

# The Tongue

by Leon King

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me," the little boy said after his friends had poked "fun" at him. This must be an old wives' tale because some of the most lasting hurt comes from words - not sticks and stones! As Christians, we must come to understand that our speech is a sign of our maturity in the Lord. That is, we indicate our growth or lack of it by the use of the tongue.

Our tongues can be used to both bless and blaspheme. That ought not so to be as we learn from the pen of James. A major point we do well to remember is that our tongue is guided by the fullness of our heart. Whatever is mostly in our hearts will come out on our tongue.

*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. {46} And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? -- Luke 6:45,46.*

Because our words flow from the heart over our tongue, we must "keep our heart with all diligence." It matters what we think and in what things we meditate. Our thinking fills our heart and if we are filled with the wrong things, it is sure that wrong things will come out of our mouth.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it <are> the issues of life.  
-- Proverbs 4:23.*

Whatever is in our hearts will come out on our tongue. I believe that is what Jesus was saying in the passage I quoted above from Luke. If I understand correctly, our heart is where our intelligence is located - it is

where we feel or have emotions, and it is the location of our will.  
Consequently, we notice this of our heart:

**INTELLECT - WHAT WE KNOW AND WHERE WE THINK EMOTIONS - WHAT WE FEEL  
AND HOW WE REACT WILL - OUR PURPOSE AND WISHES**

three of these areas will operate when we speak with our tongue, so we must guard our heart if we hope to control our tongue. We need to use our tongue in a positive way. We have been called to show forth the praises of the Lord. So we use our tongue in praise. We are the recipients of manifold blessings from God, so we are bound to render thanksgiving. We are told to encourage others with the same comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted, so we can use our tongue to comfort and encourage others.

*But ye <are> a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: {10} which in time past <were> not a people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. -- 1 Peter 2:9,10.*

*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. --  
Philippians 4:6.*

*Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. -- Colossians 2:7.*

I think we could say without any hesitation that scripture teaches us the positive and encouraging use of our tongue. We can: Bless others; Praise the Lord; Render thanks to God; Encourage others; Commend others for good work; Express words of kindness; Express appreciation; comfort those in sorrow; Strengthen the weak; Speak loving rebukes and exhortation; Promote peace, and Preach the Gospel.

Great trouble comes when we use our tongue for wrong purposes. I submit to you that this is a major thing among believers. This is no little matter, but it is a major factor in the outward expression of our "religion" as we will see later. It matters greatly how we control our speech. May I show several areas where we can (and regrettably do) "misuse" our tongue?

**1. Slander.** The first area I want to mention is slander. It comes from the Greek word "diabolos" and means "devil, accuser." We can see from the meaning of the word that it has no good implication.

Here are some passages which deal with slander:

*Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things; -- 1 Timothy 3:11.*

*He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool. -- Proverbs 10:18.*

**Definition of Slander:** The dictionary defines slander as "The utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame or damage another's reputation."

**Effects of Slander:** A Biblical example of the awesome effects of slander is found in the book of Numbers. When the twelve spies had returned from their assignment, ten of them brought up an evil report. The Lord defined their report as a "slander against the land." That slander caused the death of every one of the men of war. They were consigned to wander in the wilderness until all of them were dead. So, slander is no small thing.

*I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.*

*36 And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land,  
37 Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD. -- Numbers 14:35-37.*

*Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. -- Psalms 101:5.*

**2. Backbiting.** This comes from the Greek word "katalalous" and means "One who speaks against another."

Backbiting comes from the carnal nature or reprobate mind:

*Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, -- Romans 1:30.*

Sometimes it is found among church members. Paul thought some of the Corinthians might be guilty of this sin of the tongue.

*For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: -- 2 Corinthians 12:20.*

Backbiters can never abide in God's holy hill. Evidently this means a close, intimate relationship with the Lord. Such sins of our tongue bar our sweet fellowship with the Lord.:

*LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? 2 He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. 3 He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. -- Psalms 15:1-3.*

Here's the way to put an end to the backbiting tongue:

*The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue. -- Proverbs 25:23.*

### **3. Evil whisperings - Gossip**

A whisperer is defined as "One who utters false charges or misrepresentations maliciously calculated to damage another's reputation (synonym: Calumny)."

What are the effects of evil whisperings or gossip? There are many enduring hurts that can be traced to an evil whisperer. Strife, broken friendships, and ongoing wounds are just a few.

*A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends. -- Proverbs 16:28.*

*The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. -- Proverbs 18:8.*

Like other sins of the tongue we have already mentioned, evil whispering is from the carnal nature and the reprobate mind.

*All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. -- Psalms 41:7.*

*Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, -- Romans 1:29.*

Do Christians do it? Like backbitings, Paul listed this sin as something that might happen among the church members at Corinth.

*For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: -- 2 Corinthians 12:20.*

How can we put an end to it? The Proverbs teach us by the illustration of wood and fire. If there's no wood, the fire goes out. Wood is an apt illustration of whisperings (like hay and stubble).

*Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. 21 As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. 22 The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. -- Proverbs 26:20-22.*

#### **4. Debates.**

The dictionary defines debates as "Arguments, rivalry, competition, discord, bitter conflict and dissension, disagreement and disputation."

Do Christians debate? Yes, unfortunately, they do. I believe that nobody ever wins an argument, no matter who may appear to have gained the upper hand or presented the best defense. Discord and bitter conflicts are not products of the Holy Spirit. They certainly do not promote peace. I do not mean to say we should have peace at any price. We can never allow ourselves to pursue peace at the cost of compromise. However, we can certainly guard how we speak. We can and should speak the truth in love.

*Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, -- Romans 1:29.*

*Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. -- Romans 13:13.*

*For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. -- 1 Corinthians 1:11.*

*Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, -- Galatians 5:20.*

## **5. Maliciousness.**

Maliciousness comes from the Greek word "kakonthelas" which essentially means an "evil disposition." Doubtless, the evil disposition accompanies words over our tongue with tones laced with "barbed wire." This word includes the root of our word "malignant." When the doctor tells us we have a malignant growth, we know we have trouble. When we see a malignant spirit in ourselves or others, we know we are in for trouble.

*Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, -- Romans 1:29.*

Interestingly, the Scriptures give additional insight into this word by its use in other passages. The same word that is translated maliciousness in other places is in these two verses translated "wickedness" and "naughtiness," respectively.

*Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. -- Acts 8:22.*

*Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. -- James 1:21.*

*Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. -- 1 Corinthians 14:20.*

## **6. Tattling.**

Tattling comes from the Greek word "phluaroi" and means "Fire builders." How appropriate!

The dictionary defines a tattler as "One who tells secrets; one who utters or discloses in gossip or chatter. A "Tattletale." People who are tattlers are also those who wander about from house to house and those who have made themselves idle. This is interesting, because the Scripture addresses this to younger widows. The antithesis of this person is the virtuous woman in the Proverbs. She is a person of industry and certainly doesn't have time for "tattling."

*But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; 12 Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. 13 And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. -- 1 Timothy 5:11-13.*



Let's notice some kindred passages where the word translated "tattlers" in 1 Timothy is translated "setteth on fire," "set on fire," "flame," and related words and phrases.

*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. -- James 3:6.*

*And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. -- Luke 16:24.*

*And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. -- Acts 7:30.*

*In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: -- 2 Thessalonians 1:8.*

*And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. -- Hebrews 1:7.*

*His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; -- Revelation 1:14.*

The antidote for the house-to-house, idle tattle tail is clear. This person needs to copy the character of the virtuous woman and "*eat not the bread of idleness.*"

*She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. -- Proverbs 31:27.*

## **7. Busybodies.**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a busybody as: "A meddlesome or inquisitive person - one who offers services where they are neither asked or needed - officious."

Amazing how many people want to push themselves into the affairs of others. Somehow, there are those who "just have to know everything that is going on." What tragedy!

What ever happened to people minding their own business and helping when it was obvious that help was needed? Here are some passages relating to busybodies.

*For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. -- 2 Thessalonians 3:11.*

*And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. -- 1 Timothy 5:13.*

*Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. -- Acts 19:19.*

*But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. -- 1 Peter 4:15.*

A busybody in other men's matters means an "overlooker" of other men's matters. The antidote for busybodies is to mind one's own business and work with his own hands. When one's hands are busy in something productive and useful, usually the mind is at peace.

*And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; 11 And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; 12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. -- 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12.*

## **8. Vain or idle talk.**

Every one of us need to learn the vanity of idle talk. My dad remarked to me one time, "Son, you must like to talk to hear your head rattle." I think we are much like that. We like to talk to see how we sound whether the words are productive or not.

Here is a list of Scriptures which show us the folly of vain and idle talk.

*Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? -- Job 11:2.*

*In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. -- Proverbs 10:19.*

*In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. -- Proverbs 14:23.*

*A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards. -- Proverbs 29:11.*

*Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. -- Ecclesiastes 5:2.*

*Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better. 12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious;*

*but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. -- Ecclesiastes 10:11-13.*

*Therefore prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because they have made <you> desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that ye might be a possession unto the residue of the heathen, and ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and <are> an infamy of the people:" -- Ezekiel 36:3.*

No doubt about it, we will give account for every idle word in the day of judgment. If we have few other things to deal with in judgment, surely we are sorely heaping up in this category.

*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. -- Matthew 12:36.*

## **SOME ADMONISHMENTS FOR THE TONGUE**

As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, we can see the maturity of God's people in those who "offend not in word." That means they have learned to say things in a timely, loving, and appropriate way. They know how to keep their mouth shut when need be.

*For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. -- James 3:2.*

Let us remember that the tongue is a fire. It can (and does) set on fire the course of nature. How often have we watched somebody stir others with hateful and grievous words! Even Christians are sometimes caught up in this sin of the flesh.

*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. -- James 3:6.*

We are a paradox to the world when we allow both blessing and cursing to flow from our mouth. Just a day or so ago, two brethren came by our church. They had come to Alaska for a season of vacation and fishing. I heard from one of them after he had returned from his fishing trip and was back in Washington. He said there was a church member in the camp with them who was using his tongue in a bad way. The man found out they were preachers, and let it subside for a bit, but then went right back to it. Shame! What occasion is given to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme His Holy Name!

*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. -- James 3:10.*

We have two ears and one tongue. Someone said we ought to hear twice as much as we talk. At least!

*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. 21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being*

*not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. 26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. 27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. -- James 1:19-27.*







