

Cosmetics for the Tongue!

Exodus 20:16

Introduction

How beautiful is your tongue? Please do not show me – keep it in!

We never think of our tongue in terms of attractiveness. It is not something for which we would make an appointment with a tongue beautician. It is something that Avon and Revlon have ignored in cosmetics. One nice thing is that we do not have to diet to get it back in shape; in fact, it always is.

Yet, it is our tongue, more than our income, our figure, our face, our wardrobe, our car, our home . . . that makes all of the difference in the world. It is the tongue that can mend a marriage or tear it apart. It is the tongue that can heal a church or destroy it. It is the tongue that makes a home a paradise or a howling desert. It is the tongue that makes the difference.

Psychologists have estimated, and I feel sorry for the psychologist that has nothing to do but estimate this, that we have 700 opportunities a week to speak. Some of us still speak 800 times, but there are about 700 opportunities! We construct 12,000 sentences every week, using 50,000 words. We author a 150 page volume, by our tongue, every single week. I could replace my library of 1,300 volumes in no time, just by things that I create with my tongue.

Now, in America we hear about the freedom of speech. That is wonderful, but you never hear about that in scripture. In fact, what you find in scripture is the regulation of how we use our speech.

Of the ten commands that we will have studied by the time we have finished our study or the Ten Commandments in the book of Exodus, two of them deal with the regulation of our speech. One is the third commandment, in chapter 20, verse 7, which says,

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain . . .

In other words, we are to respect, to honor, and to protect God's character and reputation.

The Command

The command that we are going to study today, talks about protecting the reputation of other people. So please turn in your Bible to Exodus, chapter 20, and look at verse 16.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

The word "witness" is the Hebrew word "ed," which could be translated, "evidence". In other words, "Don't give false, dishonest evidence against your neighbor."

Now, specifically, this command is referring to the courtroom setting. If someone was to take the witness stand, they were not to give false evidence; false testimony against their neighbor. They were to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. That is the specific interpretation of this command.

To make a principle of this, we would say, "Don't be dishonest; tell the truth with your tongue."

The Command Violated

One great commentator that I enjoy reading, calls or categorizes nine lies of the tongue. He says, "The tongue has nine lies."

A tongue's nine lies

I think you could fit any dishonesty under one of the nine categories that are lies of the tongue. Let me give them to you.

The lie of malice

1. Number one is the lie of malice.

This is the lie to get revenge. It is a lie that I give in order to get back at someone or something. I distort the truth; I tell an untruth; I am dishonest so that I can somehow swing back. This is the lie of malice.

The lie of fear

2. Number two is the lie of fear.

This is a lie to escape punishment. We learned that at a very early age, did we not? We learned how to lie in order to avoid punishment.

We do this at college too. We tell the professor three good reasons why the term paper is not finished – and all three are lies. We tell the police officer, when he stops us, why we were the wrong person. In fact, we could not have been going 65 miles per hour in a 55 mile per hour zone, and we give him the reasons why.

We do not like punishment, so sometimes we will consider telling a lie to get away from it.

The lie for profit

3. Number three is the lie for profit.

When it is time to pay taxes, there will be people who will lie. They will deliberately write incorrect figures on that little sheet of paper that we send to the Internal Revenue Service, in order to make a profit.

I recently read of a woman who won a major marathon. It was interesting because they started checking into this woman's history and discovered that her practice for the marathon included a couple of miles on her exercise bicycle and maybe, a short jog once or twice a week. So, they got suspicious. By the time they finished their investigation, they had come up with enough witnesses to put the pieces together. This woman had started the marathon with everyone else. She had then, however, taken a shortcut – she had hopped on a bus and ridden to a point that was only a couple of miles from the finish line. She had gotten off the bus, somehow gotten back on the track, and had won. For a week, she was the winner. She probably could not run around the block twice, but she won that marathon. She was lying for profit.

We could think of any type of profit we want, and that is a category of reasons we lie.

The lie by silence

4. Number four is lying by way of silence.

Leviticus, chapter 5, verse 1, broadens this. It says that if you have evidence towards someone's character and you remain silent, you are considered, by scripture, a liar.

Let us apply that. If someone says something on the job about Jesus Christ that is not true, and you remain silent, you are a false witness for Christ. If someone says something about someone that you know and you remain silent, you are a false witness. Because of your silence, you have become a liar. This is an interesting category.

The lie of boasting

5. Number five is the lie of boasting.

This is lying to impress. It is name dropping, "Oh yes, so-and-so is a good friend of mine."

You probably run into that at work all of the time – name dropping for a promotion. They really do not know that person well. The closest they came to them is through their neighbor who baby-sat that person's uncle's cousin, or something like that. They are dropping that name to impress.

The lie of exaggeration

6. Number six is the lie of exaggeration.

This is the lie that creeps into the marriage and the home when you say something to your husband like, "You *never* do this," or "You *always* do that."

That is exaggeration. He probably did it once.

Then, there is the classic, "I have absolutely nothing to wear."

How did that get in there? Excuse me! That is the lie of exaggeration.

The lie of insincerity

7. Number seven is the lie of insincerity.

We might say, "If you need help, just call me and I'll help you," while thinking, "Boy, I hope they don't call."

We might say, "I'll pray for you," and then forget to do it.

The lie of insincerity can pervade the body like nothing else. We come to church with our little masks on and are so insincere with each other – afraid that someone might see what we are really like. We are liars; we are insincere.

The lie to self

8. Number eight is the lie to self.

This is the little conversations that you have with yourself. You talk yourself out of doing something that is right. You talk yourself into doing something that is wrong. You lie to self.

The lie to God

9. Number nine is the lie to God.

This is the worst.

My boys are old enough to know how to deceive, but they are not quite old enough to be clever at it. I was reading in the living room recently, and my peripheral vision caught a movement. I kind of ignored it for awhile, until I noticed that it was one of my sons. He had his hand behind his back and he was watching with his eyes wide open. He was slowly moving through the living room. I looked up at him and at that point in time, I thought, "I don't have a very intelligent son!"

I said, "Son."

"SIR? SIR?"

I said, "Come over here."

Of course, he came over and we discovered what was behind his back.

Ladies and gentlemen, have you ever realized that we go to God with our hands behind our backs? How ridiculous it is to go to the Lord in prayer or in worship with our hands firmly clasping something behind our back that we are not about to let go of. We are lying to God.

According to the scripture, in fact, if we come to God in prayer and regard iniquity in our heart, what does God do? He does not listen (Psalm 66:18). Why? Because He is like the father who has a son that obviously has something to hide – He is waiting for the prayer of repentance. Until then, quit trying to lie to God.

These are the nine categories of lies of the tongue, if we tried to specifically apply the command of not bearing false witness. In other words, do not lie – do not lie to yourself; do not lie to others; do not lie to God.

Four Facts

About Uncontrolled Tongues

Now, this command means more than lying. Interestingly enough, in Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 16, the command is expanded to include slander. When you add to that all of the passages of scripture that talk about the tongue, the use of the tongue, and the regulation of speech, there are tremendous principles concerning how we are to speak, when we are to speak, and the way we are to speak. This command covers a very broad spectrum concerning the regulation of speech.

Why is there so much scripture about our speech? I am going to give four reasons why. I will give four facts about a lying tongue that are so important that scripture spells it out for us so we cannot miss it.

A lying tongue is an indication of hypocrisy

1. First, a lying tongue is an indication of hypocrisy.

Look at the book of James, chapter 1, verse 26. It is as if James gets real close to the microphone, leans in, lowers his voice, and says, "There is a man among you that seems to be . . ."

. . . religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue . . . this man's religion is worthless.

If we have a lying tongue, our religion is absolutely worthless. If we cannot tell the truth, it is an indication that we are living hypocritical lives.

A lying tongue is a destroyer of friendship

2. Secondly, a lying tongue is a destroyer of friendship.

Turn to Proverbs, chapter 17. A lying tongue destroys friendship like nothing else. Verse 9 says,

He who conceals a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

In other words, the person who uncovers the "dirt" and repeats it, or the person who casts doubt on the reputation or the character of another, that individual, by their tongue, has the power of separating intimate friends. These are friends you would *never* imagine being split up; you could *never* imagine an offense between them. But there is a powerful tool that can split them up – it is called the

tongue. The tongue repeats an offense; a sin, “Did you know this about so-and-so? You know, I heard this . . . I heard that . . .”. Close friends begin to wonder and soon, it separates intimate friends.

Let me give an illustration of the power of the tongue in influencing people. This is almost too funny to believe. The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), has a habit, every April Fool’s Day, of coming up with outlandish little schemes to fool its British listeners. You would think that the listeners would learn to expect it, but every year BBC somehow pulls something off.

There was an article concerning one April Fool’s Day broadcast in the *American Way* magazine, dated March 18, 1986. At the BBC, Patrick Moore, a British astronomer, was a guest. I will read this story to you because if I do not, you will not believe me!

He had Britain jumping up and down on an April 1st morning. He told BBC listeners that, in the morning, the planet Pluto would pass directly behind Jupiter producing a slight gravitational pull on earth that would make everybody feel lighter. He urged listeners to jump at precisely 9:47 a.m.

By 9:48 a.m., the switchboards were blazing with delighted callers saying they had experienced a floating sensation when they jumped at exactly 9:47. One man complained he hit his head on the ceiling. One woman said her entire coffee group floated around the room.

Incredible! Now I know there are some people who are trying to make news, but I promise that there are people who probably jumped and felt like they went just a little higher than they had ever gone before in their lives.

That is the power of influence; the power of the tongue to affect feelings and attitudes. That is why it is so tremendous in light of friendship. Your tongue can influence the thoughts and the attitudes of someone toward a very close friend that they never thought they would ever question.

A lying tongue is an obstruction to unity

3. The third fact about uncontrolled tongues is dealing with the church body. A lying tongue is an obstruction to unity.

In Colossians, chapter 3, verse 9, Paul says, in no uncertain words,

Do not lie to one another . . .

What a church that must have been. He writes and one of the first things off his pen is, “Would you people quit lying to each other.” Then, in the rest of the chapter, he urges them toward unity.

The principle is this, the foundation for unity is honesty in the church of Jesus Christ.

A lying tongue is an invitation for God’s wrath

4. Fourthly, a lying tongue is an invitation for God’s wrath.

Turn to Proverbs, chapter 6. I want you to note the strength of the words that Solomon wrote in verses 16 through 19.

There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.

God hates it! God hates a lying tongue; God hates a false witness who utters lies, and note that right on the heels of that we are told that God *hates* one who spreads strife among brothers.

Psalm, chapter 101, verse 5, says,

Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy . . .

We never realized it was so serious, did we?

The Command Applied

Let us apply this command to not bear false witness. Let me give some cosmetics for the tongue.

Cosmetics for the tongue

These cosmetics for the tongue are simple words. They are not profound, but I want them to ring through your mind when you are tempted to open your mouth. Seven hundred times this week, you are going to have an opportunity. You are going to phrase 12,000 sentences this week. You are, in fact, going to write a book this week. May that book include these characteristics.

Truth

1. First, there is the cosmetic of truth.

David writes in Psalm, chapter 141, verse 3,

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.

David is asking God to, “Post a sentinel right by the corners of my mouth, so that it will watch carefully anything that comes out.”

In Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 15, we discover what those two sentinels are. Note this because it clears up some of the fuzziness. The first is,

. . . speaking the truth . . .

The second is,

. . . in love . . .

Now he is not saying, “Don’t confront. Don’t challenge.”

I wonder, in fact, what would have happened if, in Paul’s day, you were with the Better Business Bureau. A company writes and says, “Hey, we’ve heard some wonderful things about Alexander the coppersmith and we’d like to include him on our board.”

What would you say? You might remember that Paul said,

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm . . .

He wrote that in II Timothy, chapter 4, verse 14, and he was speaking the truth.

Let us say that a church is considering someone for the position of elder. This church writes to his former church and says, “We’d like some references. This guy seems like he’s a strong leader and is just what we need in our church. His name is Diotrephes. What do you think?”

What would you write? John wrote, in III John, verse 9,

Diotrephes . . . loves to be first among them .

..

That is the truth.

However, when you speak the truth, you are to cloak it with what? With love.

There is a lot of talk these days about talking love. There is very little confrontation; there is very little talk about holding people accountable to the truths of scripture. However, we do not love people that we do not hold accountable to what the Bible teaches. So we speak the truth and yet, we speak it in love.

Kindness

2. The second cosmetic for the tongue is kindness.

Kindness is speaking with soft answers. Let me give some thoughts on this.

A soft answer defends without lashing back. A soft answer may disagree, but it disagrees without criticizing. It may criticize the position, the philosophy, the point of view, the doctrine, but never the person.

I love the story of the woman who was so irritated at Winston Churchill that, after he spoke, she came rushing up to him and said, “Mr. Churchill, if I were your wife, I’d put arsenic in your tea.”

Churchill thought for a moment, and then said, “Ma’am, if you were my wife, I’d drink it.”

Silence

3. A third cosmetic that may seem odd, until I explain it, is silence.

Proverbs, chapter 26, verse 20, says that silence eliminates strife. Look at that verse.

. . . where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.

Silence not only eliminates strife, but it enhances worship. David said, in Psalm, chapter 46, verse 10a (KJV),

Be still and know that I am God . . .

This means literally, to stop striving; to be quiet.

Sometimes we are just yapping so much that we lose sight of the fact that we are to worship God. He is in control, so *stop* and be quiet.

The cosmetic of silence is like the statement of the old sage who said, “I have often regretted my speech. I have never regretted my silence.”

Grace

4. A fourth cosmetic for the tongue is grace. Colossians, chapter 4, verse 6, says,

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with [the flavor of] salt . . .

Grace - Words seasoned with the flavor of salt

Let me give some seasoned words. I want you to write these down and practice them. These words are not said often enough.

Please

- The first seasoned word is, “Please.”

When you say, “Please,” you view someone as a person and not as an object or a means to your end. That is why my wife and I began very early to teach our children to say, “Please.” We are not objects to them, we are people. Say, “Please.”

Thank-you

- Another seasoned word is, “Thank-you.”

For some husbands, it may have been a long time since you have thanked your wife for cooking for you. You ought to get in the habit of saying, “Thank-you, Honey, that was delicious.”

If you cannot say it was delicious, then say, “Thank-you, Honey, that was an unusual recipe,” or something.

One waitress was talking about the fact that she hates working on Sunday. Sunday is the worst day of the week to work. It is the day she gets the smallest tips and the most complaints. You would probably shock a waitress this Sunday, if you looked at her and said, “Hey, thanks, you did a terrific job.”

Say, “Thank-you.”

I appreciate you

- Let us try using these seasoned words, “I appreciate you.”

The wheels of this ministry; the flavor of your life; the joy in your heart is created so often by words of appreciation; by someone coming to you and saying, “Hey, I want you to know, I appreciate you.”

We do not hear that often enough. Practice saying, “I appreciate you.”

I’m sorry

- There are also the seasoned words, “I’m sorry.”

Now that is hard to say. It is also hard to receive. Sometimes you do not want to hear it, so when someone says, “I’m sorry,” to you, you retort back, “You said it,” or “You sure are,” or something like that. It is not only hard to say, it is sometimes very difficult to receive. It needs to be in our vocabulary, however.

Some of us have not discovered the words, “I’m sorry. I am not infallible.” We never say it. Say, “I’m sorry,” when it is needed.

I forgive you

- Along that same line are the seasoned words, “I forgive you.”

There may be a marriage that would be healed if those words were spoken. There may be a relationship between a son and a father, a daughter and a mother, or between close friends that would be restored if those words were spoken. Simply say, “I forgive you.” These are words of grace.

I think the reason Paul said these words are words of grace is because grace is the result of the Holy Spirit working in your heart. Apart from the Holy Spirit, there is no grace. This is a divine work in our hearts.

I’m praying for you

- Let me give one more. There are the seasoned words, “I’m praying for you.”

Now, you must be sure to mean it when you say, “I’m praying for you.”

I will never forget, as a college student, preaching in a church in Georgia. I was doing my very best and giving them all I had. After the service, I went down to the front and people greeted me and we shook hands. It was my first time there and my last time there. I do not know what that meant, but I never got invited to come back. However, I will never forget one man who came up to me, although I have never seen him since. He said, “Son, I want you to know that every day, for the rest of my life, I’m going to pray for you.”

That rocked me. I want to see that guy in heaven one day. I believe he meant it.

One of the greatest thrills is when people in this congregation say, “Hey, I’m praying for you.”

Keep it up! I am praying for you too. We need to pray for each other. We need to uphold each other. We are in a battle. The reinforcement and the strength comes from the prayers that we offer on behalf of each other.

Moses wrote,

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

He is saying to tell the truth. Leviticus expands it, so that you do not slander. We turn it over and look at the positive side and see that God is exhorting and regulating our speech to be encouraging and edifying. We are to season our words with truth, with kindness, with grace.

I love a story of ancient Greece involving a young man. The man said something very harsh about someone else, only to discover later that it was untrue. He went to his wise teacher and said, “Master, I have spoken harsh words. What can I do to right the wrong?”

His teacher said, “Find a sack and fill it with feathers. Then tonight, after everyone has retired, go all around this village and put a feather on each doorstep.”

The young man was confused, but he did it. He went around that entire village collecting feathers. Then, that night, as the sun sank, he went to each doorstep and placed a feather on every one, not knowing what he was doing or why. When he finished, he went home, went to bed, got up the next morning, and went back to his teacher. He said, “Master, I’ve done what you’ve said. Now what do I do?”

His teacher said, “Get your sack and go back and retrieve every feather.”

The young man said, “That’s impossible. There is no way I can retrieve every feather. The wind has come up during the night, people have been walking, animals have been moving. It’s impossible.”

The teacher said, “That’s exactly the point. Words are very easy to speak, they are impossible to completely retrieve.”