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BATTLE GROUNDS FOR THE TONGUE  
(Controlling the Tongue Series)

THE TONGUE

"The boneless tongue, so small and weak,  
Can crush and kill," declares the Greek.  
"The tongue destroys a greater horde."  
The Turk asserts, "Than does the sword."  
The Persian proverb wisely saith,  
"A lengthy tongue - an early death!"  
Or, sometimes takes this form instead,  
"Don't let your tongue cut off your head."  
The tongue can speak a word whose speed,  
Say the Chinese, "outstrips the steeds."  
The Arab sages said in part,  
"The tongue's great storehouse is the heart."  
From Hebrew was the maxim sprung,  
Thy feet should slip, ne'er the tongue."  
The sacred writer crowned the whole."  
"Who keeps his tongue doth keep his soul."

Perhaps the greatest area of struggle in the Christian life is with the area of our communication. Let me identify the vast areas this battleground includes: Profanity, blasphemy, foolish talking, lying, gossip, slander, complaining, babbling, criticizing, boasting, hasty verbal reactions, arguing, abusiveness, exploding, defensiveness, flattery, perverseness, or frowardness, false accusations, and whatever else fits under the category of unwholesome and unedifying speech! Scripturally, it is obvious this is a serious matter because in the Book of Proverbs there are over 100 verses directly instructing us about our speech! (See "Proverbs on Communication" study). In the Book of James he gives us at least 20 reasons why we need to control the tongue (see "Why Control the Tongue?" study). I think the key reference in the Bible regarding the seriousness of our words comes from the WORD of Life Himself! Look at what Jesus said in:

Matt. 12:34 -  
12:35 -  
12:36 -  
12:37 -

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO CONTROL THE TONGUE?

It is vital that you meditate carefully on the following references because I strongly believe they give the very basis needed for gaining an understanding of both the problem and the solution! (Note specifically the references to our speech).

The three reasons it is so hard to control the tongue are:

1. Because of the spiritual condition of the sinful nature.  
Rom. 3:10-18

Matt. 12:33-37

2. Because of the universal problem of the tongue.  
Js. 3:1-12

3. Because of not experiencing the Spirit-controlled life.  
Eph. 5:18-20

Col. 3:16-17



CONSEQUENCES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTROLLING THE TONGUE

It is vital that we think before we speak and to increase our awareness of this importance, we need to expand our thinking regarding some of the Scriptural motivations regarding our speech. (Please note the potential benefits and dangers).

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| Js.1:26     | Lk.6:45       |
| Js.3:6      | Prov.13:2-3   |
| Js.3:8      | Prov.15:1-2   |
| Js.3:9      | Prov.17:27-28 |
| Ps.34:12-13 | Prov.18:6-8   |
| Ps.39:1     | Prov.18:20-21 |
| Ps.139:4    | Prov.21:23    |
| I Pet.3:10  | Prov.26:17-28 |
| Matt.12:37  |               |

SPECIFIC SCRIPTURAL AMMUNITION TO USE AGAINST THE SPECIFIC BATTLEFIELDS OF:

BLASPHEMY - evil, injurious speech, railings, reviling, defaming contempt, and speaking evil of God or sacred things.

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| I Pet.2:22-23 | I Tim.1:20   |
| Rom.2:24      | I Tim.6:1    |
| Matt.12:31-32 | Ex.22:28     |
| Ps.74:18      | Acts 23:3-5  |
| Ps.73:9       | Matt.15:19   |
| Ps.44:15-16   | Lev.24:11,16 |
| Ps.74:10      | Rev.2:9      |
| Matt.9:3      |              |

PROFANITY - filthy talk, cursing, swearing, dirty jokes.

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| Ex.20:7    | Matt.15:4   |
| Ex.21:17   | Rom.3:13-14 |
| Lev.20:9   | Rom.12:14   |
| Matt.5:22  | Eph.4:29    |
| Ps.10:7    | Eph.5:4     |
| Prov.4:24  | Js.3:9-12   |
| Prov.20:20 |             |

While profanity is actual words that would damage one's testimony and reputation, the real issue is the attitudes reflected by those words. Certain words will put you in the same category as the godless. Using the above list, which words would you use to replace profanity? Remember - You can control it if you want to. Think through the specific problem areas and prepare a planned response. What are some positive responses (actively as well as verbally), that you can apply in those situations where you are tempted to use profanity?

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FOOLISH TALKING - vain, stupid, idle words.

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| Prov.10:14b | Prov.18:6-8   |
| Prov.14:3   | Prov.18:13    |
| Prov.15:2   | Prov.26:4-5   |
| Prov.17:7   | Prov.26:17-19 |
| Prov.17:28  | Eph.5:3-4     |

FRWARDNESS - perverse, obstinately willful, words used to oppose what is reasonable, foolish, contrary, deliberately turning away from what is true and right.

- Prov.4:24
- Prov.10:31b
- Prov.10:32b



WICKED - evil, lawless.

Prov.11:11	Prov.19:28
Prov.12:6	Prov.24:1-2
Prov.15:28b	Js.4:11

LYING - purgery, false witness, fibbing, "white lies", deceitfulness, exaggerating, intentional deception, or misleading, misrepresentation, dishonesty.

Ex.20:16	Prov.20:17
Ex.23:1	Prov.21:6
Ps.15	Prov.21:28
Ps.34:13	Prov.24:28
Ps.101:7-8	Prov.25:18
Prov.4:24	Prov.26:28
Prov.6:16-19	Prov.29:12
Prov.10:18	Prov.30:5-6
Prov.12:17	Prov.30:7-8
Prov.12:19	Zech.8:16
Prov.12:22	Mal.2:6
Prov.13:5	Jn.8:44
Prov.14:5	Acts 5:1-11
Prov.14:25	Eph.4:25
Prov.17:4	Phil.4:8
Prov.17:7	Col.3:9-10
Prov.19:5	I Jn.1:7-10
Prov.19:9	Rev.21:8, 27
Prov.19:22	Rev.22:15

Lying will destroy your reputation. It will destroy others if those lies are about them. Once you lie to people they will have a hard time ever believing anything you say again. The consequences are tragic! Again, observe the solutions:

Eph.4:24  
Eph.4:15

BOASTING - bragging, prideful, egotistical, self-centered conversations with a know it all attitude.

- it belittles others and puts them down.
- it starts a "can you top this?" competition.
- it causes one to think more highly of themselves - observe:

Rom.12:3	Isa.10:15
I Cor.10:12	Jer.9:23-24
Gal.6:3	Rom.1:30
Prov.20:14	Js.3:5
Prov.25:24	Js.4:16 (14-15)
Prov.27:1	Jude 16
Prov.27:2	

What kind of person boasts and why? (ex. - I feel inferior so I boast to make myself look better, or I may want to put others down because I don't like them).

What have you boasted about?

Who have you boasted to? Why?

**Examine not only your words but your motives!**

Observe further verses on how to overcome boasting.

II Cor.10:17-18	Js.4:6
Ps.107:2	Rom.12:16



COMPLAINING - murmuring, grumbling, negative, pessimistic remarks, ungrateful, dissatisfied, discontented attitude (see "BENEFITS" study; Developing An Attitude of Gratitude).

Phil.2:14	Lk.15:2
Jude 16	Lk.19:7
I Cor.10:10	Mark 14:5
Js.5:9	Isa.59:3
Jn.6:43	

Replace it by:

I Thess.5:18	Col.3:23-25
Js.5:13	I Cor.10:31
Col.3:17	

CRITICIZING - judging, condemning, "cutting up", faultfinding, pessimistically tearing down, "nitpicking", being sarcastic, giving "back door" messages.

Prov.12:18  
Rom.14:13

Overcome it with LOVE! List principles from I Cor.13:4-7 (see "Developing Genuine Love" study).

FLATTERY - "expressing envy by praising features in others which they had no control in developing." (Bill Gothard)

Prov.26:28  
Prov.28:23  
Prov.29:5

MOCKING - making fun of others, a SCOFFER.

II Kings 2:23-24	Lk.14:29
Prov.14:9	Lk.16:14
Lk.23:36	II Pet.3:3

NAME CALLING

Matt.5:22  
Matt.12:36-37  
Prov.18:6

DISRESPECTFUL - (see study on RESPECT).

Acts 23:3-5

UNRULY/HASTY - verbal reactions that are stubbornly willful, unmanageable, uncontrolled angry responses, exploding, shouting, arguing, quarrelsome speech, "mouthing off" rashly. Once out of our mouth, we can't take them back and will regret it later!

Prov.12:18	Prov.29:11
Prov.15:1-2	Prov.29:20
Prov.14:17	Eccl.5:2-3
Prov.14:29	Eccl.10:12-14
Prov.18:13	Col.3:8 (abusive!)
Prov.20:3	

List from above the positive principles to keep in mind to win this battle.

Js.1:19	Eph.4:29-32
Rom.12:21	(see study on "Rules for Arguing")
Prov.15:28	

A further thought:

To get angry and "mouth off" at situations is really to get angry and "mouth off" at God. "He works all things according to the counsel of His will." Eph.1:11. So when you react, you are reacting against the providence of God. Read I Cor.10:1-13, especially vs.10. It is a dangerous thing to be angry with God and to grumble against Him. If you are given to sinful reactions, you must stop NOW, and replace those reactions with blessing and praise.



Think through the most common problem areas and people involved. Ask those people for forgiveness and help to replace those words with positive, prepared, planned responses.

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GOSSIP AND SLANDER - (see "Gossip - A Victim of or Victor Over" study).

DEFENSIVENESS - excuse making, blameshifting, accusing words (see study on "Blameshifting").

Job 9:20	Prov.28:13
I Jn.1:8-10	Rom.14:12
Matt.7:1-5	Psalm 51
Js.5:16	

OATHS/VOWS

Js.5:12	Deut.23:21-23
Matt.5:34-37	Ps.76:11
Ecc1.5:2-6	Ps.116:14

BABBLING - a constant talker, never "shuts up", you can't get a word in edgewise, "chatterbox", "ratchet jaws", "motor mouth", "long winded."

- people try to get away from a babbling brook - continuous noise.
- it's a sinful habit - Scripture exposes it.

Prov.10:19	Prov.29:20
14:23	Ecc1.5:3
15:2	Ecc1.10:12-14
17:27	Titus 1:10
17:28	Js.1:19
18:13	Matt.5:37

Observe Job's friends and then the Lord's response:

Job 16:1-5  
Job 38:1 2

Evaluate:

1. Do people try to get away from you?
2. Do they seem relaxed with you?
3. How much do they say? Are they contributing any to the conversation?
4. Are you asking them questions? (See "Questions in Making Conversation" and "Building Meaningful Relationships" study)
5. Have you ever been told you "talk too much?"
6. Do you just keep on connecting different stories together?
7. Do you tell the experience of another when that person is present?
8. Have you ever asked someone if you dominate the conversation?

If you have been a verbose person - a babbler, there is hope:

First, admit and confess this sin to God and ask Him to grant you victory over it. Also confess it to those who you may have "turned off" or offended.

Second, determine to say only those things which are relevant to the situation in relating an experience to another. The entire background and all the details are probably not necessary. Tell the basic story and do not tie people up with long drawn out "novels."

Third, say those things which edify. Speak with a purpose. Eph.4:29. So often a babbler will also be a gossip and a complainer. Be sure, then, to say those words which will encourage the one who hears. Ask yourself:

"Is what I'm saying important? Helpful? Why? Or why not? Are these people interested? Ask them. Honestly now, why are you telling them this? "Just to make conversation?" Then learn how to ask questions (#5 below) and discuss concepts, ideas, scriptural principles, but don't just "force" conversation or you will force people away!



Fourth, seek the aid of Christian friends again (family too) and work out a signal with them so they can help you identify your babbling. Do not argue with them whether or not you are talking too much. If they think you are, YOU ARE!!

Fifth, seek to become a good listener. Take an interest in what others are saying. Discipline yourself to really listen rather than thinking what you are going to say next. Do not interrupt another when they are speaking. You need the meek spirit of one who is teachable, not one who draws attention to himself by continuous verbiage. (These five steps are "borrowed" from Rev. Thomas L. Wenger's study).

Look again at the Scriptural references to this problem.

(Prov.10:19; 20:19; Eccl.5:3; 10:12-13)

#### GETTING PERSPECTIVE

As you may have well noticed, these areas can overlap very easily, however, for easier identification, I have attempted to divide them into separate areas for more intense definition and personal evaluation, as well as giving specific Scriptural references.

Every one of these battle grounds have the same "common denominator!" No matter which area you are "stumbling" in, it reflects your heart condition.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:33-37). Our speech portrays our character just like God's speech portrays His character. The tongue is the index of the heart.

"The tongue defiles, defies, and displays."

"What is your tongue saying about the content of your heart?"

"This is one instance where the tongue does not lie!"

"That which is harbored within will ultimately be represented by what we say!"

(- Swindoll)

A careless word may kindle strife,  
A cruel word may wreck a life,  
A bitter word may hate instill,  
A brutal word may smite and kill.

A gracious word may smooth the way,  
A joyous word may light the day,  
A timely word may lessen stress,  
A loving word may heal and bless.

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#### THE HEART OF THE MATTER

"Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" - Matt.12:34

"What goes in must come out." "Garbage in, garbage out."

But let's turn that into a positive solution. Look at what David said:

Ps.119:11

Prov.4:23

What is the key?

Jesus also affirmed it in:

John 15: 3

It is the Word of Truth alone that can transform and renew our inner beings.

Rom.12:1-2

Eph.4:23

Scripture amplifies the "positive replacement principle" (see "Biblical Change" study).

Eph.4:20-32

Rom.12:21

It's the same with winning the battle with our tongues - as already implied throughout the previous studies. Even though James says "no man can tame the tongue", - the Holy Spirit can! (Gal.5:22-23 says self control is a fruit (result) of the Spirit in one's life.)



SPEECH SOLUTIONS

Eph.5:18-20  
Eph.4:29-32  
Phil.4:8-9

Ecc1.12:10-11  
Col.3:8 and 4:6  
Matt.5:37

God gives us help and hope

I Cor.10:13  
II Pet.2:9  
Phil.4:13  
Ps.39:1-11

God gives us an example in Jesus Christ

I Pet.2:21-23  
Jn.8:14-18  
Jn.8:28-29  
Jn.8:31-51

SCRIPTURAL MOTIVATIONS

Since we overcome evil with good, it is only practical to now change our focus.  
Look at the benefits of positive, edifying words!

Prov.2:6	Prov.15:23
5:1-2	15:26b
8:6-9	15:28a
10:11a	16:1
10:13a	16:10
10:19b	16:13
10:20a	16:21
10:21a	16:23
10:31a	16:24
10:32a	17:9a
11:11a	17:27
11:12b	17:28
11:13b	18:4
12:6b	18:20
12:13	18:21
12:14	20:15
12:17a	21:23
12:18b	21:28
12:19a	22:11
12:25	22:17
13:2a	22:18
13:3a	23:15-16
14:3b	24:26
15:4a	25:11
15:1a	25:12-13
15:17b	31:26

List ways that will help you to apply these benefits in specific situations.

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Look further at what God says we are to replace "unwholesome speech" with.

Ps.35:28	Ps.126:2
Ps.37:30	Ps.136:1-3
Ps.66:16	Ps.145:6
Ps.71:15-24	Ps.145:21
Ps.105:1-2	Ps.146:1-2
Ps.107:2	Acts 1:8
Isa.8:20	Phil.2:11
Isa.50:4	I Pet.3:15
Ps.119:172	

That is just the beginning! (of joy, victory, and blessing)!

CONCLUSION - HOW DO WE CONTROL OUR TONGUE?

Daily:

1. Acknowledge our sinful problem to God and to others we have offended.  
I Jn.1:7-10  
Matt.5:23-24
2. Recognize God's Spirit and the Word as the provision and promise God has made to accomplish His solution.  
Eph.5:18-20  
Col.3:16-17  
Js.1:5
3. Dedicate your tongue and heart to the Lord in prayer.  
Ps.19:14  
Ps.141:3  
Rom.12:1-2
4. Fill your mind with God's thoughts.  
Ps.119:9-13  
Phil.4:8 - use it as a filter for what comes in and goes out!
5. Don't listen to others "sinning with their lips."  
Rom.13:14  
Prov.17:4  
Prov.21:28  
Rom.1:29-32 - you are just as guilty.
6. Urge your friends to help you in specific areas of battle.  
Prov.27:6  
Prov.17:10  
Heb.3:13
7. Commit yourself to expressing thanks, praise to God, and to others with words that encourage, comfort and build up.  
Eph.4:29  
Col.3:17  
Col.4:6

"Weigh it before you say it"  
How is what I'm saying going to effect others?

The Word is to be a matter of our thoughts and conversation continually (Deut.6:5-9).

Words can be arrows, sharp to wound,  
or girders, strong to build.

Words can be comfort gently  
poured till thirsty hearts are filled.

Words can be torches for the mind  
when all the world is dark,

A staff on which the weak may lean  
when trails are steep and stark.

Words can nest within the soul like  
white doves in a tower or fly  
beyond time's farthest bound.

The Word of God is power,  
and all the words that frame man's  
thought take root in consciousness.

Blessed are they whose words inspire  
and help and heal and bless.

Words can be;  
happy or sad;  
helpful or harmful;  
warming or blistering;  
true or false;  
complimentary or critical;  
humble or proud;  
humorous or cranky;  
healing or wounding;  
sympathetic or cruel;  
optimistic or pessimistic.

If your lips would keep from slips  
Five things observe with care:  
- of whom you speak  
- to whom you speak  
- and how and when and where.

You are what you speak!