

## Keep Our Tongues And Lips

### 1 Peter 3:8-15

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

*What is the Eighth Commandment?* You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way – or as I learned it, “put the best construction on everything.”

Our text, and this eighth commandment both speak about our tongues and lips. They speak directly to how we are to use our tongues and our lips in regard to our neighbor. Did you hear what we are not to do? We are not to tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation.

We know what gossip is, and let's face it, we all like to have the latest news about someone. But, when we talk about someone, are we breaking this commandment? Are we keeping our tongue from evil and our lips from speaking deceit?

There is a simple way to test whether we are living up to God's command for our tongue and lips, or not. Would you like others to say the same thing about you? If you were talking to someone, and they said that they heard those same words spoken about you, would you feel shame? If those same words were spoken about you, would you feel the need to defend yourself against what had been spoken? If you heard those words about you, would you get angry and want to know who said them?

Jesus instructs that if you know something about your neighbor, some sin, you are to go and speak to him – one on one – just the two of you, alone. (Matt. 18:15) If you cannot do that, you are not to speak to anybody about it – period. Yes, your mom was right, if you have nothing nice to say, keep your mouth shut.

Anything that comes out of our mouth that hurts your neighbor's reputation, whether it is true or not, is a violation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

Consider how else you use your tongue and lips. Verbal abuse is so easy to fall into. Parents find themselves giving a tongue-lashing to a child who needs only to be mildly disciplined. It is so easy to scar the fragile heart and mind of a child with ill-considered words. And how many children have likewise found their smart-mouthed comments the reason they are grounded for a week.

Spouses may raise their voices in a discussion, but how often do the words and phrases that flow off the tongue and out the lips hurt feelings and leave damaging scars for days, weeks, months, or even years.

It is truly amazing how often our tongues and lips call those we claim to love, the most vile names. Yes, sometimes things are said in the heat of the moment, and how often we wish we could retract what was said.

Too often we open our mouths without first engaging our brains! This week, at the catechetical retreat we were reading through some of Proverbs, and I remembered one which is not necessarily biblical, but certainly applies. It is better to be thought a fool, than to open one's mouth and remove all doubt.

Listen to what God teaches us through James' pen: *The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth*

*come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.* (James 3:5-10 ESV)

How many of us are guilty of using our tongue and lips in a manner that is unworthy of the name of Christ? In fact, how often has God's name been formed on our tongue and passed out of our lips in ways that were less than pleasing to Him? We have used His name uselessly and for no purpose. Too often that happens as God's name flows forth from our lips in exclamation of surprise or in anger. While we could excuse it by saying it happens without conscious thought, it is still a grievous violation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment.

Let us keep our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking deceit; let us turn away from evil and do good; let us seek peace and pursue it. It is in such a manner, that yes, God's name should be formed by our tongue. God's name should freely pass through our lips. It should do so in prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and as we proclaim His name to others.

Christ's use of His tongue and lips would be good for us to remember. Remember how he prayed for those who were crucifying Him? Remember how often He defended the most vile sinners as those who were repentant and seeking God's grace?

Christ's lips called to repentance, speaking gracious words of forgiveness. Jesus spoke God's Law and Gospel, a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and those words brought a place in God's kingdom to sinners unto eternal life.

That dear friends is what Luther says we are to be doing with our tongues and lips. We are to defend our neighbor, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.

It is very easy to think of ways we can keep our tongues and lips from hurting one another, keeping them from evil and speaking deceit. The most common recipe is to think before opening our mouths. Another is to put the best construction on everything we hear – before we ever speak about it.

I also know, from personal experience, that try as we might, we will fail. We will sin against God and our neighbor with our tongues and lips.

It is in our sinfulness, that God's command for the tongue is a most joyous thing for us. God has commanded that the same tongue and lips which sin, are also to speak words of peace. They are to call us to repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and pronounce to us God's grace in Christ Jesus.

On the cross, Christ's tongue prayed for those who persecuted Him saying, "Father, forgive them!" As He hung upon the cross, many were the lips and tongues that reviled Him, mocked Him, and spoke evil of Him. He was giving His life as the ransom for sin, paying for their sinful use their tongues and lips, as well as yours and mine. On the cross, Christ was continuing to use His tongue and lips, as well as His entire body, to bring glory to His Father's name and to bring the greatest benefit to His neighbor.

Upon His resurrection from the dead, the very Word of God made flesh instructed and commanded the use of tongues and lips to dispense the very forgiveness His suffering and death had purchased. When the pastor opens His mouth, his tongue forming the words that pass through his lips in the speaking of the absolution, sins are forgiven – just as Christ commanded and authorized them to do.

It is my joy at this very moment, to use my tongue again in that manner today. I have been called and sent by God to form special words with my tongue, and force them to pass through my lips, speaking to you – your sins are forgiven.

In our service, your mouths and lips sing that you want God to accomplish the things spoken in this sermon when sing, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

You have gathered here to seek peace and pursue it. And the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous – they are on you, and His ears are open to your prayer.

Christ answers the prayer you sing when the words of institution flow over the tongue and out the lips of Christ's ministers. With that voice Christ is speaking, sacramentally uniting to His own body to the bread you will eat and uniting His blood to cup you will drink. These words, Christ's Word, bring into existence a blessed meal that is passed through the lips and over the tongue of believers, forgiving sin, and filling them with Christ.

It is in the setting of the gathering of God's children in His name that tongues and lips flow forth prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. As our hearts are renewed again, and we regard Christ the Lord as holy, let us pray that our tongue and lips are always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us

Dearly beloved of God, open your lips! Loose your tongues! Rejoice that God has kept your tongue and lips engaged in the wonderful word of God, proclaiming His goodness and mercy to us, and to all people, for all eternity. Amen.