revile in return” (1 Pet. 2:23). In like manner, his disciples are to “not return reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing” (1 Pet. 3:9).

Cursing is the opposite of blessing (see Prov. 30:11 above). With the tongue “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” (Jas. 3:9-10). Whereas to bless a person expresses one’s desire that he receive happy and joyful things, to curse a person articulates one’s desire that dread, calamity, and sorrow is heaped upon him. To curse a person is not loving one’s neighbor as oneself or treating others as we wish to be treated (Mark 12:31; Luke 6:31).

CURSING WORDS ARE PRIDEFUL WORDS

Cursing is not only hateful, it is full of pride and conceit: “For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, Let them even be taken in their pride, And for the cursing and lying which they speak” (Ps. 59:12). As one’s mouth distributes its disdainful curses it displays a heart that is elevated above others. The person who curses his neighbor thinks too highly of himself (Rom. 12:16). As he curses with his tongue, he exposes

his foolish pride that supposes he has the position, power, and prerogative to denounce another person. Pride is on display whenever cursing occurs. By cursing another person, one implies himself to be superior to that person. The cursing person is an arrogant person.

Instead of calling down reproaches and denunciations upon others, we must “let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” and put away all evil speaking with malice (Eph. 4:29, 31). We grieve the Spirit of God when our words curse and destroy others (Eph. 4:30).

CURSING WORDS ARE IRREVERENT WORDS

Even some people who allow cursing to flow from their mouths understand that it is not respectful toward others. On several occasions I recall people who generally use profane language changing their speech around a woman or “the preacher.” We should realize that we are always in the presence of Almighty God. By cursing men we show a lack reverence for God, who created and sustains all men (Jas. 3:9).

To curse man shows a lack of love for man and a lack of love and respect for God. The one who loves God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength does not curse God or man (Mark 12:30).

Incredibly, many people openly curse God. When a man blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed in the camp of Israel he was stoned to death. God said,

Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: “Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the

name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death” (Lev. 24:14-16).

The fact that we do not live under the Law of Moses and therefore do not stone people is no comfort to the person who takes the name of the Lord in vain (Exod. 20:7). The Lord did not hold guiltless the person who took his name in vain under the first covenant, and neither will one escape punishment today who profanes the name of the holy God (Heb. 2:1-2; Matt. 12:37).

CURSING WORDS CONSUME AND DESTROY

When cursing is the habitual course of one’s speech, its dangerous nature is obscured. It is spoken so freely by some that they do not even realize what is coming out of their mouth! For them, their cursing language is as natural as the clothes they wear and the water they drink. Note however, that divine judgment will certainly come upon the person who curses his neighbor with his tongue:

As he loved cursing, so let it come to him; As he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, So let it enter his body like water, And like oil into his bones. Let it be to him like the garment which covers him, And for a belt with which he girds himself continually. Let this be the LORD’s reward to my accusers, And to those who speak evil against my person (Ps. 109:17-20).

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. . . . There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (Jas. 4:11-12).

Rest assured that cursing places

one under divine judgment and righteous condemnation.

SILENCE CURSING LIPS

One can repent of the sin of cursing and restore purity to his speech. Controlling the tongue requires constant surveillance of the heart: “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you” (Prov. 4:23-24). Since our words come from our heart, we must put God’s word deeply into our hearts so that the fruit of our lips will praise God instead of cursing both God and man (Heb. 13:15; Jas. 1:21; 3:9-10).

The Holy Spirit teaches us how to restore or maintain pure speech in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.” By purging our minds of evil thoughts and putting virtuous thoughts in their place we can guard our hearts and our tongues against the sin of cursing.

There are practical things that we can do to overcome and resist cursing, including the following:

1. Develop love for others. Where there is love there will not be the cursing of God or man (1 Cor. 13:4-7). The person who curses others does not love them.

2. Be humble before God and man (Jas. 4:6-10). Humble hearts produce words that are “fitly spoken,” not harsh, hateful, and haughty words that denounce and detest (Prov. 25:11).

3. Pray for God’s help. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer” (Ps. 19:14).

4. Hold God in reverence. When God is held in rever-

ence in a person’s heart his words will reflect honor for God and for man: “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” (1 Pet. 2:17). Curse words do not come out of a mouth whose heart is given to reverent living.

5. Be kind and forgiving. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). Merciful hearts shun cursing, knowing that “with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:37-38).

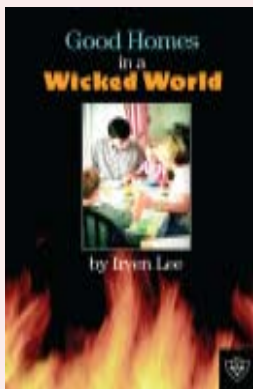
6. Increase your personal faith. When we “walk by faith” our words are seasoned with the salt of graciousness, not laced with poison of profanity (2 Cor. 5:7; Col. 4:6; Matt. 12:33-37).

CONCLUSION

We must gain and observe the wisdom related by Solomon when he said, “A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul” (Prov. 18:7). Although the intent of “cussin’ out” a person is to denounce and destroy them, the result is the destruction of the person doing the cussin’. It is foolish, idle talk that damns the soul (Matt. 12:36-37).

“The wicked is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous will come through trouble” (Prov. 12:13). Therefore, “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

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Railing and Clamor

Kevin Maxey

When was the last time that you used “railing” and “clamor” in a sentence? Probably rarely, if ever. These are the kind of terms many of us read in our Bibles and immediately wonder, “What does that mean?” As we define “railing” and “clamor,” you will see that just because we don’t use these particular words in everyday conversation, they are certainly being practiced in full force today.

WHAT EXACTLY IS RAILING?

One of the best ways to understand a word is to look at how the Holy Spirit uses it in a biblical context. One such passage is 1 Peter 3:8-10, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: *not rendering* evil for evil, or *railing for railing*: *but contrariwise blessing*; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile” (KJV, emphasis mine). In place of railing, other translations use words such as reviling, insult, tongue lashing, berating, abusive language, ridicule, and sharp tongued sarcasm. The *Contemporary English Version* puts verse 9 this way, “Don’t be hateful and insult people just because they are hateful and insult you. Instead, treat everyone with kindness. You are God’s chosen ones, and he will bless you.” The *Easy to Read Version* reads, “Don’t say something bad to a person to pay him back for saying something bad to you.”

Let’s investigate some of the Greek and Hebrew words that are translated as “railing” in our Bibles. First there is the Greek word *loidoria*, which Zodhiates defines as “to revile, a railing, reproach.” Strong defines it as “slander or vituperation, railing, reproach.” Another Greek word is *oneidezō* which means, “to defame . . . chide, taunt, cast in teeth” (Strong). Zodhiates adds, “reproach, to defame, disparage. . . . Generally it means to rail at, revile, assail with abusive words . . . to upbraid, chide.” In the Hebrew, *hōarap*, “means to taunt or agitate someone about something” (Zodhiates, see 2 Chron. 32:17; Ps. 119:42). And another Hebrew word, ‘שׁ, means “to scorn, to insult”

(Zodhiates, see 1 Sam. 25:14). So we gather from these definitions that a person is guilty of railing when they insult someone with hateful words.

WHAT IS CLAMOR?

Again the context surrounding the use of this word speaks volumes about its meaning. “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, *clamor*, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32). Various translations use the following words in place of clamor: angry shouts of dissatisfaction, loud quarrelling, loud insulting language, shouting, insults. The Greek word used here is *krauge*, which means “an outcry in notification, tumult or grief, clamor, crying.” Zodhiates explains this word can be used to refer to “an outcry . . . public . . . of tumult or controversy.” While railing would refer to all kinds of insulting speech, clamor is connected with insulting speech that is particularly both loud and public.

This is a serious problem! While none of us purposefully sets out to be railers and clamorers, we find that all of us have witnessed, been recipients of, and most likely participated in this type of abusive verbal behavior. Hateful speech is a deadly sin that will not only destroy your relationships in your neighborhood, in your home, and in the church, it will destroy your soul.

1. Man rails against his fellowman. This is so because we all have a tongue, and James says we will always have trouble taming this unruly member (Jas. 3:8). You can be a witness to railing and clamor almost every day. You’ve seen it at work when a business deal goes awry, at the service desk of a store when an angry customer files a complaint, on your street when a cranky next door neighbor gets upset, at your child’s ball game when a temperamental parent doesn’t like a referee’s call, and on the daytime talk shows when foolish people clamor and rail in front of millions of viewers. How do you react in such difficult circumstances? Will you cast your lot in with the typical reviler or will your words be seasoned with salt and grace

(Col. 4:6; Eph. 4:29)?

2. The ungodly will rail against the godly. When you live right and proclaim the light of truth in a dark world, the world will hate you. “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:20). When you disapprove of the sins of fornication, adultery, and homosexuality the world will revile you. When you speak against the sins of drunkenness, profanity, worldliness, and immodesty people will rail. Enemies of the Lord anxiously await opportunities to rail against his children (1 Tim. 5:14). Goliath insulted young faith-filled David (1 Sam. 17:42-45,10); Sennacherib, king of Assyria, taunted Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:17); and the Jews and Romans reviled Christ (1 Pet. 2:23). Christ warned us that the world will revile you just as it reviled him (John 15:18). If you are living right you need to understand and be prepared for the fact that ungodly people will attack you verbally.

3. Some family members will rail against other family members. Perhaps the place where railing is most practiced is behind the closed doors of the home. Do you think you can leave your Christian “character” at the church building or discard it at the front door when you walk into your home? When you take off your coat and shoes, do you think it is okay to take off your godly adornment as well? Children, do you insult your parents with back-talk and statements like, “I hate you!” Fathers, do you berate and curse your children? Do you frequently call them fools and stupid idiots (Matt. 5:22), provoking them to wrath (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21)? Wives, are you so frustrated and bitter with your husband that you feel you have nothing left to do but give your husband a hateful verbal lashing in order to get his attention (Prov. 21:19)? Do these family scenarios sound too familiar in your home? Remember that God’s command for you to love others most certainly applies to your family relationships. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 and see if you are practicing these specific qualities of love in your family.

4. Some Christians will rail against other Christians. The one area of life where absolutely no evil speech should be present is in the church. But sadly we often find times when Christians taunt, insult, lash out and attack other Christians. You’ve seen it maybe in a business meeting when brethren get heated about some controversy. You’ve heard about it when one brother starts yelling at another brother in the foyer of the church building after services. You probably know of brethren who do not like what the preacher or elders are saying and they cry out in reproach and storm out of the building. Some preachers even allow sinful attitudes to overtake them in the pulpit (Phil. 1:15-16). Other brethren like to accentuate their bitter verbal arrows by slamming phones and doors on others. Such are the sins of clamor. While some participate in this publicly

many others cowardly do their railing in private from house to house, phone to phone, or computer to computer. God condemns those who are, “wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not” (1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:11). God forbid that any of God’s children would participate in such evil.

HOW TO REACT TO RAILING AND CLAMOR

What are you to do when you are the recipient of someone’s malicious railing and clamor?

1. Feel sorry for the railer. When evil words have been spoken towards us, we usually feel sorry for ourselves. “What is wrong with me? Why is this person so upset? I can’t believe he hurt my feelings!” Do you mope, whine, cry to others, and feel sorry for yourself? God instructs you not to feel sorry for yourself, but to feel sorry for the person who would stoop to the disgraceful level of railing and clamor. It’s like a bully on the playground who picks on someone else. How truly tragic it is that a person is so lacking in self esteem that he feels he needs to harm someone else in order to elevate himself. In the context of 1 Peter 3:8-9 remember what God says to the person who has been railed against, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing.” The Greek word for “pitiful” here means, “full of pity and compassion for the ills of others” (Zodhiates). Show pity to others, even to those who speak evil of you. This is not saying you should overlook their sin, but look past your personal pain and look at the eternal picture. Look at the sad condition of the railing soul. They are in sin, and their soul is in jeopardy. Think about how sad their lot in life must be that they have to stoop to the level of hate-filled speech to make themselves look good. Would you want to trade places with them? Certainly not.

2. Expect it to happen. Our text in 1 Peter 3:9 continues — “knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.” Don’t be surprised when you are the victim of someone’s evil words. Jesus says you were called to endure such suffering. A similar statement is made in chapter 2 of the same book, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Part of living the life of a Christian means that we will have to endure suffering and even verbal ridicule. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). The first few times it happens, some Christians are ready to quit the Lord. Don’t quit. Prepare yourself now. It has happened in the past and it will happen in the future. Be prepared and overcome.

3. Take it as a compliment. Before we continue, I need

to clarify one thing. Be careful not to falsely characterize the rebuke of a wise man as railing and evil speech. Some hear a lesson from a preacher that exposes sin and error and they immediately conclude that the preacher is practicing hateful speech. Exposing error is not sinful speech! God calls us to do this very thing, not to be hateful, but to convict sinners and save souls as we speak the truth in love (2 Tim. 4:2-5; Eph. 4:15; Tit. 1:10-16). If there is truth to the corrective words of a sincere preacher or loving brother then heed it and repent. Don't dismiss it by falsely calling it "hateful speech."

However, if there is no truth to the words of your enemy then take his railing as a compliment! This may sound odd at first, but answer this question, "Why is this person using abusive speech toward you? Why is he trying so desperately to run you down?" You have something he is either jealous of, or he feels convicted by your godly lifestyle, and he is trying to justify himself. When you are the subject of railing take heart because, in most cases, it means you are living right and courageously shining the light of God in dark places. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12). Jesus says rejoice when people treat you this way! It means you are doing something right! In fact, Jesus says something is spiritually wrong with you if no one ever speaks evil of you. "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). Realize that when you are living godly and are the subject of verbal insults you are in good company "for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12).

4. Don't stoop to their level. God specifically says that when you are railed against don't rail in return. "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing" (1 Pet. 3:9; Rom. 12:17-19). The first thing we often want to do when we are verbally attacked is to launch our own verbal counter attack. If someone is already so agitated with you that he is clamoring against you, what makes you think that verbally insulting him is the best response? It is like pouring gasoline on a fire! "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). Don't let those who misuse their tongues cause you to misuse yours. Refuse to let a fool win by making you act like a fool. "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him" (Prov. 26:4).

Determine right now, that no matter what the circumstance, you will not participate in the sins of railing and clamor. Too often we think that, if we were mistreated badly enough, that justifies our evil response. "But you don't know what he or she did or said to me!" I do know what people said and did to Jesus, "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did

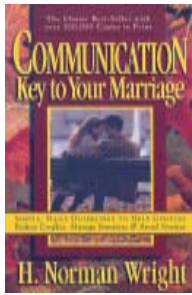
not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). Jesus more than any of us had a right to strike back, but he didn't. When you get upset with your neighbor, co-worker, spouse, child, parent, or brother in Christ, control your tongue and refuse to commit this horrible sin (Jas. 1:19-20).

5. Render a blessing to that person. God not only prohibits verbal retaliation, He commands that we seek blessing for the evil speaker. We continue with our text in 1 Peter 3:9 where God says don't respond to evil words with evil words, but respond to that person with a blessing — "not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing." Paul, who knew a thing or two about being the subject of hateful verbal attacks explains, "being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat" (1 Cor. 4:12-13). It may seem hard enough to hold our tongues, but now God wants us to render a blessing to our enemy? How is this possible? This doesn't mean that we are to approve of their sin, or that we reward their sin, but God says we are to act in such a way as to bless this person. Zodhiates explains this word "blessing" as invoking God to intervene his will upon this person's life for his good. This person's soul is in danger and you need to act in such a way as to bless this soul toward spiritual salvation. This will of course include correction but it will also include a genuine spirit of good will for that person's soul. "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:44-45). This love is not what some would describe as "warm fuzzy feelings" toward that person, but *agape* love, which is a mental decision to act in a way that is best for that person. Don't have an "I'll tell him off" attitude, but act in such a way as to help save the soul of your verbal accuser (Jas. 5:20).

6. Don't get discouraged. Many collapse in defeat when they have been struck by the malicious arrows of the railer. They desperately ask, "What is wrong? Why is this happening to me? Why is God allowing this?" Nothing is wrong. You shouldn't be discouraged, in fact, you should be encouraged because God says you are truly blessed. "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached (*if someone rails against you*, kdm) for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet. 4:12-14).

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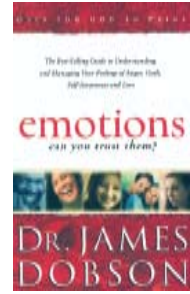
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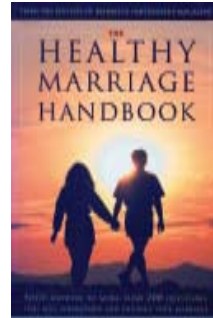
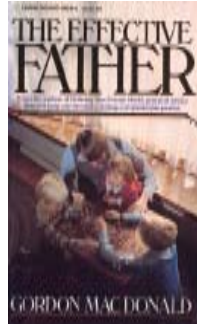


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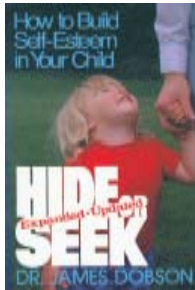
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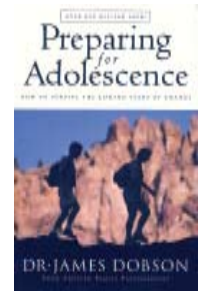
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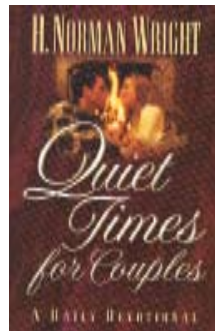


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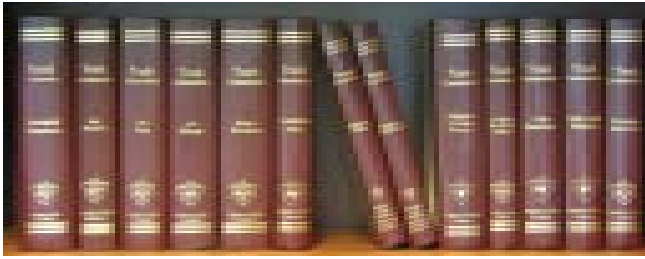
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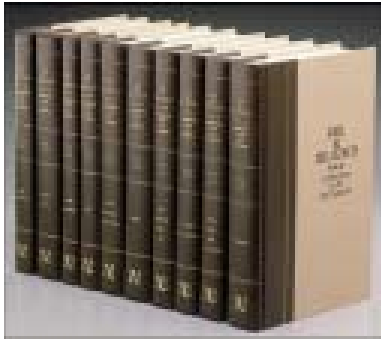
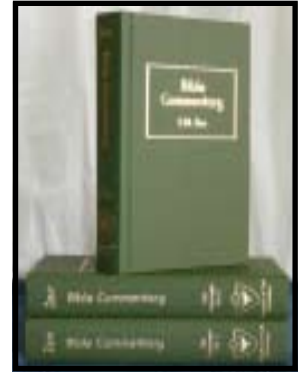
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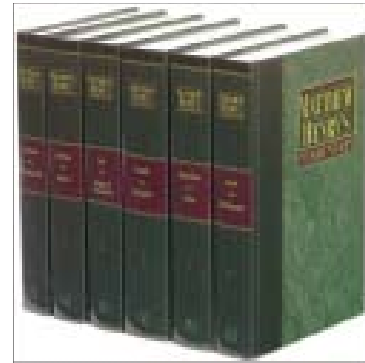
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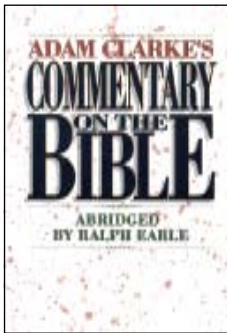
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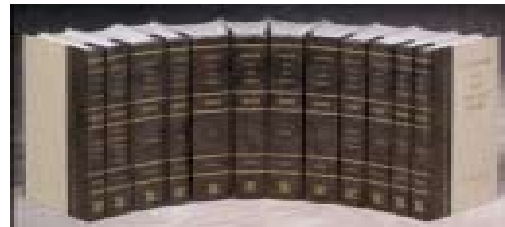
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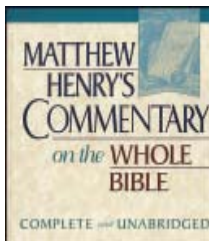
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Murmuring and Complaining

Steve Monts

“These are grumblers, complainers, walking about according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage” (Jude 16). Murmuring and complaining are recognized by many as wrong and sinful. The subject receives a hearty “Amen” when the preacher condemns it. But it is a sin people often see in others and rarely in themselves. When was the last time we sat down in the quiet of the room and did some serious self-examination? Many of us do not like to go to the doctor for a regular physical, but spiritually we must (2 Cor. 13:5). I fully believe, if God’s people would take time to meditate on their shortcomings, then murmuring and complaining would be found in that list. This is serious and should not be winked at, for it can cause great damage to the body of Christ.

Let me say at the outset that there is legitimate complaining. In Acts 6:1 a complaint arose due to the neglecting of the widow’s needs. This need ought to have been met and was God approved since seven men were appointed to this business. In the proper manner a complaint for a God-given duty to be carried out is legitimate. That is called standing for the truth. But more often than not, murmuring and complaining arrive on the scene due to some matter of judgment that is not going “*my way*” or a complaint *against* a matter of truth. It is this complaining that we have under discussion.

God has never desired for his people to be complainers, on the contrary they should be the happiest people in the world. We have all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3). We are a spiritual house unto the Lord of the universe (1 Pet. 2:5). We are forgiven of all our trespasses (Ps. 103:3). We are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). What more could we want? But still, despite all of these wonderful blessings, we often find the minutest things to

murmur and complain about. This ought not be so.

THE DEFINING OF THESE WORDS

There is not much difference between murmuring and complaining. To murmur is still complaining, but an “under the breath” complaint. This is where the word murmur comes from. It is an onomatopoeic word, meaning that the very pronunciation of the word suggests its meaning, like “moo” or “meow.” Webster defines murmuring as “to utter complaints in a low half-articulated voice; to feel or express dissatisfaction or discontent; to grumble” (*Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary*). To complain is defined as “To express feelings of pain, dissatisfaction

or resentment; to make a formal accusation or bring a formal charge” (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Thus we see in both words the idea of the expression of dissatisfaction. Often today we see both freely put into action. First, there is the murmur. It is like a jackal’s call to let others know the hunt is on; these people attract others like

them. Once the pack is formed and organized, the outright bold complaint comes. All those caught in the fray are quickly devoured by the vicious attack. We see it at our jobs; we see it at PTA meetings, and we see it at church. How sad indeed!

WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT MURMURING AND COMPLAINING?

In the Old Testament God often met the complaints of the people with a swift death sentence. In Numbers 11:1 the record says, “Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.” Again in Numbers 16:41ff it says, “On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained. . . . And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, get away from among this

congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. . . . Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred.” This obviously did not sit well with our Lord, and he put the complainer to death for his complaints. What boldness we have today to murmur and complain in much the same fashion! When something is not going our way, such as with the Israelites, we have the gall to complain against the One who knows best. You may think your complaints are only in the secrecy of your home but the God of Heaven hears it well. “. . . and you complained in your tents” (Deut. 1:27; Ps. 106:25). Let us stop all such murmuring!

In the New Testament God will meet the complainer with his complaints on the Day of Judgment. Physical death was often the penalty under the Old Testament in addition to spiritual death. Spiritual death is the penalty in this dispensation. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-14 God used the Jews as an example of how his people should not be. In verses 6 and 9 he says, “Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted . . . *nor complain*, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.” Friends, we must see how serious this is to God, for until we do we will always see our complaining as not as evil as adultery and drunkenness. This is a lie from the Devil. “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be *condemned*. Behold, the judge is standing at the door!” (Jas. 5:9).

THE REASONS AND OCCASIONS OF COMPLAINING

If we can recognize both when and why murmuring and complaining happen, it may help us avoid it. There are certain times when we all feel a murmur if not a complaint welling up inside of us. We need to learn to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (Jas. 1:19-20).

WHEN WE ARE NOT GRATEFUL

Often we complain when we cannot have a new house, car, dining room table, or towel set. Oh how sick this must make God. We are blessed to be living in the most prosperous nation, in the most prosperous generation this world has ever known. We have so much our forefathers did not. We have so much that foreigners do not, yet we often complain the most because we are not grateful for what we have. How often the poor are more thankful than we (Prov. 15:17)! What would you think of the person who was invited to your house for dinner and was not grateful? You prepared a large feast, with all kinds of meats and vegetables, as well as deserts. The table is full, and the meal is huge. For the turkey you had cranberry sauce as many often do but, unknown to you, the person invited hates cranberry sauce. After the dinner is over the person invited goes away very full and then proceeds to murmur and complain about how awful it was to serve cranberry sauce. It must be how we look to God when we forget

to count our many blessings and complain about minor setbacks in life. When was the last time you thanked God you were not blind, deaf, or crippled like many people often are? Rather we complain about how we need a new TV, a better stereo, or a new bike — all those things that those just listed could not enjoy since they are disabled. For shame, for shame!

WHEN WE DON'T AGREE WITH THE PREACHER OR ELDERS

When one of God's leaders is not standing for the truth they must be corrected. This is contending for the faith (Jude 3). This is not complaining which God rebukes. It must be done by all of us. But often is the case where a complaint comes just because of a difference in judgment. Often we believe we are the better preachers though we have never preached a lesson, and we are the better elders though we have never served a day in our life as one. When people complain against qualified leaders, they are actually complaining against God. Notice in Exodus 16:2, “Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron.” But in Exodus 16:8 Moses said, “. . . for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? *Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord.*” Was Moses a perfect man? No. Did Moses make mistakes? Yes. But he was God's leader and thus the people should have respected that. Likewise the elders and preachers may make judgment calls that later turn out to be incorrect, let them learn, let them become better, without tearing them down, without trying to start a murmuring masquerade. To tear down and to murmur against one of God's leader is to murmur against God! Again, no one is saying you cannot offer critique or advice in a proper spirit, but just make sure the one you are talking to is the person you are critiquing!

WHEN WE HAVE BECOME IDLE IN THE LORD'S WORK

Galatians 5:15 says, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another.” If we treat each other like a microwave meal, we will be gone before you know it. A good example of Galatians 5:15 is found in Luke 9:46 where the disciples were literally disputing with each other over who was the greatest. Jesus said it was the servant of all. What they should have been doing was working, serving others. They, like us when we become idle, will become the devil's tools. We have got to focus our energies on the work of the Lord. When you are constant in your study, door knocking, setting up home Bible studies, exercising and growing in your abilities, you find little time to nitpick and complain. There is no time for it, for you are too busy with the Lord's work. Too many quirky brethren feel their spiritual work is only on Sunday and mid-week services, thus they find all the time to think and meditate about what to complain about. Christ speaks to us as to his disciples; quit quirk and start working.

The Slippery Slope of Flattery

David Halbrook

INTRODUCTION

When buying a car, we look for one that will provide a “smooth ride,” not one that jolts and jostles on every bump in the road. When buying a car, a smooth ride is fine, but smoothness of speech is not well spoken of in Scripture. When the Bible refers to someone speaking smoothly, it doesn’t refer to how many words an individual stumbles over, it refers to someone who chooses and uses their words in such a way that the hearer is taken on “a ride,” deceived.

If you try to climb a steep hill, there must be enough footing in order to progress toward the top, but if the hillside is slick then there is little hope of successfully climbing that hill. In the faith, we can be grounded and stable (Col. 1:23), but flattering words are smooth and slick. In Psalm 73:18, the Hebrew word that is often translated “flattery” is here translated “slippery places.” So the idea behind this word is that if you use or believe flattering words, you are in a slippery place. The hearer, if not watchful, will be fooled by the smooth, flattering words he hears. When thus fooled,

the smooth talker will use the hearer in the same way that he used words — for his own advantage. Beware of those things which the Bible warns of as flattery.

BIBLE WARNINGS AGAINST FLATTERY

1. Flattering Titles. “Let me not, I pray, show partiality to anyone; Nor let me flatter any man. For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away” (Job 32:21-22). Job is aware that his maker does not approve of using flattering titles. By doing this, the hearer believes himself to be more important than he actually is. Every soul is important to God but flattering titles show partiality, against which Christians are warned because it is not in the character of God, whose character we are to follow (1 Pet. 1:15-16; Acts 10:34; Jas. 2:1ff).

The Pharisees loved to be flattered by titles, and Jesus addressed this foolishness (Matt. 23:5-10). Today, titles which elevate men to places that God did not place them, abound in the religious world. Why are there “pastors” who have no wife or children (1 Tim. 3:2,4) and men bow-

WHEN WE ARE NO LONGER CONTENT WITH GOD’S WORSHIP

In the book of Malachi we see how people were tired of God’s ways. In regards to his worship they said, “Oh, what a weariness!” (Mal. 1:13). Sound familiar? I am greatly disturbed by the many who have begun to complain in such a fashion. God has provided for us a simple worship that has today begun to bore many people. Everything has to be updated from songs to sermon topics. Let me hasten to say that as long as something is scriptural then it is God approved, but it is the reason of change I question. I notice among us an attitude that says, “Old songs, old sermons are dull; out with the old, in with the new.” Some murmur and complain about such things till they get their way. One person who was of this mind told me that the “old time” songs no longer “do it” for him. I asked him what was wrong with them? Were the words unscriptural? He

said, “No.” So I asked then, if the words are scriptural and true, then whose fault is it that the song no longer “does it” for him? He concluded rightly; it was his fault. He was the one becoming bored with approved worship; thus he was seeking a sleeker song. Who are we worshipping, God or ourselves? This attitude will never be satisfied; in time the sleeker song will become the “old fuddy duddy.” Let us be content with God approved worship and not seek to cause a complaint, contention, and commotion in the congregation.

In conclusion, let us be a better people not a bickering people. Let us “do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault” (Phil. 2:14-15).
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ing their knees to a man whom they called “Holy Father” (John 17:11)? When men believe that they are a pastor, though they are biblically unqualified, or that they are a “Holy Father,” they have fallen into the snare of accepting flattering titles.

2. Double-Hearted Speaker. “They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; With flattering lips and a double heart they speak” (Ps. 12:2). The Psalmist warns us of those who speak with a double heart. He states that they speak vanity. Here a neighbor speaks useless or idle words in order to gain some advantage — maybe to gain trust in order to steal from them or to commit adultery with their mate. Maybe a preacher will lie regarding his convictions of a certain issue in order to receive support — this is using flattering words, false words which gain the confidence of others for the sake of personal gain. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he *never* did such a thing among them (1 Thess. 2:5).

Spouses can be guilty of using flattering speech in order to gain something which they want. No Christian should use flattering words for personal gain, but we should show wisdom and understanding in our speech (Jas. 2:13).

3. Proud Speaker. “May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, And the tongue that speaks proud things, Who have said, ‘with our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; Who is lord over us?’” (Ps. 12:3-4). The smooth speaker will often be a proud speaker. These announced “with our tongue we will prevail,” they are flattering themselves. Those who announce their own strength, forget their need for God. Solomon said that these kind of people are headed for a fall (Prov. 16:18). To remain faithful to the Lord, we must be careful to remember that we must follow his way if we will be successful in getting to heaven. When we begin to believe that we can get to heaven without faithfully attending the “assembling of ourselves,” we have a proud mind (Heb. 10:24-26).

4. The Evil Woman. “Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’ And call understanding your nearest kin, That they may keep you from the immoral woman, From the seductress who flatters with her words” (Prov. 7:4-5, also see 2:10-16; 6:23-24). In Proverbs 6:20-23, Solomon, as he does throughout the book, reminds us to hear the words of our father when he teaches us God’s word. In this case, it will save us from the destruction of the adulteress. Those with the attire of a harlot (7:10), who are quick to kiss (7:13), who quickly want you to come over when the house is empty (7:19), will also use flattering words to lead you to the way to death (7:27). Words such as “I’ve been waiting for someone like you” or “this will make us truly happy,” may make our heart race, but if we are wise, they will cause our heart to turn away (7:15, 18, 25). Neither men or women ought to use such flattering words or tactics. The young must learn not to be deceived by flattery for fornicators and

adulterers will be judged (1 Cor. 6:9; Heb. 13:4).

5. The Crowd-Pleaser. “Now go, write it before them on a tablet, And note it on a scroll, That it may be for time to come, Forever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, Lying children, Children who will not hear the law of the Lord; Who say to the seers, ‘Do not see,’ And to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits’” (Isa. 30:8-10). Isaiah warns the people who are asking the prophets to speak “smooth things.” In so doing, the people desire to avoid the “bumpy road” of hearing a message that will jolt their conscience because of their sin and demand repentance. They prefer the smooth road of a smooth message that will be positive, non-condemning, and non-controversial. Paul warns Timothy of the audience who want their ears tickled. They will seek men who are willing to comply with that kind of preaching (2 Tim. 4:3). This preacher will talk often of heaven yet rarely of hell and who God has said will be there. When an audience, which is made up of people headed on the path to hell, hear a message that does not awaken them to their compromise and sin, they are simply being flattered. Of this preacher and audience, Jeremiah says “they love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?” (Jer. 5:31). By failing to warn and properly discipline Christians who are guilty of sin, men follow the wide and broad path to hell (Matt. 7:13).

CONCLUSION

The Bible warns of those who are willing to speak flattering speech, but it also warns of those who are willing to hear it. Both the evil woman and the one who fell for her flattery descend to the chambers of death (Prov. 7:27). Likewise, with all flattering speakers, they along with those whom they deceive will be separated from God, so “be not deceived” (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 6:7).

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NEVER SAY NEVER

by Catherine G. Swift

This topical study looks at some areas where we can prepare ourselves for those times we might be tempted to declare . . . “NEVER.” This book teaches from the Scriptures that we should learn to carefully think before bursting forth with something we may regret. For personal and group study.

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Caustic Speech and Words That Stir Wrath

David Dann

The Bible has a great deal to say concerning the words we use and the manner in which we use them. Furthermore, the Lord has made it clear that the status of our relationship with him may depend largely

Jesus said, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37). The Bible has a great deal to say concerning the words we use and the manner in which we use them. Furthermore, the Lord has made it clear that the status of our relationship with him may depend largely upon our words.

We must be careful about the kind of speech we use. Our speech reveals our thoughts and the way we talk says a lot about how we think. The fact that we communicate our innermost thoughts through words can be either good or bad depending upon what we say and how we say it. A man’s character is often revealed through the words that proceed from his mouth, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34b). Whether we like it or not, the way we talk exposes who we really are and what we really think. This is precisely why we may sometimes conclude a conversation with a feeling of regret for having opened our mouths at all.

It is also undeniably true that our words have an impact on others. We have a choice concerning whether we will help or hurt others through the things we say. We have a choice concerning whether we will influence others for good or evil through our words.

The word of God provides us with

much needed instruction concerning our speech.

It is not necessarily easy to make proper use of the tongue. James writes, “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. . . . And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire by hell” (Jas. 3:2, 6). We need to be reminded to watch what we say.

WHAT SHOULD WE SPEAK?

1. That which is true. “Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (Eph. 4:25). Before speaking we need to make sure that what will proceed from our mouths is, to the best of our knowledge, the truth. Basic honesty and truthfulness are respected attributes even among those in the world. This is probably due to the fact that honesty is recognized as a rare commodity. As Christians, we are to follow the example of Christ, who always spoke the truth. Our perfect example is one, “Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22).

2. That which reflects the way we would like for others to speak to us. “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). The command to

treat others the way we would like to be treated certainly extends to our speech. If I do not want others to lie to me, curse at me, or slander me, then I should never consider using that kind of speech myself. Most, if not all, of our speech problems would disappear were this principle consistently applied.

3. That which will edify others.

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). To edify is to do that which will build up, encourage, and help others. Edifying speech involves that which is constructive rather than destructive. Before speaking we must determine that our words will be helpful toward the ones we intend to address.

4. That which will impart grace to the hearers. “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6). Our speech says a lot about whether or not we are truly following Christ. Others should be able to tell that we are devoted to the Lord and seeking their best interests from the way we talk. They should notice a difference between our speech and the speech of the world.

CAUSTIC SPEECH AND WORDS THAT STIR WRATH

The Bible warns against the kind of speech that is designed to do more harm than good. Caustic speech is that which is cutting and derisive in either tone or content, or both. It provokes a negative response from the hearer. It is sometimes far easier to speak in a manner that will stir others up to anger than it is to speak in a careful and loving way. For this reason, we need to consider the impact of our words before we open our mouths. As James puts it: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jas. 1:19). Our society is filled with caustic speech and words that stir wrath. This kind

of talk is rampant in movies, television, and radio programs, song lyrics, and everyday conversation between ordinary people. But it cannot be the kind of speech that is heard among God’s people. Caustic speech comes in many different forms.

1. Hateful and abusive speech.

Speech sometimes reveals the hatred of the one speaking when words are used as weapons to abuse others. Christ was often on the receiving end of this kind of speech (John 8:48; Luke 7:34; Matt. 27:39-44). This sort of thing may be as obvious as hurling a stinging insult in a bitter tone of voice, or as subtle as belittling someone in front of his friends. In any case, the one who uses hateful and abusive speech is destined for eternity in hell unless he repents (Matt. 5:22).

2. Gossip and slander. Gossip is potentially damaging idle talk about others that may or may not be true, while slander refers to a false accusation intended to destroy another’s reputation. This is the sort of speech that stirs up anger and destroys relationships. “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases” (Prov. 26:20). “A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends” (Prov. 16:28). If our words are not intended to serve a worthwhile purpose, then they need to be left unsaid.

3. Cursing. The idea of cursing is that of calling for harm to fall on someone else. Unfortunately, men have invented numerous ways by which to communicate these kinds of thoughts to one another, mostly in the form of so-called “four-letter words.” Insulting and vulgar name-calling involving filthy language certainly fits into this category (Col. 3:8). Nothing stirs up wrath quite as quickly as when one man curses another. But our Creator expects us to use our ability to speak for more noble purposes than cursing one another. James wrote of the tongue saying, “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” (Jas. 3:9-10).

4. Lying. Lying is the same as simply speaking that which is not true. The liar injures and insults those to whom he speaks (Prov. 26:28). Society teaches that lying is acceptable under certain circumstances. But the Bible teaches that lying is a sin that will land one in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8).

5. Complaining. If any should doubt that grumbling and complaining can stir up wrath, just remember that the complaining of the Israelites in the wilderness stirred up the wrath of God (1 Cor. 10:5-10). Some who would never dream of lying, cursing, or gossiping think nothing of complaining, even though we are commanded to “do all things without complaining and disputing” (Phil. 2:14). Complaining does nothing but cause irritation and ill-feelings.

SOME APPLICATIONS.

1. How do you speak to the members of your family? Caustic speech plagues too many families. Husbands and wives, do you hurl insults and abuse at each other? Or, do you treat each other with love and respect (Eph. 5:33)? Children, do you complain about your parents and lie to them? Or, do you honor and obey them (Eph. 6:1-3)? Parents, do you lose your temper and speak to your children in a way that is sure to stir them up to anger? Or, do you set a godly example as you seek to raise them according to the Lord’s principles (Eph. 6:4)? What kind of speech is heard in your home?

2. How do you speak to your brethren? Caustic speech can quickly destroy a local church. We are each responsible for working to “stir up love and good works” among our brothers and sisters in Christ (Heb. 10:24). Are

Blasphemy

John Isaac Edwards

Among the sins of the tongue is the sin of blasphemy. To blaspheme is to carp at, condemn, curse, defame, despise, defy, hack, rail, reproach, revile, scorn, speak evil, upbraid, vilify. The sin of blasphemy is committed against men and against God. Impious speech about things divine is blasphemy against God. Calumnious or scurrilous speech with reference to man is blasphemy against men. Really, all blasphemy against men is blasphemy against God, “For we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28), made in the image, in the likeness or after the similitude of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; Jas. 3:9). These pages bring to mind some practical, profitable truths about blasphemy from the book of God.

BLASPHEMY ASSOCIATES ONE WITH THE ENEMIES OF GOD

As creatures of God, we are duty bound to bless the name of God (Ps. 100:3-4). Instead of blessing the name of God, however, the enemies of God blaspheme his worthy

name (Jas. 2:7). Psalm 74:10 asks, “O God, how long shall *the adversary reproach*? Shall *the enemy blaspheme* thy name for ever?” Thus, to blaspheme (*to reproach*) is to be combined and conjoined with the enemies (*the adversaries*) of God. And friend, you do not want God for an enemy — just ask King Saul! (1 Sam. 28:16-18).

BLASPHEMY CAN BE GIVEN OCCASION TO . . .

The devilish deed of David in the matter of Uriah the Hittite gave “great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme” (2 Sam. 12:14). Did it ever occur to you that when you sin, as a child of God, you not only transgress the law of God, but you also give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme? To give occasion to blasphemy is no small matter, for it cost the life of the child born unto David (2 Sam. 12:14-23).

Paul wrote the Romans,

you contributing to that goal in the way you speak to your brethren? Are you speaking things which will edify others (Eph. 4:29)? Or, are you gossiping and complaining about other members of the congregation? What kind of speech characterizes your relationship with your brethren?

3. How do you speak to those in the world? Many of us spend most of each week surrounded by caustic speech. Do you get caught up in the lying, slander, and gossip that is common in the workplace? Do you speak in an insulting and abusive way toward others at school? Do you curse your neighbors? Or, are you speaking to others in the same kind of way you would like for them to speak to you (Luke 6:31)? Listen to yourself a little more closely and notice what comes out of your mouth over the course of the next week.

4. How do you speak to those with whom you disagree? Caustic speech often rears its ugly head in the midst of an argument or disagreement. This is true whether

the disagreement is over an important religious matter or something as insignificant as the color of the fence post. Do you feel as though you have the right to deride and verbally abuse those with whom you disagree? In spiritual matters there is a time and place for sharp rebuke of those in error (Tit. 1:13; 2 Tim. 4:2). But there is never a proper time and place for caustic speech that stirs up wrath. We need to learn to speak the truth in love even when we disagree (Eph. 4:15). Keep watch over your mouth the next time you find yourself in the middle of a disagreement.

Conclusion

Our words can be used to accomplish an immeasurable amount of good or an irreparable amount of harm. Let’s be sure to choose them carefully. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).



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Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and
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makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and ap-
provest the things that are more excellent, being instructed
out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a
guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast
the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou
therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?
Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost
thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou
commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law,
through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the
name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through
you, as it is written” (Rom. 2:17-24).

To teach one thing but do another, or to boast of the law
and break the law is to give occasion to blasphemy. Thus
the instruction to do as the word teaches, “that the name
of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1;
Tit. 2:5).

Saul, the saint-persecutor, gave occasion to blasphemy,
when he “compelled them (the saints, v. 10) to blaspheme”
(Acts 26:11). At the same time, Saul was said to have been
“a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1 Tim.
1:13). Only God knows how much havoc has come to the
church because of men giving occasion to blasphemy.

BLASPHEMY IS HEARD AND KNOWN BY GOD

When Rabshakeh, the servant of the king of Assyria,
stood and cried with a loud voice in defying the armies
of Israel, the Lord said concerning him, “Whom hast thou
reproached and blasphemed? And against whom hast thou
exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? Even
against the Holy One of Israel” (2 Kings 19:22). As you
read the story in 2 Kings 18 and 19, you observe that God
heard the hacking (19:3-4) and blasted the blasphemer
(19:7).

In the prophecy of Ezekiel “against mount Seir” (the
country of Edom, Gen. 32:3), the Lord by his messenger
declared, “And thou shalt know that I am the Lord, and
that I have heard all thy blasphemies which thou hast spo-
ken against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid
desolate, they are given us to consume. Thus with your
mouth ye have boasted against me, and have multiplied
your words against me: I have heard them” (Ezek. 35:2,
12-13). When the Edomites (the heathen) spake against the
Israelites (the Lord’s people), they spake against God and
their blasphemies were heard by God! In being the object
of blasphemy, “the mountains of Israel” were “taken up
in the lips of talkers,” “an infamy of the people,” “a prey
and derision” of “despightful minds” and were said to “have
borne the shame of the heathen” (Ezek. 36:1, 3-6). This is
a reminder that “there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo,

O Lord, thou knowest it altogether” (Ps. 139:4), and “That
every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give ac-
count thereof” (Matt. 12:36).

The letter to the church in Smyrna contained this mes-
sage: “I know the blasphemy of them which say they are
Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan” (Rev.
2:9). You may deceive and delude men, but not God!

BLASPHEMY CARRIES A DEATH SENTENCE

Under the law of Moses, the blasphemer was put to
death. The mind of God was revealed against blasphemy in
Leviticus 24, when the Lord said, “Whosoever curseth his
God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name
of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the con-
gregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as
he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name
of the Lord, shall be put to death” (Lev. 24:15-16). This
divine blasphemy law was carried out, when the son of an
Israelitish woman blasphemed the name of the Lord and
cursed (Lev. 24:10-11, 23).

The death-by-stoning penalty for blasphemy is also
seen in the life-taking possession of Naboth’s vineyard by
wicked Ahab, recorded in 1 Kings 21, as two men of Belial
brought false witness against Naboth, saying, “Naboth did
blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth
out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died” (1
Kings 21:13). Truthfully, the false witnesses, in speaking
evil against Naboth, were guilty of blasphemy, and Ahab,
with his wife Jezebel, giving occasion to it, was worthy of
death (1 Kings 21:17-24).

Blasphemy will bring “the second death” as the “blas-
phemy” beast of Revelation 13, “and whosoever receiveth
the mark of his name” is “cast into the lake of fire and
brimstone . . . and shall be tormented day and night for
ever and ever” (Rev. 14:10-11; 20:10; 21:8).

BLASPHEMY WAS ONE OF THE SINS THAT CRUCIFIED CHRIST

As to the unjust vilification of Christ in the house of
Caiaphas, Luke recorded, “And the men that held Jesus
mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blind-
folded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him,
saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee? And many
other things blasphemously spake they against him” (Luke
22:63-65).

In the tenth chapter of John, “the Jews took up stones
again to stone” Jesus “for blasphemy; and because” He,
being a man, made himself God (John 10:31-33). Jesus
made himself equal with God when he said, “My Father”
(John 5:17-18), and “thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark
2:5-7). This, in the mind of the Jews, was nothing short of
blasphemy (Matt. 9:3). Jesus asked his accusers, “Say ye

of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (John 10:36). He was condemned to death on the charge of blasphemy (Matt. 26:65; Mark 14:64). As it was done to the Lord and Master, so it will be done to the disciple and servant (Matt. 10:24-25). Stephen is a prime example, as "they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God" and "they stoned Stephen" (Acts 6:11-14; 7:54-60).

BLASPHEMY IS A RELATIVE OF ENVY

Where you find blasphemy, you often find envy (emulation, indignation, jealousy, malice), as James noted, "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (Jas. 3:16). Railings (blasphemy, evil speaking) follows envy and strife in 1 Timothy 6:4, and evil speaking is coupled with malice in Ephesians 4:31. In the case of Christ, for example, envy led to the delivering up of Jesus. According to Matthew 27:18, Pilate "knew that for envy they had delivered him."

Blasphemous words proceeded from the evil heart of envy, in the thirteenth chapter of Acts. Almost the whole city had come together to hear the word of God, and "when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13:45). When you speak against the word of God or contradict the work of men of God you are guilty of blasphemy!

A heart filled with envy is a heart empty of love. Since the bucket of speech is drawn from the well of the heart (Matt. 12:34), to speak evil is to think evil and love "thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5). Therefore, we need to be reminded, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

BLASPHEMY DEFILES A MAN

Jesus taught, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man" (Matt. 15:18-19). To be defiled is to be made unclean. To keep ourselves pure, we must adopt the purpose of mouth and heart. May we have the purpose of the Psalmist who said, "I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress" (Ps. 17:3), and the purpose of Daniel who "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8).

BLASPHEMY MARKS ONE FOR DELIVERANCE UNTO SATAN

Paul named Hymenaeus and Alexander as examples of "some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck," and said, "whom I have delivered unto Satan, that

they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:20). This is an expression of discipline, as Paul instructed the Corinthians concerning the immoral brother in their midst, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5). Such a one was to be taken away (v. 2), purged out (v. 7), put away (v. 13), and with such an one they were not to company (v. 9), not to eat (v. 11). The purpose of delivering the blasphemer to Satan is simply to teach him not to blaspheme.

BLASPHEMY CAN BE FORGIVEN

"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come," so said the Saviour in Matthew 12:31-32. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has been so rolled around and tossed around that it has not taken proper shape in many minds. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, in context, was when there was brought unto Jesus "one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw," and the Pharisees said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matt. 12:22-24). This is what precipitated the Lord's teaching. Encapsulated in this teaching is a basic definition of blasphemy (to speak against).

The sin of blasphemy is forgiven the same way all other sin is forgiven — by the blood of Jesus. The non-Christian avails himself of the benefits of the blood of Christ as he hears the word of Christ (Matt. 17:5), has faith in Christ (John 8:24), repents of his sins as commanded by Christ (Luke 13:3), confesses Christ (Matt. 10:32) and is buried with Christ by baptism into death (Rom. 6:3-4). The Christian who sins reaps the blessings of the blood as he walks in the light and confesses his sins (1 John 1:7-9), which involves repenting of wickedness and praying for forgiveness (Acts 8:22).

We are living in times in which there are many "blasphemers" (2 Tim. 3:1-2). May we never become marked or marred by blasphemy, but continue to hear and heed the admonition of Paul, "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth . . . seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:8-10).

Renew Promptly!

“Tongue” continued from front page

process of creating new spiritual life (v. 18), and requires to be bridled lest it lead to empty and vain religion. There he has emphasized that one must be quick to hear but slow to speak. Here he follows up with much more penetrating observations on both the tongue and the spoken word. Let us follow carefully the thoughts of the inspired writer in James 3:1-12.

LET THE TEACHER BEWARE! (v. 1)

Chapter 3 of James treats two subjects that are directly related to one another. The bridling of the tongue (vv. 1-12), which is a metonymy for “speech” (compare “what he says” in v. 2) and the possession and usage of true wisdom (vv. 13-18). Both these subjects relate to the duties of the teacher in particular, although the lessons apply equally to problems faced by all Christians. The “one wise and understanding” in verse 13 still has the teacher in mind even as it changes the subject to wisdom. The wise man and the teacher are the same person. This follows the thought found in the book of Proverbs when it treats the two as substantially equal: “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” (31:26).

The KJV translated *didaskaloi* as “masters” (not a term we commonly use) but teachers were in fact the masters of those days. Teachers played an important role in early Judaism and later in the church in New Testament times, just as they do today. “Rabbi” a term denoting “my great one” was used commonly to describe Jewish teachers and savants. Jesus warned against the abuses of this term and the heavy intellectual freight that went along with it (Matt. 23:7, 8). Prophets and teachers are mentioned as an important aspect of the growing new Gentile church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). They are also noted as in a similar category with apostles and prophets in other passages (see 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). The new religion of Jesus Christ had to be taught, young converts needed to be further instructed in the truths of Christianity, and advanced Christians required to be reminded of those important doctrines which they accepted in earlier years but may have forgotten. It was the job of the teacher to fill all these roles.

The author of the book of Hebrews insists that all disciples with the passing of sufficient time “ought to be teachers” (5:12). The exercise of this right was denied to women in the assemblies of the churches (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12), but even opportunity for them to instruct were provided in other and different circumstances (1 Cor. 11:5; Tit. 2:5, 6).

But there were certain dangers that attended the task of teaching. The teacher’s assignment must not be entered into without deliberation and thought. According to James in verse 1, the teacher will receive heavier judgment, or “greater condemnation.” The New Testament provides

numerous examples of those who fell short in their duty as teachers of the truth. Just as the Old Testament had its “false prophets” who led the people into error and brought upon both Israel and Judah several national tragedies, “false teachers” in the New Testament deceived God’s people and brought down churches, families, and individuals. In the early church some promoted circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses (Acts 15:24). Still others taught one thing but lived another (Rom. 2:17-29). Some were so anxious to teach that they did so in spite of their own ignorance; this led to catastrophe for both the teacher and the taught (1 Tim. 1:6, 7). Paul also tells of those who pandered to the illicit desires of the crowd (2 Tim. 4:3).

According to James, teaching is a dangerous business, fraught with many perils. One cannot take lightly the duties and responsibilities associated with it, for the souls of men and women are in the balances. Therefore, “heavier judgment” goes along with this work. The tongue of the teacher can be an instrument of instruction, exhortation and encouragement, or else a dangerous and destructive weapon that may be used against the defenseless. That is the point he is attempting to make, and it is one that every teacher must appreciate and concern himself with as he goes about his task of teaching. It is especially interesting that James does not except himself from this danger, but rather includes himself in the warning: “we shall receive greater condemnation.”

Some ought thus to be discouraged from teaching, and still others ought not ever to teach, for they do not take the dangers involved with sufficient seriousness. They are not willing to study and prepare themselves sufficiently to arm their minds and prepare their thoughts for this difficult work. They may only covet the prestige and notoriety which attaches to it, rather than taking seriously the responsibility that comes in its wake. James warns us not to be too quick in assuming this responsibility, for with it there is an attendant risk to the teacher’s own soul.

THE DANGER IS UNIVERSAL (v. 2)

“In many things we all offend. If any man does not offend in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body also” (v. 2). The author recognizes the universality of sin, as the rest of Holy Scripture does, and for that matter, all of human experience and observation. Solomon observes that “there is not a man on the earth who does good and sins not” (Eccl. 7:20). Paul says that there is “none righteous, no not one” and that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10, 23). Even ancient pagans understood the reality of the human condition. It was such an undeniable fact that it was recognized broadly outside of revealed religion. Seneca noted that “We all sin, some more grievously, some more lightly” (*On Clemency* 1:6). Thucydides spoke of public figures and their faults: “It is the nature of man to sin both

in private and in public life” (3:45).

All men stumble says James, and of all faults, those of the tongue are the hardest to avoid. Therefore the profession of the teacher of religion is the most difficult mode of life conceivable. Of course, not only the teacher, but all of us must be cognizant of these dangers and resist the temptations associated with loose and careless speech. The proverbs of the Old Testament are full of warnings about careful use of the tongue (Prov. 15:1-4, 7, 23, 26, 28; etc.). In the period between the Old and New Testaments, Jesus ben Sira wrote extensively about the danger of the tongue (Eccl. 5:11-6:1; 22:27; 28:13-26). In fact, he comes very close to the words of James in this regard in 14:1 when he says, “Blessed is the man who has not slipped with his mouth”; and, “Who is he that has not offended with his tongue?” (19:15).

James tells us the man who is capable of controlling the tongue can surely manage the entire body also (*holon to soma*), the whole man. The same is a “perfect man” (*teleios aner*), that is, one who is fully mature, spiritually full-grown, well-rounded and worthy to be used as a teacher of others.

THE TONGUE IS SMALL BUT POTENT (vv. 3-5A)

Massive animals like stallions are controlled by the bridles that are put into their mouths. The bit is small but exercises complete control over such enormous and otherwise unmanageable creatures. Likewise, a large ship is guided by the small rudder that the steersman turns according to his various whims (*horme*, “impulse” or “desire”). Once more, the rudder is tiny by comparison with the ship, but it is the key to control and direction. These are the illustrations that James brings to bear upon the tiny bundle of muscles, nerves, and sensory organs that constitute the tongue. Small it is, but potent it can be, for either good or ill.

“Even so the tongue is a tiny member, and boasts great things” (5a). The author uses strong alliteration with his repetition of the “m” sound in the original *mikron melos* . .

. *megala*. He could have pressed the positive aspects of the usage of the tongue had that been his desire. Certainly it could be said that the tongue has accomplished great things. But that is not what he chooses to say. James concentrates upon the negative instead. He uses the word “boasts” in order to stress how the tongue may be abused from its original purpose and made the servant of evil designs. “Boasts” connotes selfish haughtiness, and, as the next verse implies, the tongue not only boasts of the evil it can accomplish, it is often successful in its ventures.

THE TONGUE IS A CONSUMING FIRE (vv. 5B-6)

Forest fires are the bane of those who live out in the “wide open spaces.” Apparently they are not a new problem. James makes reference to the forest fires of his own time: “How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!” (5b, RSV). This illustration continues the contrast between small and great that was illustrated by bits in horses mouths and ships and their rudders in the previous verses. But the writer goes beyond anything he has said up until now. William Barclay (*Letter of James* 100) observes that there are two reasons why the damage which the tongue can do is like fire. First, because it is wide-ranging. The tongue can damage at a distance. A chance word dropped in one end of the country can finish up by bringing damage and grief and hurt and heartbreak at the other. Second, the tongue is quite uncontrollable. In the tinder-dry wood and scrub of Palestine, a forest fire was almost immediately out of control. Likewise, no man can control the damage done by the tongue. “Three things come not back — the spent arrow, the spoken word, and the lost opportunity.” Once a word is spoken there is no getting it back. And there is no stopping the damage it will ultimately do. It is like attempting to “unlight” a forest fire!

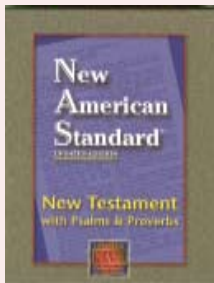
James asserts therefore that the tongue is “a world of iniquity” (*ho kosmos tes adikias*, v. 6a), or “the evil cosmos.” It is the whole world of iniquity. The phrase is an assertion that the tongue is the entire universe of evil in itself. It gives voice to every evil feeling and every kind of sinful thought; it sets in motion by simple vocalization and thus gives concreteness to every kind of sinful act. Nothing evil is beyond its power of accomplishment. Even though something dreadfully evil may be beyond the power of the body to achieve, it is within the power of the mind to imagine it and the tongue to describe it. So, it is the “world of iniquity” in itself.

The word *kosmos* is most often used in the Bible to refer to that part of creation that rejects divine control. So, unless the tongue is under the control of God through his word, it can be a part of the body which is utterly without God. An uncontrolled tongue is like a world hostile to, and ignorant of God. It can be that part of the human anatomy that constantly disobeys, defies, and rebels against God. If we allow it to take this track, then it surely will be “a world

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of iniquity” in our own lives.

In that case, it “defiles the whole body, sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire by hell” (v. 6b). The entire body is defiled by the sins committed by the tongue. The entire regular course of human affairs is disturbed and even wrecked by evil tongues and the wickedness that is wrought by them. Finally, the unredeemed tongue will be “set on fire in hell.” A frightening thought!

THE TONGUE IS BEYOND TAMING (vv. 7-8)

All the animals of earth were given to the human race to have dominion over, and thus to domesticate in the service of man (Gen. 1:28; 9:2). The result is that all of the various beasts have been tamed by man, and many of them have become beasts of burden. No matter how vicious they seem, all of them have been trained in some circumstances to serve the needs of men. The ingenuity of the human race has made docile all of the beasts of earth, but “the tongue alone is beyond taming” (v. 8). He labels it “a restless (unruly) evil.” It is “full of deadly poison” (compare Ps. 140:3; quoted in Rom. 3:13). Even venomous serpents have been contained by man’s skills in handling them, but the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly venom, which no unredeemed man can control.

THE TONGUE BLESSES AND CURSES (vv. 9-12)

James sees the two sides of man’s nature illustrated by his use of the tongue. With the tongue a man blesses God. Whenever the Jew mentioned the name of divinity, he always said the words, “Blessed be He!” The pious and observant Jew said his eighteen prayers three times a day, and with each of the *Shemoneh ‘Esreh* he began the prayer with the words, “Blessed be Thou, O God!” James uses the verbal form of the word *eulogetos* to speak of blessing God (cf. Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 2 Cor. 11:31).

The New Testament uses this and still other forms to bless the name of God (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3; and compare Ps. 145:21). But James tells us that this same tongue will turn and in an instant curse a fellow man who, according to Scripture, is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27). These two things are as opposite as a fig tree bearing olives, or a vine figs, or a fountain yielding both salt water and fresh at the same time (and from the identical opening, *ek tes autes opes*). And yet we know they do happen, and with greater regularity than we would like to think.

Peter illustrates this human frailty perfectly in that he promised to die with the Lord and not ever to deny him (Matt. 26:33), and later with the same mouth spewed forth oaths and curses as he denied the Christ (Matt. 26:69-75). As William Barclay expressed it so beautifully, “The tongue can bless or curse; the tongue can wound or soothe; the tongue can speak the fairest things, and the tongue can

speak the foulest things. It is one of life’s hardest duties, and it is one of life’s plainest duties, to see to it that the tongue does not contradict itself, but that it ever speaks only such words as we would wish God to hear” (*Letter of James* 106).

CONCLUSION (v. 13)

Although verses 13-18 lie outside the parameters of this study, they are in fact a conclusion to this section of James. Having shown the risks and dangers of the uncontrolled tongue, the author then turns to address the issue positively. The next paragraph of the chapter speaks of the true wisdom that is from above and shows how it is articulated. This is not by running the mouth and exercising the tongue, but by living a humble and godly life: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show his works by his good life in meekness of wisdom” (v. 13). Talk is cheap and boasting is empty, but daily application of the principles of godly living is beyond price. That is the point James wishes to make. One who loves God will allow “the wisdom that is from above” (v. 17) to rule in his life and will ever make that the goal of his living.

Given the power that the tongue has, in the furtherance of good or in the destructive potential of evil, it is clear that the child of God must be extremely careful in the “right of free speech” which we enjoy in this land of liberty. We may have the right to say a thing, but it may not be at all right to say it! Is it any wonder that Jesus said, “By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37)?

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“Lying” continued from page 2

The evil of lying is evidenced by the fact that Satan himself is depicted as “a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). The first recorded sin was a lie, told by Satan when, with reference to the forbidden fruit, he tempted Eve to eat thereof, saying “you will not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). Being deceived by the devil’s lie (1 Tim. 2:14), Eve ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Gen. 3:6). This resulted in the fall of man and its subsequent evils. In view of what happened when that first recorded lie was told, believed, and acted upon, can any sane person say that lying is harmless?

A study of the Scriptures reveals that subsequent history depicts the evils associated with lying. God said of the northern kingdom, Israel, before they were carried away

into Assyrian Captivity, that “Ephraim has encircled Me with *lies*, and the house of Israel with deceit” (Hos. 11:12). Describing the apostate condition of Judah, the southern kingdom, before they were carried away into Babylonian Captivity, Amos said “their *lies* lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed” (Amos 2:4). The book of Nahum portrays the judgment from God upon the ancient city of Nineveh, and describes that city as “all full of *lies* and robbery” (Nah. 3:1). The young prophet who cried out against Jeroboam’s unauthorized altar in Bethel lost his life because he believed and followed the *lie* spoken to him by an old prophet (1 Kings 13). Contributing to the fall of Judah was the fact that the people “like their bow” had “bent their tongues for lies” (Jer. 9:3). Even their prophets prophesied “*lies* in God’s name,” declaring “the deceit of their heart” (Jer. 14:14), thereby causing God’s people to “err by their *lies* and by their recklessness” (Jer. 23:32). God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead when they lied about their contribution to the church (Acts 5:1-10). Contributing to the predicted departure from the faith would be the tendency of some to “speak *lies* in hypocrisy” (1 Tim. 4:2), as well as the fact that many would “believe” those lies (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Much space could be devoted to biblical examples of the evils which befall the family of man because of lying. However, every responsible reader of this paper has probably already experienced misfortune because of the effects of the lies of other people. How many of us have purchased items we would not have purchased were it not for the fact that we believed the lies told us by a glib salesman? How many of us have voted for a crook because we believed his lies? How many of us have had our reputations smeared because of lies told about us? Worse yet, as it relates to our standing before God, how many of us have told lies which have not been corrected? And how many professed “Christians” are guilty of lying as it relates to the filing of their income taxes, misrepresenting products they try to sell, by cheating on exams in school, or even in the excuses they offer for missing worship?

Someone has observed that “sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle that fits them all.” It behooves each of us to speak the truth — even if it hurts! When all is said and done, “a poor man is better than a liar” (Prov. 19:22).

BEARING FALSE WITNESS

Obviously the bearing of false witness is intimately connected with lying. “False” denotes that which is not true. “A witness is a person who saw something happen, or a person who takes an oath in court to tell the truth, or a person or thing that furnishes evidence or proof of the thing or fact mentioned” (*World Book Dictionary*).

God does not look lightly upon the bearing of false witness! In the ninth commandment, God said, “You shall not

bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16). Listed among the things which “the Lord hates” is “a false witness who speaks lies” (Prov. 6:16, 19). However, history is filled with the record of the evils wrought by false witnesses. Naboth was stoned to death because people believed the testimony of two scoundrels whom Jezebel employed to testify against him, saying that he had blasphemed God and the king (1 Kings 21:8-14). Many complaining Israelites died of snake bite because they spoke falsely against both the Lord and Moses (Num. 21:1-7). Jeremiah suffered much because of those who resolved to attack him with the tongue (Jer. 18:18). The wicked council, composed of those who presumably represented Jewish orthodoxy, sought false testimony against Jesus to put him to death (Matt. 26:59). Stephen was stoned to death, in part, because of the testimony of false witnesses who accused him of speaking blasphemous words against this holy place and the law (Acts 6:13).

How many of us have offered false testimony — testimony which may have caused untold misery and harm? Has any of us rashly said that all politicians are crooks? Has anyone said that the church is filled with hypocrites? Has any of us, in anger, said to a mate, “You are *always* showing disrespect to me,” when in reality the “always” actually means “occasionally”? How many Christians, upon reading an article written by a preacher opposing error, have concluded that he is nothing but a trouble maker, when the person may actually be agonizing within with the fear that the error he is opposing may cause precious souls to be lost? In short, do *we* condemn the act of being a false witness while sometimes *practicing* the same?

FALSE SWEARING

“False” has already been defined. To “swear” is “(1) to make a solemn statement, appealing to God or other sacred being or object; take an oath, (2) to promise solemnly, vow, (3) to testify under oath (*World Book Dictionary*). Another word for false swearing is “perjury,” which is considered a serious crime. For example, the Senate voted to impeach former President Bill Clinton not for sexual infidelity, but for lying under oath, or for false swearing. According to the *Pulpit Commentary*, at Rome the one who bore false witness in court was hurled headlong from the Tarpeian rock; in Egypt the perjurer was punished by the amputation of the nose and ears.

God also; yes, God *especially* is opposed to false swearing! In Leviticus 6:3-5 God prescribed the punishment under the Law for those who had sworn falsely. To the Israelites, God said, “You shall not swear by My name falsely” (Lev. 19:12). Hosea spoke of the apostates who were guilty of swearing falsely (Hos. 10:4). Jeremiah spoke of those of his day who would “steal, murder, commit adultery, *swear falsely*, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods” (Jer. 7:9). Through the prophet Malachi, God said, “I will

be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against *perjurers*, against those who exploit wages earners and widows and orphans” (Mal. 3:5).

It seems that the more dishonest a person is, the more often he deems it necessary to resort to swearing in general. However, some of us long for those times when a man’s word is his bond, a time when we could believe what a person said simply because he *said* it — not because he swore it! We would do well to heed the words of Jesus who, in a context alluding to false swearing, said “do not swear at all,” and who also said “let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ for whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matt. 5:33). The bottom line is this — God wants his people to be scrupulously honest!

Reportedly, a certain lady said to John Wesley, “My talent is to speak my mind,” to which he replied, saying, “I am sure, sister, that God wouldn’t object if you buried that

talent!” Humorous as that sounds, Wesley was not entirely correct, for it is fine for one to speak his mind *if* his mind is filled with a knowledge of the Scriptures, and if his mind instructs him to use his tongue to the glory of God and the building up of fellow human beings. However, it is a fact that there is nothing opened more often by mistake than the mouth. So let us be careful about *what* we say, and *how* we say it!

Borrowing these words from Colossians 4:6, we conclude by saying “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

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(**Note:** This series of lessons on “The Sins of the Tongue” will conclude in the next issue of *Truth Magazine*.)

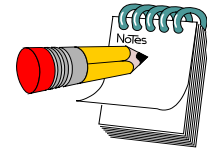
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Quips & Quotes



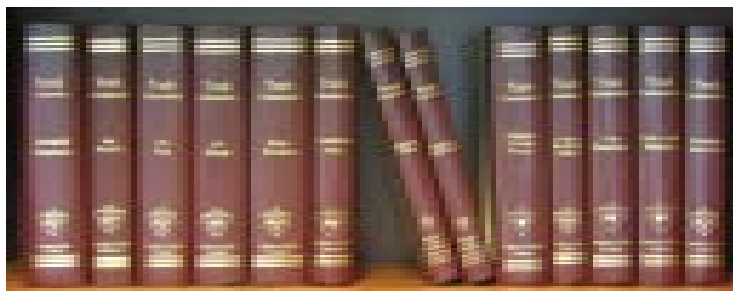
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