

New Life

Bible Study Lesson

THE DEVIL'S WORKSHOP #2 – AN UNCONTROLLED TONGUE

DAILY READINGS:

- ❖ **Monday:** The tongue is powerful (Proverbs 6:2; Proverbs 18:21; James 3:2-10).
- ❖ **Tuesday:** There is a danger in excessive talking (Proverbs 10:8, 19; Ecclesiastes 5:3; Ecclesiastes 10:14).
- ❖ **Wednesday:** Avoid gossip and talebearing (Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 20:19; Psalm 50:19-20).
- ❖ **Thursday:** There is wisdom in being slow to speak (Proverbs 17:27; Proverbs 21:23; James 1:19).
- ❖ **Friday:** Words come from the heart (Matthew 12:34-37; Matthew 15:18-19; Luke 6:45).
- ❖ **Saturday:** How to have a controlled tongue (Psalm 141:3; Philippians 4:8; Titus 3:1-2).

MEMORY VERSE: *“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”—Psalm 19:14*

The Power of Words

Years ago a study was conducted by the University of Arizona to find out how many words people speak daily. The average was 16,000 words per day. (One man was found to be speaking up to 47,000 words per day!) What do those 16,000 words consist of? How do those words affect others? An old story, called *Feathers in the Wind*, tells about a woman who had a terrible problem with gossiping. Once, after discovering she had spread a story that was not true, she went to her pastor and asked for help. He told her to take a feather pillow and cut it open. When she did this, the feathers blew all over the room and out an open window. "Now pick up all the feathers," her pastor told her. "That is impossible!" the woman cried. "So it is with words," her pastor said, "once spoken they cannot be taken back."

In the Bible, James compared the tongue to “a fire”(James 3:6). Just as an unattended fire can burn down a forest, so a careless word can destroy reputations, friendships, and marriages. Just as a small rudder turns a very large ship and a small rider can turn a large, strong horse, just a few thoughtlessly spoken words could change the entire direction of someone's life. Although we might “not realize the tremendous power of words, the devil does, and he uses this tool to destroy, discourage, and deceive many people.

Some Tactics of the Devil

What are some of the ways the devil works through an uncontrolled tongue? Gossip, slander, disrespect, and telling lies about others are some of the obvious ways, and the Christian needs to be careful in these areas. However, there are other tactics the devil uses that are not as apparent. Proverbs 10:19 warns, *“When there are many words, transgression and offense are unavoidable . . .”* (Amplified Bible). Where there is excessive talking, there is a danger of saying something you should not say. The rest of the verse describes one who is wise: *“he who controls his lips and keeps thoughtful silence is wise.”* (Amplified Bible).

There is an old saying, “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.” James 1:19 gives similar advice, saying that we should be “swift to hear, [and] slow to speak.” Some people talk too much about themselves, boasting of their accomplishments or abilities. Proverbs 27:2 gives this good advice: *“Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips.”*

The Source of Our Words

It is often easy to excuse an uncontrolled tongue, saying such things as: "I didn't mean to say that" or "You misunderstood me" or even "The devil made me do it." While it is possible to occasionally misspeak, it is important to realize that words come from the heart. One Christian evangelist said, "The heart is the factory . . . and the tongue is the showcase of the heart" (Leonard Ravenhill). Words reveal what is in the heart. What you think about often will come out through your words. If there is bitterness, hatred, or anger in your heart toward others, you might be able to hide it for a while, but eventually your words will betray you. James 3:8 says that "*no human being can tame the tongue.*" A tongue that is out of control is a sign of a heart that needs God's help. This dangerous tool of the devil is able to work because of "*evil thoughts*" (Matthew 15:18-19). Whether you speak "good" words or "evil" words depends on "*what the heart is full of*" (Luke 6:45).

If you find that your words are hurtful, bitter, or angry, it is time to examine your heart. Where are these words coming from? Has someone hurt you? Did someone cheat you or tell lies about you? Have you been made fun of or rejected? Does it seem like others always have better things, more money, or an easier life than you do? These things can produce the wrong feelings in your heart. What can you do about it? If you do nothing, these feelings will take root in your heart and soon become a part of you. It is vital that you quickly identify those thoughts and ask for God's help in removing them. Thoughts that are allowed to remain soon become words. Proverbs 23:7 shows that what you allow yourself to think on will define who you are. "What is down in the well comes up in the bucket" (old proverb).

The Power of Words Rightly Spoken

Proverbs 25:11 says, "*Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a ruling rightly given.*" Words "rightly given" are used carefully, thoughtfully, and at the right time. They are beautiful and often rare. Why is that? Because it is easier to say the first thing that comes to your mind. However, the first thought that comes to mind is not always the kindest thought (the devil will make sure of that). In the original Hebrew, "a word fitly spoken" means "a word spoken on his wheels." In ancient culture, carts did not have wheels. They were pulled along by two long poles. This was hard work, and it often left deep ruts in the ground. In time wheels were added—a significant improvement. "Each of your words should be like a vehicle on easy-going wheels, so smooth and courteous that it would produce no jar or shock to either speaker or hearer; nor . . . leave a painful rut behind in the memory" (*The Biblical Illustrator*).

A children's rhyme that says, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me," is sadly untrue. However, just as words have great power to do harm, words also have the ability to do great good. You can combat the tool of the devil (an uncontrolled tongue) with God's help and develop a controlled tongue, one that encourages, comforts, and positively influences others. Kind, positive words have a greater effect than we will ever know. Not only can they brighten someone's day, they are often contagious. You can encourage others to use words "rightly given" as well. The best result is that your kind, thoughtful words can be a light to people who are unsaved, a witness of a better way of living.

How to Have a Controlled Tongue

Ask for God's Help: "*Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.*" (Psalm 141:3).

Think on Good Things: "*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*" (Philippians 4:8).

Ask for Forgiveness When Necessary: "*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed*" (James 5:16a).

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

- 1. How are words like feathers?**
- 2. How is the tongue like a fire?**
- 3. What are some things carelessly spoken words are compared to in this lesson?**
- 4. How does the devil work through the uncontrolled tongue?**
- 5. How can excessive talking be a problem for the Christian?**
- 6. What do you think this quote means: “The heart is the factory...and the tongue is the showcase of the heart” (Leonard Ravenhill)?**
- 7. What are words “rightly spoken”?**
- 8. Do you agree that the rhyme “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me” is untrue? Why or why not?**
- 9. What are some examples of a controlled tongue?**
- 10. What are some things you can do to have a controlled tongue?**
- 11. Why is excessive talking dangerous?**
- 12. Don’t some people “deserve” to be talked to meanly? Why or why not?**
- 13. How can words hurt us?**
- 14. Have you ever spoken hurtful words to someone else? If so, why?**