

THE IMPORTANCE OF A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE

How beautiful is your tongue?

Or haven't you ever really considered your tongue in terms of its attractiveness?

You don't look at it very often in the mirror.

You don't go on shopping trips for it.

You don't have a weekly appointment at the tongue beautician.

Avon and Revlon don't sell cosmetics for it.

You don't have to diet to get it back in shape.

Men don't ogle it or whistle at it or write poems about it.

Yet it is your tongue, more than the form of your face, or the dimensions of your figure, or the lavishness of your wardrobe, or the size of your income, which determines whether or not you are a beautiful person.

The tongue can give new delights, year after year.

The tongue can make a plain person into a beautiful person.

The tongue can heal bruises and scrapes.

The tongue can soothe the agitated temper.

The tongue can give hope to the despondent soul.

The tongue can point the way to God.

The Bible compares it to the rudder of a ship - which, although it is relatively small, controls the direction of the entire vessel: "Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs" (James 3:4). The Bible also compares it to a fire - of which a small spark can create a great holocaust: "So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!" (James 3:5).

The tongue can make or break your marriage.

It can make your home a paradise or a desert.

It can draw your children to you in affection or send them away from you in disgust.

It can make and keep friends or lose them.

It can defend a good cause or allow an evil cause to go unchecked.

It can make the difference between hiring and firing.

It can heal a church or kill it.

It can attract people to Christ or send them away from Him.

It can honor God or curse Him.

It can save potential suicides, and it can drive people to self-destruction. As Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

Your reputation will, in large part, be established by the use you make of your tongue. It will leave a lasting impression on people. It will label your character. The bystanders at the trial of Jesus said more than they realized when they said to Peter, "Your accent betrays you" (Matthew 26:73).

It's not an easy matter to cultivate an attractive tongue. "For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, but no human being can tame the tongue - a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:7,8). The tongue is an onery critter, wild as a bucking bronco. Just when we think we have it under control - its mighty energy harnessed, its wild nature tamed - the wild mustang spirit breaks out again, sending the snorting creature into a bucking spree, hooves flying, boards splintering, harness dangling, and dust choking.

How, then, can the tongue be brought under control? How can it be tamed and trained to become a thing of beauty and useful power?

This powerful organ can be made beautifully powerful only by bringing it under the control of an even greater power - the power of God's Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). When the Spirit came at Pentecost, the first object on earth that it used was the tongue! The disciples began to

speaking in languages that could be understood by the foreign Jews who were visiting in Jerusalem for the feast. Simon Peter - the same Peter who earlier had cursed and sworn before a servant girl while denying Christ - got up to give a sermon, and the Holy Spirit used his tongue so marvelously that three thousand people responded and were saved.

In I Corinthians 12:3 we read, "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." It is the Spirit which transforms the cursing tongue into a confessing tongue.

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A SILENT TONGUE

It was once said of a great linguist, "He could remain silent in seven different languages."

The Bible certainly isn't silent about the art of keeping silent.

Proverbs 10:19 says that "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent."

Ecclesiastes says, in the well-known "a time to" passage, that there is a time to keep silent and a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7). All too often we get our times mixed up; we speak when we ought to keep silent, and we keep silent when we ought to speak.

Psalm 4:4 teaches us to "commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent."

And it says in the letter of James: "Know this, my beloved brethren, Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). Most of us do just the opposite - we are slow to hear and quick to speak.

It's true, isn't it, that so often when we are conversing with another person, we don't really listen to what she is saying. In fact, while the other person is speaking, we are thinking about what we are going to say in return. If both individuals are going through the same little ritual, we have the ludicrous situation of two people talking to themselves together. There is a sobering proverb: "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion" (Proverbs 18:2).

How does one develop a beautiful tongue? The first exercise we suggest is this: initiate a program of *constructive silence*. It won't be easy, because it takes more muscle power to keep the tongue silent than to activate it.

Constructive Silence Eliminates Gossip

We ought to be "slow to speak" said James 1:19. Why? Because much of what we are tempted to say has no constructive purpose. Much of it is just gossip - a mixture of truth, half-truth, and outright untruth - which hurts everyone and helps no one. Even if it is the truth, are you under an obligation to broadcast it to the world?

If you say nothing, no one can repeat it. When it comes to gossip, a beautiful tongue is a silent tongue.

Constructive Silence Promotes Harmony With Others

We could stay out of a lot of trouble with other people if we would relax our tongues a bit more. You may have noticed that James 1:19 places speech and anger close together: "Be ... slow to speak, slow to anger."

We speak most impulsively when we are angry. We speak most rapidly when we are angry. We speak most unthinkingly when we are angry. Tempers and voices rise together. It's not the disagreement itself that leaves the scars after an argument; it's the words that were said in haste.

Another thing to consider: it's a well-known fact that we irritate people when we talk too much. Compulsive talkers find it difficult to keep friends. The good listener is more popular than the poor listener. It's simply common sense and good manners to refrain from monopolizing the conversation.

Constructive Silence Can Give You a Ministry to Others

Did you know that often you can be of great help to others simply by being a "sounding board" for them? People are troubled, or aged, or lonely, or making a decision, or simply need someone to care. You don't have to produce sage advice or magnificent words of wisdom; you just provide an open ear.

Occasionally a psychiatrist will admit that a major part of his therapy is simply listening while his patients speak their minds. And these folks are willing to pay \$25 to \$100 per hour just to have somebody listen without interrupting or arguing. The implication is that there is often no one at home who is willing to silence his tongue long enough to open his ears.

PASTOR - ELDER - SHEPHERD

"Church members often go to their pastors for precisely the same reason. They need someone who will listen. There have been times when I as a pastor have been thanked over and over again for "how much I have helped," when actually I had said hardly anything during the entire call."

Often extramarital affairs originate not because of unfulfilled passion or premeditated unfaithfulness, but because one person needed to talk and a friend happened to be willing to listen. Wives - listen!

Many of our personal problems could be solved so easily if we would just learn to listen! We could save hundreds of dollars on medical bills; we could enjoy happier marriages; we could contribute to the well-being of others, if we would just close our mouths and open our ears.

Constructive Silence Is Important in Our Relationship With God

Elijah expected God to reveal Himself in the great windstorm and in the earthquake and in the fire. Instead, He revealed Himself with a still, small voice (I Kings 19:9-18). If Elijah hadn't kept quiet and listened intently, he wouldn't have heard God's message for himself and for Israel.

"Be still," says the Lord, "and know that I am God" (Psalms 46:10). "Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord," said the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 2:13).

Prayer is to be a two-way conversation with God. Prayer is with the ears as well as with the mouth. Listen for the still, small voice. Give God a chance to get a word in - and give Him enough room so He doesn't have to get it in edgewise.

To Help Relax Your Tongue

1. Make a call on an elderly person and give her an entire hour to talk about anything she wants to talk about.
2. After conversing with a friend, jot down as accurately as possible everything she said. In other words, check on how good you were as a listener.
3. Refrain from passing on a tempting tidbit of gossip, even though you think it won't hurt anyone. It's good discipline for the tongue (and it probably would hurt someone).
4. Listen carefully at the next discussion group you sit in on - whether it be a Sunday school class or a meeting of the Garden Club. Try to answer these questions: What percentage of the group members did 80 percent of the talking? Was it the ones who knew the most who did the most talking?
5. Next time you pray, give God equal time. If you pray for five minutes, remain silent for five minutes. If you pray ten minutes, remain silent ten minutes. After you have spoken to Him, let Him speak to you.
6. Resist the temptation to argue an unimportant point, even though you know you are right. Just be quiet about it and talk about something constructive instead. Or better yet, let somebody else talk about something constructive.

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS AN APPRECIATIVE TONGUE

We all know how wonderful it is to be appreciated - to know that your sweat, worry, time, and tears had a happy effect on some life, and then to have that life respond with a gesture of thanks.

If it is important to you to be appreciated, then it is logical to assume that it is important to appreciate. It is, in fact, appreciative people who are most appreciated by others!

An appreciative tongue is so important that in America we set aside a special day in November to exercise it! Our Pilgrim fathers knew the value of an appreciative tongue. May we never abandon that part of our rich heritage.

An Appreciative Tongue Exemplifies True Godliness

One of the surest signs of genuine godliness is a sincere sense of appreciation before the Almighty.

What, according to Romans 1, is the tragic fault of those who have drifted away from God? The answer is in verse 21: "For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him."

An Appreciative Tongue Will Put Our Requests Into Perspective

"Have no anxiety about anything," says the letter, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

A beautiful prayer will not only ask God for something new; it will thank Him for something old. A prayer of blessing will accompany a prayer for blessing.

Ask God for cake, if you will, but first thank Him for bread. Ask Him for victory over the power of sin, but also thank Him for deliverance from the guilt of sin. Ask Him for a happier home life, but thank Him first for a home. Ask Him for shoes, but also thank Him for feet.

An Appreciative Tongue Will Give You a Better Home Life

It was the happy experience of the woman described in Proverbs 31 to be appreciated: "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (vs. 28). No wonder she was such a remarkable person! She had a cheering section! In her home, the practice of personal appreciation was the accepted life-style.

An appreciative tongue acts as a love-bond for all relationships, and this is especially true in our homes.

Do you really want to make your husband feel that his life is worth living? Then appreciate him! And let him know about it!

Perhaps he has provided you with a comfortable living. Perhaps he can afford only the modest things in life. No matter; *he provides*, and he works hard to earn his paycheck. Appreciate it.

Accentuate the positive. Instead of complaining about what you don't have, tell him you appreciate what you do have. Instead of harping about the old washing machine, emphasize how beautifully the new vacuum cleaner works. Even your "innocent" remarks about Mrs. Snelling's beautiful new clothes will probably be interpreted by him as a back-handed insult to his earning power (and it is, isn't it?). He'll become a better handler of the family finances if you compliment him on his successes. He'll become a better lover if you tell him how much you enjoy him. He'll become a better father if you verbally approve of the way he handled a particular discipline situation.

Loved ones tend to become what you say they are!

An Appreciative Tongue Will Change Your Perspective on Things

She who has learned to appreciate has learned to see the beautiful.

A vulture and a hummingbird are flying over the same desert. The vulture will find a decaying dead body, because that's what he is looking for. The hummingbird will find a beautiful flower, because that's what he is looking for. You will find what you want to find.

The appreciative customer at the check-out counter will be more inclined to notice the friendliness of the bag-packer than the grumpiness of the check-out girl. When working in the garden, the appreciative person will be happier over the strawberries than she will be disgusted

with the weeds. When caring for the baby, she will talk more about the joy of seeing the child grow than she will complain about dirty diapers. When evaluating the neighbors, she will treasure more highly their friendliness than she will curse their noisy dog. In going to church, the appreciative woman will treasure more highly the truth of a sermon than she will deplore the preacher's nasal voice.

Appreciation will not eliminate all the ugliness, unrest, and uncertainty of life, but it will help you to cope with it and to enjoy it a great deal more.

1. This month, compliment five or more of the following people, taking special note of their response to your appreciation:
 - a. The check-out girl at the supermarket, for her pleasant smile.
 - b. The station attendant, for the extra-clean windshield.
 - c. The waitress at the restaurant, for her efficiency.
 - d. A Sunday school teacher, for her faithfulness.
 - e. ~~The neighbor, for not waking you up at 6:30 a.m. with his power mower.~~ (If you really want to shock her, compliment the postlude; no one ever seems to listen to that.)
 - f. A neighbor, for not waking you up at 6:30 a.m. with his power mower.
 - g. Your husband, for his uncanny ability to fix the toaster.
 - h. Your mother, for her excellent gravy.
 - i. ----- etc., etc.
2. When you pray, accompany each request with a related word of thanks. Discipline yourself not to ask for anything until you have first thanked Him for something.
3. Look for things to be thankful for, rather than for things to gripe about. Be like the hummingbird, not like the vulture. You'll be surprised to see a vast treasury of beauty, love, and strength that you never knew was there.

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A WITNESSING TONGUE

There are two extremes when it comes to witnessing for Christ. There are those who cannot enter into any kind of normal conversation without making a hard-sell pitch for the listener to be saved. Eventually they find that people begin avoiding them as if they had leprosy. On the other hand, there are those who never, never, never give the slightest indication that they are Christian believers and wouldn't have the foggiest idea what to say if someone asked them how to become one.

Most of us are somewhere in between these two extremes. There may be a few who ought to tone down a bit, but chances are that most of us are nearer to the second extreme than we are to the first. We may talk about our faith. We may talk about our minister, but we don't say much about our Savior. We pass up glorious opportunities to witness because we are afraid of what people will say - and because we haven't been taught what to say.

A Private Faith Must Also Be a Public Faith

Believing and confessing are Siamese twins. What the heart knows, the tongue must say. "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord," says the Bible, "and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved".

Let us say, by way of illustration, that you are unjustly charged with a crime such as disorderly conduct. Your lawyer might be inclined to call to the witness stand various friends of yours who would be willing to vouch for your gentle and non-violent character. How would you feel if one by one your "friends" refused to take the witness stand, stating that they were "too busy" or "embarrassed by the publicity," or "afraid of the questions that might be asked"? How do you suppose Christ would feel if you, who profess to be His friend, back down with all kinds of excuses when called upon by the court of the world to "give an account for the hope that is in you"?

Secondly, the witnessing tongue must be a gentle tongue. No one can be an effective witness with a chip on her shoulder. The witnessing

tongue must reflect the compassionate spirit of Christ as He dealt with the various kinds of sinners of His day. It must attract rather than antagonize, invite rather than threaten, and console rather than condemn. If the bridge of human friendship is blocked, the Gospel will not get across.

Thirdly, the witnessing tongue must be a reverent tongue. We understand this to mean reverence for God, reverence for the great truths which are being shared, and reverence for the personality of the other person. If there must be a debate, let it be in the spirit of promoting God's truth rather than gaining a victory.

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A CLEAN TONGUE

A certain toothpaste container says that its product is valuable if used with a "conscientiously applied program of oral hygiene."

What America needs more than it realizes is a conscientiously applied program of oral hygiene. And it's not the kind that comes out of a toothpaste tube or that is assured if you see your dentist every six months. It's the kind that only Christ can give when He applies His unique cleansing action to the entire oral cavity.

America has an X-rated mouth.

Profanity is everywhere -

- From the ghetto to the vice-president's office.
- From the PTA to the Senate.
- From the schoolyard to the Convention of Vacuum Cleaner Salesmen.
- From the kitchen to the beauty shop.
- From the drive-in movie to the Broadway state.

Yes, and even from the Ministerial Association to the pulpit; for the use of profanity supposedly labels the radical chic clergyman as "one of the boys" and expresses his new "liberation."

And speaking of liberation - some women believe that women's lib has set them free to use the same swear words their husbands use. That's liberation?

A study of profanity at Wayne State University revealed that college students use one off-color word for every fourteen. That's better than adults, who use one bad word in every ten.

Few people seem to be concerned about dirty tongues. They're concerned about air pollution and water pollution and earth pollution - but they aren't concerned about pollution of the sound waves.

The words of Jesus are appropriate in this age in which we are so concerned about the purity of what we eat, breathe, and drink: "Not what goes into the mouth defiles (pollutes) a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles (pollutes) a man" (Matthew 15:11).

We'd like to share a few more things that the Bible says about a clean tongue.

A Clean Tongue Shows Reverence for God

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

Society may think he's cute. But the Bible says that God will not hold him guiltless. Why?

Because a name is more than a name. It represents a person. When Sally Smith bitterly complains that because of gossip she has "lost her good name," she is not saying that someone has harmed the letters S A L L Y S M I T H. She is saying that someone has harmed her reputation, besmirched her character before others, and has hurt her to the core of her personality.

Similarly, to abuse the name of God is to abuse more than a few letters of the alphabet. It is to abuse a Person. It is to show extreme disrespect for the Holy One. It is to harm God's reputation. It is to attack His very Being. It is to play lightly with His character.

*A Clean Tongue Displays Reverence for All Things Holy,
Personal, Private, and Important*

A clean tongue is a beautiful tongue because it breathes reverence - reverence for all things good and beautiful; reverence for life itself; reverence for the way God has made us.

She who speaks with a clean tongue expresses a sensitivity to the spiritual.

She who refuses to use the common four-letter words for sexual realities implies a high esteem for that relationship. The profane tongue implies animalism and contempt.

She who speaks carefully of words like "heaven," "hell," and "damn," expresses reverence for the respective realities of those words, whether happy or dreadful. She who uses them indiscriminately is saying that she either denies or ignores their existence.

*A Clean Tongue Displays a Good Stewardship of the God-Given
Talent of Clear Concise, and Colorful Speech*

The ability to communicate with the tongue is one of God's greatest gifts to the human race. The Christian believer realizes that speech, like her other talents and abilities, is to be used and educated and perfected as a part of her stewardship on earth.

Any ignoramus can swear. It takes no special talent to use cuss words. A parrot or myna bird can learn to swear quite proficiently. Limited word power often reflects limited brain power.

The clean-tongued person, on the other hand, is more than likely one who has consciously sought for original, colorful, and clear ways of expressing herself. She will avoid cliches in speech, seeking to get out of the habit of using "flat" and overused words (and there is no cliche quite as trite as a swear word). When she speaks, she really tries to communicate; she is not content to use the same invectives that she might, in a fit of rage, say to herself in an empty room.

A Clean Tongue Is, by Its Very Rarity, a Witnessing Tongue

Profanity is so common today that its very absence is distinctive. The person who has a clean tongue stands out in a group simply because she is a rarity.

Hopefully, your Christian witness will be far more explicit than that, but the mere absence of gutter words in your speech will label you as a person with certain convictions. Others will be strongly suspicious that you are a Christian believer and may even begin to excuse or curtail their own foul speech in your presence.

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A KIND TONGUE

One of the most famous chapters of the entire Bible begins with these words: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (I Corinthians 13:1).

Cymbals have their place in an orchestra, but can you imagine the insanity they would cause if they were crashed constantly throughout an entire symphony?

Clanging gongs have their place in life - to wake us up, to warn us of fire, and to tell school classes that the period is over - but when they "stick," the sound becomes deafening and irritating.

Such is the sound of a voice without kindness. It may speak with beautiful eloquence, perfect diction, erudite intelligence, and syrupy sweetness. Yes, it may even speak in unknown tongues. But if it does not speak with genuine love, it emits but a garbled sound of irritating disharmony.

Jesus taught that there is one word that summarizes the entire Law: "You shall love the Lord your God ... you shall love your neighbor" (Mark 12:30,31). Love summarizes both the contents and the spirit of the Ten Commandments. The woman who speaks lovingly has made good progress in keeping God's holy Law.

A Kind Tongue Helps to Make a House a Home

We turn once again to Proverbs 31, that remarkable and still-timely vignette of a truly wonderful wife and mother. She is faithful, ambitious, intelligent, and generous. But she is more than that: she is kind. The beauty of her person is enhanced by the kindness of her words. "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue" (Proverbs 31:26). It is no wonder that a few verses later it says, "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (vs. 28).

It is with kindness as it is with most good things: the place to begin is in the home.

Many, if not most, family problems could be solved or at least eased by a kind tongue. A little kindness goes a long way when your husband comes home from work - hot, tired, and irritable. A little kindness can solve a lot of math problems when Junior becomes disgusted with his homework. A little kindness saves many tears when Sally comes home crying because "I'm so ugly and nobody likes me and I'll never get a boyfriend."

A Kind Tongue Overcomes Speech Problems

Some people feel self-conscious when they speak. They think they say "dumb things," or have a peculiar accent, or have a voice that is pitched too high or too low, or have a small vocabulary, or say the wrong thing at the wrong time. If you feel this way, the gift of kindness may do more for you than a college course in public speaking. If you speak in love, all the alleged imperfections (supposed or real) simply become a harmony to the melody of kindness.

A Kind Tongue Supplements a Truthful Tongue

The Bible says in Ephesians that it's not enough just to speak the truth. We are to speak the truth "in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

Perhaps your husband acts boorish when he cracks his knuckles in public. Tell him the truth - but tell the truth in love.

Perhaps your friend is inviting tragedy by becoming too friendly with the plumber. Tell her the truth, and tell it to her soon (see James 5:19,20), but tell it to her with kindness.

A Kind Tongue Promotes Peace

The Apostle Peter (who, by the way, had to struggle with a boisterous and unruly tongue) says, "Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing. For he that would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile" (I Peter 3:9,10).

According to the letter of James, the tongue is like a wild horse, difficult to bridle and control. There is, however, one bit that will control the tongue. This is a bit of love.

We need a bit of love at all times, but we especially need it during times of personal antagonism. It's relatively easy to be kind to others when they are kind to us. The real test comes when we are provoked.

It's easy to be kind when hubby comes home with flowers; it's not so easy when he comes home criticizing the tasteful way you have rearranged the furniture.

It's easy to smile at the customer who is satisfied; it's harder when she blames you for the high price tags.

It's easy to be kind when your neighbor is sweet and minds her own business; it's not so easy when she implies that you are raising a brood of undisciplined little delinquents.

The kind tongue is a kind of tongue that reveals Jesus as such an extraordinary person. "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return" (I Peter 2:23). He loved the world He came to save to such an extent that He controlled the impulse to speak out in anger against the very people who were seeking to kill Him. Among His dying words were words of kindness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

A Kind Tongue Is a Positive Witness for Christ

A woman of this author's acquaintance is well known in her church as an articulate leader at women's meetings and as an impressive leader in prayer. She is also known by the postmen, the deliverymen, the garbage men, the policemen, the service station men, and the paper boys of the neighborhood as "Mrs. Complainer" (they usually use a more descriptive word). For all her angelic utterances, she is a poor testimony to the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Her beautiful sounds are no more than clanging gongs and clanging cymbals.

The advice of Colossians 4:5,6 is appropriate: "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt."

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A TONGUE THAT DOES NOT GOSSIP

We have heard people confess almost every sin there is, plus a few more. But we have never heard anyone admit to gossiping.

Perhaps it's because gossiping is so common that we don't realize we are doing it. Perhaps it's because we think we have excused ourselves by preceding gossip with such phrases as "I don't mean to talk about her, but ..." and "Don't tell anyone else about this...." Perhaps it's because if we would admit it, we might feel obligated to stop it.

The practice of gossip is one of the most subtle and common diseases of the tongue. It attacks both old and young, male and female, married and unmarried. It is a highly communicable disease (pardon the pun), and it is a sickness which leaves ugly scars.

Gossip Is Irretrievable

It has been said that letting the cat out of the bag is easy enough; the difficult part is trying to get it back in again.

Once a rumor is started, it is almost impossible to stop it. We may be sorry about it, and we may be forgiven by God for it, but we cannot undo the consequences.

Depend on this: the words you say about others will eventually get back to them. The Book of Ecclesiastes has an interesting way of putting it: "Even in your thought, do not curse the king, nor in your bedchamber curse the rich; for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter" (Ecclesiastes 10:20). What the writer is saying is that it's almost impossible to defame someone without that person somehow hearing about it. The means may be so mysterious that we accuse the very birds, but the message gets through.

"He who repeats a matter alienates a friend," says the Book of Proverbs 17:9. You may not think the friend will hear, but she always does.

A good rule to follow: If you wouldn't say it to her face, don't say it.

Gossip Is Unloving

No one can gossip about someone and truly love that person at the same time.

The second great commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Even if the tales we tell succeed in passing the test of truthfulness, they still must pass the test of love. It is at this point that our conversation often "flunks out."

According to the great love chapter, I Corinthians 13, one of the characteristics of love is that it "does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right" (13:6). Phillips translates the phrase in this way: "It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails." The New English Bible lends still further light: "Love keeps no score on wrongs; does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth."

A substantial part of gossip is gloating over the sins, faults, and idiosyncrasies of other people. Love, according to the Word of God,

denies that luxury to our egos. Love will rejoice in telling good news and will refrain from wallowing in that which is bad.

What does the Bible say we are to do when a fellow believer falls into sin? Does it say we should spread the news all over town? Please refer to Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Four Reasons Why We Gossip

- ① We gossip because we lack healthy self-confidence and self-respect.

It is when we feel insecure and threatened that we are most likely to spread ugly gossip about others. By rubbing some of the glitter from someone else's crown, we believe our own will shine more brightly. By cutting others down, we think we will feel taller.

The solution, then, is not merely to stop downgrading others; it is to begin upgrading yourself. Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). He didn't say instead of yourself; He said as yourself. He implied that you can't really accept your neighbor until you accept yourself. You must be a precious and valuable person, or God wouldn't have created you in His own image, sent His Son to die for you, promised the power of His Spirit in your life, and prepared a place for you to live with Him forever!

- ② We gossip because we haven't sufficiently stimulated our minds with more important things.

Says Charles Allen in *God's Psychiatry*: "Those of great minds discuss ideas, people of mediocre minds discuss events, and those of small minds discuss other people."

One positive solution to gossip is to involve your mind with better and more important things. Be informed about world events and their significance. Read good books - nonfiction as well as fiction. Flip the TV dial from a situation comedy or soap opera to a talk show, a debate, or a documentary. Take an interest in the great social challenges of our time, such as race and poverty, and be able to discuss them intelligently.

- ③ We gossip because we are idle.

The housewife has made the beds and washed the dishes. It's not time to get lunch ready yet, and the soap operas don't come on until afternoon, so she spends an hour on the phone with a friend - talking about you know who.

The retiree has pulled all the weeds, and the mail won't be here for three hours, so she seeks out a neighbor for the latest news.

It's not a new story. Paul observed that widows in the church often did not have enough to do, so they learned to be "idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not" (I Timothy 5:13).

There's nothing wrong with good fellowship. But all too often the ladies indulge in gossip-by-the-hour simply because they have nothing more valuable to do. One of the best cures for gossip is to get so busy doing something constructive that you just don't have time to worry about the private business of others.

- ④ We gossip because we are in the habit of gossiping.

Many a student who has been away at college for some time is shocked when he returns home - shocked at the intensity and volume of his parents' gossip. When living at home he had simply accepted it as "normal," but now that he has been away for awhile he sees it in a new perspective. Perhaps a tape recorder secretly placed in the kitchen or living room would shock us into realizing how gossip has become habitual with us.

- Ⓐ Before you pass along any story, check with the subject of the story to see if it is true. If, for instance, you hear that Pat Brown is stepping out on her husband, check with Pat Brown. This may

accomplish one of two things: it may curtail your talk, and it may curtail Pat Brown's extracurricular activities.

b. Test the stories you hear by Philippians 4:8:

- Is it true?
- Is it honorable?
- Is it just?
- Is it pure?
- Is it lovely?
- Is it gracious?

If it passes all these tests, then by all means get on the telephone and pass it along!

c. Discuss some possible cures for gossiping. Talk it over with your husband and your children.

d. Next time you are with your friends at coffee, mutually agree to talk about anything at all except other people. Make a rule that the first offender has to pay some penalty, such as paying a quarter or providing the cookies at the next get-together. It may sound silly, but it will keep you aware.

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A TRUTHFUL TONGUE

A beautiful tongue is a truthful tongue because God, who invented the tongue, designed it to tell the truth. "Behold," says the psalmist, "thou desirest truth in the inward being" (Psalm 51:6). "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 12:22). The ninth commandment calls for a truthful tongue: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

God is such a stickler for the truth because He is a God of truth. "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Numbers 23:19). Falsehood is the very antithesis of all that He is; therefore He hates it. His enemy, Satan, is called "the father of lies" (John 8:44). Murderers, idolaters, and others will join the liars in the "lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). The lying tongue will come to a rather ugly end!

Lying is one of the worst forms of moral ugliness. It is a lie that caused our first parents to sin in the Garden of Eden. It was lies that brought about the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). It was lies that pinned Jesus to the cross.

More money is stolen by the tip of the tongue than by the point of a gun. Burglars may steal their thousands, but liars steal their tens of thousands - by padded expense accounts, misrepresented goods, altered records, false diagnosis of automobile and appliance troubles, and various confidence schemes.

There is little that breaks down the mutual confidence and respect of home life more quickly than the discovery of a lie. It says of the "ideal wife" in Proverbs 31 that "the heart of her husband trusts in her" (v. 11). Mutual trust is the silent and unseen oxygen that fuels the fires of love.

Probably most of us are careful to avoid outright and blatant lies. It is more likely to be the subtle untruths that keep our tongues from being as beautiful as they can be. It is these subtle untruths that will occupy us in this discussion.

A Truthful Tongue Avoids Half-Truths

There are many ways of avoiding the truth. One of them is to tell only part of the truth. "Honey, a truck ran into my back fender at the intersection of 4th and Grove." That's true of course - but the other half of the truth is that the truck went through a green light and you went through a red one.

Another way to tell a half-truth is to combine truth and falsehood in one statement, thus making the falsehood more plausible: "She has been acting grumpy lately; she must be angry with me over something."

The first part of the statement may be entirely true and the second part entirely false. Yet when they are placed side by side, the false is made to sound true.

A Truthful Tongue Speaks Up to Defend the Truth

A person can sometimes tell a lie merely by keeping silent. Jesus was condemned because no one stood up before Pilate to tell the truth and set the record straight.

Over coffee after a women's meeting someone speculates that since Jean Simpson has missed two meetings in a row, "she's probably mad about something again." You don't really care for Jean Simpson, and you know that she often does get angry about little things. But you also know that she's visiting a sister in Chicago. If you say nothing, you are implying consent to the unkind judgment.

A Truthful Tongue Distinguishes Between Fact and Opinion

The story is being circulated in the community that John Meredith left college because he was caught smoking marijuana. The truth is that John quit college because he couldn't make the academic requirements. This talk about marijuana was somebody's educated guess. In the mysterious chemistry of gossip, opinion is a volatile substance which readily crystallizes into "fact" when mixed with a little saliva.

Every day we hear opinions stated as facts. "She certainly is unfriendly." "He is a poor minister." "You can't trust him." But these are personal viewpoints only; they are apt to be biased and one-sided. They would be more accurately stated, "I think that...." The person with a beautiful tongue has trained herself to separate fact from implication, opinion, deduction, and innuendo.

A Truthful Tongue Is Careful About Absolute Statements

"Henry," the wife cries, "you never talk to me any more." That's not quite the truth, is it? It's the kind of exaggerated statement that so often cuts to the heart.

"You are always so ungrateful."

"All you ever think about is sex."

"You're just like your mother."

"We never go out any more."

"Our marriage has been miserable for eleven years."

"I don't have anything to wear."

Not only will you be less untruthful if you cut out the absolute words such as "always" and "never," but you'll get along a lot better with your loved ones.

A Truthful Tongue Speaks the Truth About Oneself

It's perhaps (notice I used the word perhaps) just as easy to be dishonest about yourself as to be untruthful about others.

How easily we justify our prejudices, excuse our mistakes, defend our bad judgments, and explain why we have failed! As the teenager said to his mother after she had finished giving him a lecture on some misdemeanor, "Mother, why do you suppose I do these things? Is it heredity or environment?"

On the other hand, it is also easy to do injustice to the truth by underrating ourselves. So often we fail unnecessarily, and we fail because we have told ourselves a lie. We say, "I can't do it," or "I'm just not smart enough," or "People will just laugh at me," or "I'll make a fool of myself."

God gave you talents, vitality, personality, and strength. Don't lie about what God gave you!

A Truthful Tongue Is Careful About "White Lies"

Most of us will agree that always it is best to tell the truth. But we also know there are borderline cases, the "white lies" which are meant for good.

What about the resident of Holland, for instance, who during World War II gave refuge to Jews? Was he obligated to tell the truth to the Gestapo?

What about some borderline cases?

The husband who tells his wife that her new dress is beautiful, even though he thinks it isn't?

The housewife who tells the mysterious stranger at the door that her husband will be home in ten minutes?

The medical doctor and the patient's family who do not tell the patient he has an inoperable cancer?

The parents who tell their children that Aunt Jenny went away on a long vacation, when in reality she ran off with the butcher?

No doubt you will wish to consider these questions at the meeting. On what basis do you decide the answer?

Remember, a beautiful tongue is a truthful tongue.

a. Keep a notebook of falsehoods, half-truths, and assorted opinions which are passed on to you as "truth" this month. Include such items as --

--the dogmatic statement that a radio preacher vowed was the only possible interpretation of some obscure passage in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

--what the garage man said was wrong with your car.

--the claims made by a television commercial.

--the excuses your children gave for not practicing the piano.

--the incorrect weight printed on the meat or fruit package at the supermarket.

b. Before quoting another person or repeating her opinion, check with her first, asking, "Did I understand you right?" or "Is this what you really meant?"

c. Be careful of your statements. Discipline yourself to tell the truth and only the truth. Don't exaggerate it, minimize it, twist it, or mix it with a pinch of anything else.

d. Be careful of your actions. Tell with your face what you are thinking in your mind and saying with your lips. If you disagree, don't nod your head. If you are concerned, don't try to act ho-hum. If you are unconcerned, don't make a pretense of being excited.

e. Don't do anything that you are ashamed to tell the truth about!

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight" (Proverbs 12:22).

"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart" (Psalms 51:6).

"Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with her neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25).

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A CONTENTED TONGUE

Why were the Israelites who escaped from the slave camps of Egypt not allowed to enter the Promised Land? Why did their bones lie white in the desert? Was it not because of their complaining tongues?

And the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron, "How long shall this wicked congregation murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and all of your number, numbered from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun'" (Numbers 14:26-30).

"What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you?" asked James. "Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You

desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war" (James 4:1,2).

Among those who will be dealt with most harshly at the judgment, says Jude, are the "grumblers" and the "malcontents" (Jude 16).

The Apostle Paul had plenty to complain about. He had a "thorn in the flesh" that must have been painful and inconvenient. Time and time again he was beaten, shipwrecked, forcibly evicted, and persecuted. He spent two years languishing in a prison without any formal charges being lodged against him. Yet he was no complainer. "I have learned," he said, "in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13). In this same letter, written from a prison cell, the words "joy" and "rejoice" appear no less than thirteen times in five short chapters.

"There is great gain," Paul said to Timothy, "in godliness with contentment" (I Timothy 6:6).

"Rob no one by violence or by false accusation," John the Baptist told the soldiers, "and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14).

"Be content with what you have," said the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, "for he has said 'I will never fail you nor forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

A grumbling and complaining tongue is an ugly tongue.

A contented tongue is a beautiful tongue.

A Contented Tongue Handles Illness With Courage and Quiet Strength

I am sure you have all met the kind of woman who never gets asked "How are you?" The uninitiated soul who unknowingly asks that fatal question is treated to a lengthy and gory discourse of the length of her recent operation, the amount of blood lost, and the precise medical terms for at least half of the organs of her body. To say nothing of last year's arthritis, this year's sinus trouble, and her sister's miscarriage.

You have also no doubt visited people whom you knew were in great pain, yet they maintained a spirit of cheerfulness and strong faith. Sweat was on the forehead, but a smile was on the lips. You were inspired and lifted up, and you walked away thinking that your own problems were not so bad, after all.

James tells us what to do when affliction strikes: "Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise" (James 5:13). He doesn't say we ought to tell the whole world how terrible we feel.

Then there is the instruction from Paul (who himself had more than his share of physical suffering) to the weakly young Timothy: "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3).

It's not easy to exhibit a beautiful tongue of peaceful trust when the body is being plagued with pain. It takes more than power of God's Holy Spirit. "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

A Contented Tongue Disciplines Itself in the Face of Apparent Injustices

It's not easy to keep from complaining. Life just doesn't seem fair sometimes. You struggle along honestly, living moderately in order to stay within your income. Meanwhile, the fellow down the street operates a fraudulent air conditioner repair service and owns a swimming pool, three cars, a camper, a boat, and four color TV sets. Your teenage daughter, who is trying to lead a godly and chaste life, gets discouraged because her unprincipled classmates are getting the dates. Your son comes home with an honest C, and his classmates receive dishonest B's. No, it's not easy to keep from complaining.

When you're feeling low because of the apparent success of the dishonest and immoral people of the world, read Psalms 37. Often called "The Psalm for the Fretful," it reassures us that God is still a God of justice, and there is no wrong which will not eventually be made right:

"Fret not yourself because of the wicked, be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb (vv. 1,2).

Are you tempted to complain to God? "Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!" (vs. 7).

Are you tempted to lash out with your tongue in jealous anger? "Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil" (vs. 8).

A Contented Tongue Will Improve Your Church Life

In almost every church there are a number of members who are always, always, always complaining about something. On one particular Sunday Morning after the service, two individuals in my church came up to one of the elders - one to tell him that I was preaching too long and the other to tell him that I wasn't preaching long enough!

Frankly, it gets very disheartening. It makes ministers less effective, and it has been known to send their wives away on vacations to mental institutions. It is discouraging to lay leaders of the church when the very people who always have an excuse for not helping are the same people who sit back and criticize those who finally volunteer to do the job. It is disillusioning to new Christians. They come vibrant and eager to work in the church organizations, expecting to be uplifted and inspired; but instead they find a thistle patch of griping and complaining.

The problem is that the very people who are the complainers, grumblers, and criticizers can't seem to recognize themselves. When they read an article like this, they are already pointing their finger at someone else. Perhaps at this point you should pause about five minutes to consider whether or not it is you I am talking about.

"Do all things without grumbling or questioning," says the scripture, "that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14,15).

A Contented Tongue Will Improve Your Home Life

One who no doubt knew what he was talking about said: "It is better to live in a corner of a housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman" (Proverbs 25:24).

"My husband doesn't hear a word I say," complains Constance Kelly. "He can read the evening paper, listen to a football game on radio, and watch a hockey game on television without missing a thing. But when I talk to him, it's like he's stone deaf."

There are many causes of this malady (which is almost as common as the common cold), and many husbands are simply too self-centered to talk with their wives as equals. But one of the causes of masculine silence in the home is the "nag virus." At first the hubby is willing and even eager to converse with his bride. Then it became apparent that her chief topic of conversation was an endless list of his inadequacies, his unfinished projects, the clothes she didn't have, and how the Van Snozzles had it better than they did. Soon he just turned her off and listened to more pleasant things.

Husbands aren't the only people who get nagged. Sons and daughters are next in line, chiefly over the way they dress, the manner in which they taken care of their rooms, and their choice of friends. "I can do a hundred things right," one teenage girl complained bitterly, "but all I hear about is the few things I do wrong."

the way to cure the nag habit is to accentuate the positive. Complimenting a husband on how well he painted the kitchen will do more for a marriage than criticizing the way he didn't paint the bathroom (besides, the bathroom will probably get painted faster, too). Praising your children for their good habits will encourage them to overcome the bad ones.

Don't allow your family to get into the habit of complaining. Require your children to take a positive attitude toward their school work; don't allow them to become chronic complainers about their teachers and assignments. Require them to take a positive attitude toward the meals you serve; don't allow them to mumble under their breath about eating "this slop again" (yes, I have overheard this in a few homes). Require them to find an answer to each new problem as it emerges, rather than wringing their hands and complaining about how bad things are.

a. Think of all the things you have criticized concerning your church, its leaders, and its pastor. Write them on a sheet of paper, being as specific as you can. Now, on the other side of the sheet, itemize all that you have done in a positive way to correct these faults. Which side of the sheet looks more impressive? After you have done this, vow not to do any more criticizing until you have done all within your power to remedy the situation. In other words, be a builder, not a wrecker.

b. Next time you are about to complain about something you don't have, stop and thank God for something you do have. Then ask a few questions about whatever it is you say is lacking. Is it a necessity or a luxury? How much would you actually use it if you had it? Do you want it because you really need it or because someone else has one like it? Could your money be spent more wisely on something else? What would it do to your stewardship toward the church and other Christian causes?

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A SIMPLE TONGUE

"Simple" is defined in the dictionary as "without ostentation," "unpretending," "natural," "not ornate," "unembellished." A beautifully simple tongue is one which makes no effort to impress, to flatter, to embellish, to exaggerate. It does not try to give the impression that the speaker is richer, wiser, holier, or greater than she really is.

Jesus was a simple man. He made no effort to "make an impression." He wore no clothes that drew special attention to Himself. He made no effort to be seen socializing with the "right" people.

Jesus spoke in simple words. He drew parables and analogies from the common things of life, like mustard seeds and sheepfolds. He didn't try to "tone down" His more pointed remarks. He didn't use obscure words or intellectual-sounding phrases. As a result, the common people heard Him gladly.

The Apostle Paul believed he should follow the example of his Master in this respect. He came preaching, he says, "not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (I Corinthians 1:17). Then he goes on to say that the simple, unembellished truth of God is far more effective in saving the world than all the fancy wisdom of the world:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God (I Corinthians 1:27-29).

A Simple Tongue Uses a Simple Yes or No

Jesus said, "Do not swear at all, either by heaven ... or by the earth ... or by Jerusalem... (or) by your head.... Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew 5:34-37).

This "swearing" does not necessarily refer to profanity. It refers to the making of oaths in order to convince somebody you are telling the truth. The point is that others should be able to assume your truthfulness on the basis of your character. There should be no need to substantiate your words with all sorts of fancy expressions like "by God," "I'll swear on a stack of Bibles," or the childish, "cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye." Establish such a reputation for having a truthful tongue that you can boldly use a simple tongue.

A simple Tongue Avoids Flattery

Gushers are welcome only on oil fields. And even there they are quickly capped.

Remember the old peacock with the huge hat who went around crooning "Isn't it absolutely divine," "How mar-velous," and "Oh, Martha, this is the most heavenly party!" It is well-intentioned, perhaps, and meant to show appreciation, but it was overdone. And when compliments become overdone, they lose both their sincerity and credibility.

One of the most wise sayings in the Book of Proverbs is this one: "It is not good to eat much honey, so be sparing of complimentary words" (Proverbs 25:27). Most people like to eat honey - but only a little at a time. Too often and too much gets sickening. Most people also like to hear compliments - but only a few at a time. Too often and too much gets sickening.

Let's be honest. Many of our compliments are meant more to impress other people than they are to express how we are impressed by them. Then it becomes flattery, and flattery is a form of a lie.

A Simple Tongue Avoids Exaggeration

Titus 2:7 says that in our teaching we are to display "integrity, gravity, and sound speech."

If the incident you are telling your friends about was funny, there is no need to try to make it funnier. If the fish you caught was twelve inches long, tell them it was twelve inches long. If you had an operation last year, there is no need to make it sound worse than it was (if, indeed, you must describe it at all). If your children are intelligent, that fact will be obvious to all and you won't have to conjure up a story about how their teachers praise them. If you find yourself in a certain economic bracket, what good will it do to try to give the impression that you are in a higher one?

A Simple Tongue Uses Simple Language With God

"Holy and infinite Jehovah, we beseech thee," drones the minister, "look down upon us, Thy humble servants, in Thine infinite mercy and with Thy ineffable love...."

That's the kind of pastoral prayer that many of us are used to. There is a certain dignity and beauty about such language in prayer, but we pose some questions. Are dignity and beauty the objectives of prayer? Does the use of high-sounding words increase the effectiveness of the prayer? Do they encourage others to lead in public prayer? Who are we trying to impress - people or God? Or, perhaps, isn't prayer meant to impress anyone?

Jesus advocated simplicity in prayer. He said, "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words" (Matthew 6:7). Then He proceeded to teach His followers a model prayer which is the epitome of directness and simplicity. There is no fluff, no fancy language in the Lord's Prayer - just simple praise and direct petition.

The effective prayer for forgiveness uttered by the publican was only seven words long. Paul prayed for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, not ten times or a hundred times, but only three times.

The best way to pray is in a way which for you is natural, normal, and sincere.

Springboard for discussion:

1. I have trouble controlling my tongue (a) never, (b) seldom, (c) sometimes, (d) frequently.
2. After an argument, I usually feel that I was most hurt by (a) the issues that were involved, or (b) the words that were said.
3. As to gossip, I feel that I am (a) never, (b) seldom, (c) sometimes, (d) frequently guilty.
4. During this past week I was able to use my tongue constructively by
 - comforting a child. --witnessing for Christ.
 - expressing love to --defending a good cause.
my husband.
 - advising a friend. --expressing sympathy and concern.

5. Generally, I believe I talk (a) too much, (b) too little, or (c) about the right amount.
6. Check the faulty uses of the tongue that bother you most in other people (mark three).

--Too talkative	--Unkind
--Unappreciative	--Gossipy
--Never witnessing	--Lying
--Filthy	--Exaggerating
--Complaining	

The Human Tongue Is Distinctive

Some animals have fancier tongues than humans do. Snakes and lizards have forked tongues which also serve as organs of smell. Teeth grow on the tongues of some fish, such as the salmon and trout. Frogs, toads, and chameleons have very long tongues which can dart out with blinding speed to capture insects.

Although our human tongues cannot harpoon a dinner, bite, or smell, they can do something even more fantastic - they can form words. This is one of the abilities which makes us distinctive from the animal world, and this is one of the abilities which gives us such a tremendous potential for both good and evil.

What Others Have Said

"The tongue is, at the same time, the best part of man and his worst; with good government, none is more useful, and without it, none is more mischievous" (Anarcharsis).

"It is observed in the course of worldly things, that man's fortunes are oftener made by their tongues than by their virtues; and more men's fortunes overthrown thereby than by vices" (Sir Walter Raleigh).

"How often you are irresistibly drawn to a plain, unassuming woman, whose soft silvery tones render her positively attractive! In the social circle, how pleasant it is to hear a woman talk in that low key which always characterizes the true lady. In the sanctuary of home, how such a voice soothes the fretful child and cheers the weary husband?" (Charles Lamb).

Isaiah's Tongue

Isaiah 6:1-8 relates the story of how God called Isaiah to become a prophet. He did so by first giving Isaiah a vision of His awesome holiness and then by sanctifying the prophet's tongue. Isaiah realized, after catching a glimpse of the purity of God, that his tongue needed to be purified: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (vs. 5). Then the angel touched the prophet's lips with a burning coal taken from the fire, a token of forgiveness and restoration (and perhaps a hint about how painful it is to cleanse the tongue): "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven" (vs. 7). Then, and only then, was Isaiah ready for service: "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'" (vs. 8).

Truth: When we become aware of the holiness of God, we become aware of how much our tongues need to be cleansed.

Truth: In order to be ready to serve, we must let God cleanse our tongues.

Judgment and the Tongue

At the end of the age, we will be judged by how we have used our tongues. Said Jesus, "I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account of every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36,37). The tongue reveals more about a person than almost anything else does. Although for a time the tongue may "cover up," it eventually reveals the truth about character. Like the mouth of a babbling spring, it reveals the nature of the water's source. "The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil" (Matthew 12:35).

How to Be a Good Listener

Here are some suggestions on how to become a more effective "sounding board" for others:

- ① Be able to keep a confidence. Never, never spread to someone else something which has been told you in confidence, even though you introduce it with, "Don't pass this on to anyone else..."
- ② Don't feel compelled to express agreement or disagreement with every statement made.
- ③ Refrain from belittling her problems by telling about yours.
- ④ Be slow to give advice. Your friend, by "talking it through" with you, will probably be able to come to her own decision.
- ⑤ Ask questions which will help her understand herself, such as "Why do you feel that way?" and "You've changed your opinion about that, haven't you?"
- ⑥ Be able to keep a confidence. (Yes, I know I said it once before.)

Additional Verses for Study and Comment

"When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent" (Proverbs 10:19).

"He (Pilate) entered the praetorium again and said to Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave no answer" (John 19:9).

"Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving" (Ephesians 5:4).

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

"Then I will thank thee in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise thee" (Psalms 35:18).

"And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it" (Mark 14:23).

"And when he had said this, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat" (Acts 27:35).

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A CLEAN TONGUE

Illustration

You may wish to use this illustration to emphasize the holiness of the name of God.

Sometimes when an outstanding athlete graduates from a college or retires from a career in his sport, his number is "retired." For instance, if his suit number was 12, no one in the future will wear number 12. It is set apart for him alone as a token of high esteem and honor. No other athlete will share the glory of that number.

Similarly, the name of God has been "retired," as well as the names for Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. No one else can use it. His name is for His exclusive use. It is a "holy" (literally, "set apart") name, to be treated with reverence and honor. "I am the LORD, that is my name," says God. "My glory I give to no other" (Isaiah 42:8).

Additional Point

You may wish to add an additional point to the ones developed in the main text: *A clean tongue refuses to use filthy talk.*

"Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which is not fitting," says Ephesians 5:4.

X-rated movies have been around for a few years, but X-rated tongues have wagged since earliest history.

Children readily pass on "dirty stories" to their friends and classmates with great gusto, proving how daring they are.

Many adults never grow out of that stage. To the end of their lives they are "proving" their sophistication or cleverness or sensuousness by repeating the same old dog-eared tales. There are some new ones, of course, supplied by many of the "men's" magazines on the market, but they are really retreads of the old ones.

What should you do about the dirty stories and off-color jokes you hear? Sometimes you can't help but hear them, you know. The words of Jesus are appropriate: "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man" (Matthew 15:11). You become defiled when you try to remember the story and pass it on. You don't have to act shocked or laugh nervously; simply throw in a disgusted or pitying glance and forget it.

Discussion Ideas

1. Does your group agree or disagree with the following statements? Why?

"The use of profanity reflects a poverty of vocabulary rather than a richness of intelligence."
"Profanity is man's lowest substitute for wit."
"You can tell the size of a man by the size of the things that makes him swear."

2. Does the stipulation of the third commandment include the various names of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as well as the names of God the Father? Why?

3. What about the slang words that are a little different from the holy names but sound very much like them? For instance, should the Christian use "gosh," "jeez," "gee," etc.?

4. What about the excuse commonly given for swearing: "It's only a habit"? Are we responsible for habits? How do habits originate? Are there good habits and bad habits? Are good deeds less praiseworthy because they are repeated often and have become habitual? Are bad deeds less blameworthy because they are repeated often and have become habitual?

5. The Lord's Prayer is compact, crowding into a few words the basic essentials of good prayer. It includes the phrase, "hallowed be thy name." Is this an indication of how important the third commandment is?

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A KIND TONGUE

The Devastating Power of an Unkind Tongue

According to World Book Encyclopedia about 3,000,000 acres of trees are destroyed by fire in the United States every year. About half of these are caused by nature (lightning); the rest are caused by man. The chief causes of forest fires (in order of frequency) are brush or trash fires which get out of hand, arson, and negligent smokers.

The point is that almost all of these devastating fires are caused by a very small fire or even by a single spark. The fire on one leaf quickly spreads to the branch and thence to the tree and surrounding trees. Thus it is with the fires set by the tongue. Recrimination follows recrimination, and insult follows insult. What begins as a small criticism of one aspect of the person ("Your hair looks lousy.") soon envelopes the entire personality ("I should have listened to my mother and never married you.").

Who knows how many of our blazing racial troubles were ignited years ago when the undisciplined and hate-filled words of a white person lodged in the mind of a young black, smoldering there for years until it erupted in a fire of violence?

For "A Kind Tongue Helps to Make a House a Home

In Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress one of the feminine characters, Talkative, is described as "a saint abroad and a devil at home."

Do you want to make your teenagers bitter against Christianity? One sure way is to talk like a saint at church and lash out like a devil at home. Teenagers see something terribly inconsistent in the mother who speaks with impressive sweetness when she leads the guild devotions and

then at home calls her children a "bunch of brats" before she runs to the phone to tell the world what an awful dress Julia Sparrow was wearing.

A Kind Tongue Promotes Peace

"A soft answer," says one of the Proverbs, "turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

A soft answer is a quiet answer. As the old Indian is reported to have advised the young brave and his new squaw, "Never raise voice unless wigwam is on fire."

A soft answer is also a non-argumentative answer. It may defend, but it does not lash back. It may stand stoutly for the truth, but it does not criticize.

A soft answer is not a weak answer or a powerless answer. It is, in fact, the strongest kind of answer because it has the capability of subduing one of mankind's most vicious weapons - an angry tongue.

A Kind Tongue is a Positive Witness

Colossians 4:5,6 says that our speech is to be "seasoned with salt." Salt does two things: it preserves and it makes things more palatable. It doesn't really change the food, but it makes it more pleasant to the taste. It makes the difference between eating food and enjoying food. Likewise, graciousness does not necessarily change the contents of the message we bring, but it does make it more acceptable, pleasant, and believable.

Discussion Ideas

1. Discuss how a loving tongue is involved in keeping each of the Ten Commandments. Love, after all, is a summary of the entire Law. For instance, honoring your father and your mother involves speaking to them in a particular way.

2. Where is it most difficult to be kind? At home? At church? At work? Why? Under what circumstances are you most likely to be unkind?

"If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (I Corinthians 13:3) (Paraphrase).

"If I give my children all the toys they could ask for, and if I deliver my automobile for my teenager to use every night, but have not love, I gain nothing."

"If I give my husband a clean house and good meals, but have not love, I gain nothing."

"If I give away all I have to the poverty program, and if I deliver my body to be sacrificed on a civil rights march, but have not love, I gain nothing."

"If I make a generous pledge to the church, and if I deliver up my old clothing to the rescue mission, but lovelessly grumble about it, I am nothing."

"If I give generous presents at Christmas in an effort to keep up with what others will give me, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Ask some of the ladies to read their versions before the group. You may even want to publish some of the better ones in your church newsletter.

What Others Have Said

"Gossip is like mud thrown against a clean wall; it may not stick, but it leaves a mark."

"The difference between gossip and news is whether you hear it or tell it."

"There are male as well as female gossips" (Colton).

"Everyone says it, and what everybody says must be true" (James Fenimore Cooper).

"Old gossips are usually young flirts gone to seed" (J. L. Basford).

"Female gossips are generally actuated by active ignorance" (Rocheffaucauld).

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↓ This is Not Fair To Women.
Men Are Just As Bad.

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"Guess What They'll Say Next"

Announce that you are going to conduct a quiz. You will give some commonly heard statements ending with the word "but," and the participants must supply the last part of the sentence.

1. "I'm not one to gossip, but _____"
2. Don't get me wrong; I'm not a bigot, and some of them are my best friends, but _____"
3. "I don't mean to imply that Jean isn't doing a good job as committee chairman, but _____"
4. "I don't mean to be critical of the way you handled the situation, but _____"
5. "Jim is a fine husband in many ways, but _____"

The point is that the very statements we use to excuse our gossiping are the statements that give us away. Whenever you hear someone say, "I'm not ... but ...," you can be sure that no good will come from it.

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A TRUTHFUL TONGUE

Half-Truths

When discussing "A Truthful tongue Avoids Half-Truths," point out that Satan used the half-truth ruse when he tempted Adam and Eve. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5), he said. This was partially correct, of course, because they would come to know evil as well as good. But the other part of the statement, that they would be like God, was a lie.

Discussion Ideas

1. To what extent do you think we lie when we sing some of our church hymns? For instance, "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," "All for Jesus," and "Take My Life and Let It Be." If we don't mean it, should we keep on singing anyway?
2. Discuss the possible results of telling small untruths to our children. Perhaps you or others can relate some personal experience which are relevant. What effects will it have on our children? On us?
3. Do you believe that lie-telling can become habitual? Perhaps you are acquainted with people who lie even when they don't have to.

Role-play

The situation: Mary has just had an operation for the removal of a tumor. Her sister, Jane, tells her the truth—that the tumor was not malignant. Mary's husband, however, died of cancer a few years ago, and until the end Mary told him that he didn't have cancer. Therefore she will not believe Jane.

What Others Have Said About Truth

- "Truth needs no flowers of speech" (Pope).
"How sweet the words of truth breathed from the lips of love"
(James Beattie).
"Don't be 'consistent,' but be simply true" (Holmes).
"Peace, if possible, but truth at any rate" (Martin Luther).
"Beware of a half-truth; you may get hold of the wrong half."
"The sting of reproach is the truth of it" (Benjamin Franklin).
"Any time you find that truth stands in your way, you may be sure that you are headed in the wrong direction."
"Nothing ruins the truth like stretching it."
"There are three sides to every story: your side, my side, and the truth."

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A CONTENTED TONGUE

What Others Have Said

"A contented person is one who enjoys the scenery along the detour."

"Content makes poor men rich; discontent makes rich men poor" (Benjamin Franklin).

"When you feel dog-tired at night, it may be because you growled all day."

"Enjoy your own life without comparing it with that of another" (Condorcet).

"The usual fortune of complaint is to excite contempt more than pity" (Samuel Johnson).

"Those who complain most are most to be complained of (Matthew Henry).

"Constant complaint is the poorest sort of pay for all the comforts we enjoy" (Benjamin Franklin).

"If Only ..."

A certain two-word prefix is among the most futile and senseless phrases in the English language. That phrase is "if only."

"If only I were beautiful ..."

"If only you had a better job ..."

"If only we had a boat/dishwasher/pool/larger home/etc..."

"If only we didn't have so many children ..."

"If only we had more children ..."

"If only I had married someone else ..."

To go through life with an "if only" attitude is like driving a car with your eye constantly on the rear view mirror. You see where you could have turned off on a beautiful nature trail; you see where you could have stopped at a gas station; you see where you missed a beautiful rock formation, but you fail to see the opportunities ahead of you. Instead of complaining about the past, let us press on to the future. "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13,14).

A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE IS A SIMPLE TONGUE

A Simple Tongue Doesn't Try to Impress Others by Its Speech

There are many ways of trying to impress others by your use of the tongue:

--Talk with authority about books you haven't read (you read the reviews).

--Speak nonchalantly about how much your husband loses when the stock market goes down two cents a share.

--Use long, obscure, important-sounding words.

--Slip in a few slang expressions common among teenagers.

--Quote at length what some important person told you (actually, you were in the audience).

--Repeat as your own some judgment made by an authority in the field.

--Mention on frequent occasion that you are a tither and that you spend hours a day in prayer.

Love, says the Bible, "is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own."