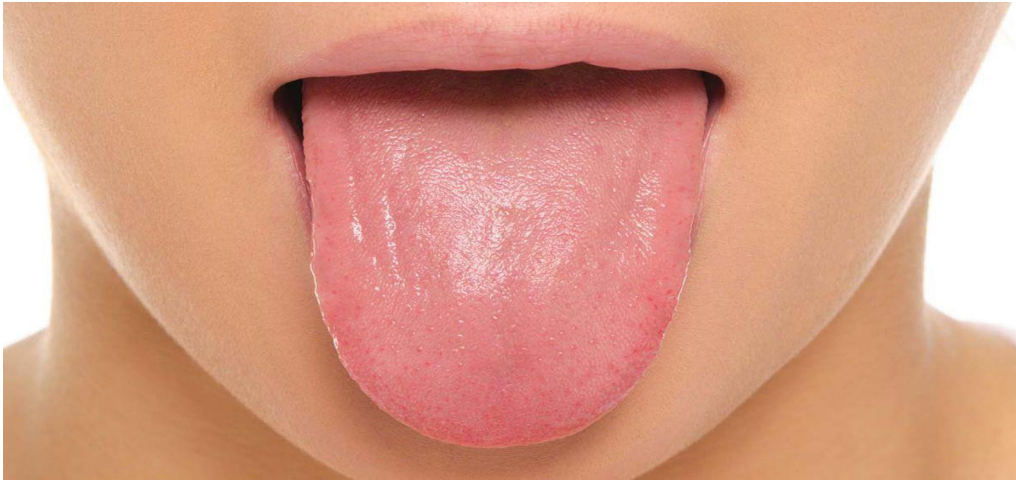


THE BATTLE OF THE TONGUE

Part 2

By John Gagliardi



Last month, we looked at what the “Battle of the Tongue” is all about, and the importance of controlling our thoughts if we are to control the words of our mouth.

We will now consider six of the most common “tongue hazards”, and let God’s Word give us some strategies to overcome this most troublesome “small member”.

1. Lying and deceit

The prophet Jeremiah warns us that the human heart is “deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17: 7), while at the same time, one of the main weapons of Satan is deceit. Jesus says that when the devil speaks, he lies: “...For he is a liar and the father of it.” (Matthew 8: 44) As seen above, the Book of Proverbs has a lot to say about lying and deceit.

God is truth – and Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13: 8, “we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.” It is all about what is in our heart – Jesus says that if we abide in His Word, and let it sink down into our hearts, we will know the truth and the truth will make us free. (John 8: 31 and 32)

When we have Christ in our hearts, we are a new creation, with renewed minds and hearts, the “new man,” and “therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour...” (Ephesians 4: 23-25) Colossians 3: 9 says: “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.”

Lying in business – as in every other walk of life – is not just a sin, but simply worth the effort. It is ultimately much more difficult to remember all the lies you’ve told, those intricate “webs of deceit” we have spun, than to tell the truth and face the consequences! “Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive.”

We need to take God’s attitude to lying very seriously indeed. The Holy Spirit warns through David: “He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence.” (Psalm 101: 7)

2. Gossip and slander

Gossiping and talebearing are both soundly condemned in the Bible. Proverbs, the ultimate book of wisdom, describes the words of a gossip as “tasty trifles”. Revealing other people’s secrets can even seem virtuous – so we enjoy it. The “trifles” taste good – but they soon give us spiritual indigestion!

“Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases...The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.” (Proverbs 26: 20 and 22) James puts it this way: “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother ... Who are you to judge another?” (James 4: 11 and 12)

Paul talks of “gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not ...some have already turned aside after Satan.” (1 Timothy 5: 13 and 15) God’s command is clear enough – “speak evil of no one” (Titus 3: 2). We do well to hear and obey!

3. Blasphemy and cursing

In this age of “anything goes”, where a film rated for general exhibition can be filled with foul four-letter words and blasphemous references to Jesus Christ, cursing, swearing and blasphemy are almost taken for granted. The danger is – the more you hear it, and take it for granted, the more you become desensitised. I think it was Frances Schaeffer who commented on just how quickly today’s unthinkable becomes tomorrow’s thinkable and normal.

Christians are in the world but not of it – and being in it, of course we see and hear things that we would rather not. To avoid it completely, we would have to be taken out of the world – and that will come only when God decides to call us home. So for the time being at least, we are stuck with it – but we do not have to join the cursers and the blasphemers, and we do not have to approve of it in conversations in which we participate. We do not have to laugh at the dirty jokes, and cravenly join the crowd. We have freedom of choice – we can make our point by just walking away.

We are supposed to be “salt” and light” (Matthew 5: 13 and 14) in the world. We are told to always have our speech “with grace, seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4: 6) James also is concerned that we should control our tongue: “But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men...out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.” (James 3: 8-10)

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth...” (Ephesians 4: 29). That is good advice from the Apostle Paul.

4. Idle talk

Many of us just talk too much, and talk without thinking – many times the Bible warns us that idle and hasty words lead us into all sorts of trouble. James says: “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak.” (James 1: 19) Proverbs tells us that in the “multitude of words, sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” (Proverbs 10: 19)

Jesus issues a very stern warning on the matter of words: “But I say to you that 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.” (Matthew 12: 36 and 37) So next time you have your mind in neutral and your mouth in high gear, remember these words of Jesus! They have eternal consequences.

There is also a very practical reason why it is often good to stay silent – people think you are smarter than you are! “Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips he is considered perceptive.” (Proverbs 17: 28) “Do not be rash with your mouth ... let your words be few ... a fool’s voice is known by his many words.” (Ecclesiastes 5: 2 and 3)

Also, if you talk too much, you get poor, which is not a good thing: “In all labour there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty.” Proverbs 14: 23) So if you want to be wealthy and be considered smart, just talk less!

5. Flattery

Another tongue hazard is flattery – “buttering” people up, often insincerely, and usually to gain something from them. Again, God is opposed to flattery: “...A flattering mouth works ruin.” (Proverbs 26: 28) David in Psalms says: “They speak idly everyone with his neighbour; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips...” (Psalm 12: 2 and 3)

In another place he is even stronger: “For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue. Pronounce them guilty, O God!” (Psalm 5: 9 and 19) In fact, the Bible says it is better to rebuke someone, than to flatter them: “He who rebukes a man will find more favour afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.” (Proverb 28: 23)

6. Complaining and murmuring

The final “tongue hazard” we will look at (although there are plenty of others you can work on) is our seemingly infinite capacity to complain and “murmur”. In this life, things are never perfect – and if we want to live a happy life, we had best accept that, “build a bridge, and get over it.” Things weren’t perfect in Biblical days, and they are not perfect today – we live in a fallen world.

But what we can do, is control our tongue and our attitude when things don’t go exactly as we think they should. In the Bible, “murmuring” was recorded right back in Exodus, when the Israelites, in spite of seeing miracles such as the parting of the Red Sea, complained about their lack of gourmet food: “...He hears your complaints against the Lord ... for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him.” Exodus 16: 7 and 8) By the Book of Numbers, the Lord was starting to lose patience with His chosen people: “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.” (Numbers 14: 27)

Jumping right over to the New Testament, complaining is still a problem: “Nor let us ...complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.” (1 Corinthians 10: 9 and 19) The Jews even complained about Jesus: “The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.” (John 6: 41)

“There are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts...” (Jude 16) But the Holy Spirit says through Paul: “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation...” (Philippians 2: 14)

CONCLUSION

So we need to always be very aware that the tongue, while small and hidden away (most of the time at least), is potentially one of our greatest enemies, and can lead us into all sorts of troubles if we don’t control it. We are spiritual beings, and our words spoken on earth have spiritual significance - what we bind on earth will be bound in heaven. (Matthew 16: 19)

Words have great power, and we misuse them at our peril. But if we use them as God expects and teaches us to use them, “full of grace and seasoned with salt”, then we have within us an immense powerhouse for good to bring healing and peace to a troubled and hurting world.

Nowhere is the power of our words better illustrated, than in Mark 11: 23 – “For assuredly, I say to you, whoever **says** to this mountain, be removed and be cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he **says** will be done, he will have whatever he **says**.” Our words, backed by faith have mountain-moving power.

It is up to us then to choose whether the mountain we move has good or evil consequences. For out of our mouth comes both blessing and cursing. Our words can kill, and they can make alive.

Let us pray, with the great psalmist of Israel, a prayer that is both important and most relevant to the Kingdom business professional:

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”