

5. Speaking the Truth and Controlling the Tongue

The out-of-control tongue swears and curses. James described our problem in James 3:3-10:

3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord set the standard for clean, moral, and approved speech. If the characteristics taught in the beatitudes are in the heart, controlling the tongue will be easier. Many modern examples illustrate the deceit and danger of an unruly tongue. Political slander, media profanity, and casual cursing and swearing populate our public discourse and our private lives alike.

Your Word Is Your Bond

Matt 5:33-37:

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Our word can only be what it is: *yes* or *no*! To add oaths to it, summoning the power of heaven or earth cannot make *yes*, *no* or *no*, *yes*. Embellishments to pure straight talk are from the evil one. James repeated this admonition of Jesus in James 5:12 and tells us we will be condemned for such language: "Above all, my brothers, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned." Religion is worthless if one lets his tongue run wild. James again said in James 1:26, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." To add an oath to our *yes* and *no* endangers our very soul. Such language comes from the devil.

Lying and Deceiving

Yes cannot be *yes* and *no* cannot be *no* when one is lying and deceiving. There is no room in the Lord's teaching for little lies or white lies. All lies and deceptions are wrong. In 1 Peter 3:1, Peter quotes from the Old Testament to show the sin of deceit and evil speech:

"Whoever would love life
and see good days

must keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from deceitful speech.

Paul concurs in Rom 3:10-14, comparing evil deceitful speech to the nastiness of open graves and poison of vipers:

13 "Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."
"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

Jesus taught that lying, deceitful speech was of the devil – a liar and the father of lies – in John 8:44-45:

44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!

Those who follow the Lamb of God have no lies in their mouths. The Revelation teaches in Rev 14:4-5:

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

Contrasted to these followers of the Lamb are the liars whose place is in the fiery lake in Rev 21:8,

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

To let your *yes* be *yes* and your *no* be *no*, is not to lie or speak deceitfully.

Gossip and Slander

Paul places slanderers and their lies right along side of the grossest moral sins in 1 Cor 6:9-10:

Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards **nor slanderers** nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

In Col 3:8-10, Paul expands this list to include filthy language:

But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

In 2 Cor 12:20, Paul includes gossip with slander, "I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, **gossip**, arrogance, and disorder." To let your *yes* be *yes* and your *no* be *no*, is to refrain from the maliciousness of slander and gossip.

Obscenities, Foolish Talk, and Coarse Joking

Obscenities, foolish talk, and coarse joking, all of these are not to be hinted of in the lives of

Christians, leaving no room for dirty jokes, euphemisms, taking the Lord's name in vain, racial jokes and slurs, and demeaning talk about people of the opposite sex. Paul says that they are out of place. Eph 5:3-7 explains that we are not to be partners those who do:

3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be **obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking**, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.

Our *yes* must be *yes* and our *no* be *no* in all our interactions; and these include discussions and interaction in the locker room, on the golf course, at the water fountain, etc.

Conclusion

Our evil speech does not begin with the yes or no of our lips, but with our hearts. If we embed the beatitudes in our hearts, our speech will be correct and wholesome. Jesus taught in Matt 12:33-37

34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Let our *yes* be *yes* and our *no* be *no*.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. James 3:3-10: What little devices control horses and ships? What little member can control the person? What can corrupt and ruin a person? With what do we praise our Father?
2. Matt 5:33-37: By what may Christians swear? What comes from the evil one?
3. James 5:12: By what will we be condemned? When is religion worthless?
4. James 1:26: Who may consider himself religious?
5. 1 Peter 3:1: Who will love life and see good days?
6. Rom 3:10-14: What is an open grave? Where is the poison of vipers?
7. John 8:44-45: In whom is there no truth? What is the devil's native language?
8. Rev 14:4-5: Who follow the Lamb? What is not found in their mouths?
9. Rev 21:8: Where will liars be found in the last day? Who will be with them?
10. 1 Cor 6:9-10: Will slanderers be found in the kingdom of God?
11. Col 3:8-10: What sins are expressed with language? What have Christians taken off? What are they to put on?
12. 2 Cor 12:20: Is gossip a sin?
13. Eph 5:3-7: What kind of talk is out of place for Christians? Who is an idolater?
14. Matt 12:33-37: From what does the mouth speak? What must men give account of in the day of judgment? What will acquit us? What will condemn us?