

Sinful Words, Part 1: what are they and how to overcome them

“Speak, that I may see what you are” for what is in the heart is vented by the tongue.

- Man is too apt to think that words are only wind, things that won't be called into account, but the Lord says otherwise, Mt 12.33-37.
- David was so afraid of offending with his tongue that he bridled it and prayed for God to make its words good, Pss 39.1; 19.14
- The tongue is full of deadly poison, lies, curses, and blasphemies, Js 3.7-8; Rom 3.13-14. The wildest of beasts can be tamed, but none can tame the tongue—although the grace of God surely can.
- Given what our Lord says in Mt 12.33-37 and what James says in Js 1.26, there is, perhaps, no one test or proof of the reality of a work of grace upon the heart, more simple, clear, and infallible, than the general tenor of our language and conversation. By our speech our profession of faith will be justified or by our speech our profession of faith will be condemned.

6 Propositions (Venning)

1. Sinful words are forbidden and good words are commanded, Ex 20.16; Eph 4.25, 29; 5.3-4; Col 4.6; Ps 34.11-14
 1. To list all the sins of the tongue would exhaust us, but the most common are: swearing, cursing, blasphemy, and lying (WLC 145).
 2. “Though a Christian need not always talk of grace, yet he is always to talk as to show himself a gracious person.”
2. Unless a man takes heed to his words and bridles his tongue, his religion is useless, Js 1.26
 1. Of course it's possible, and all too common, that in an unguarded hour and under the pressure of some strong temptation or sudden provocation, God's people may speak shamefully out of character. But if there is grace in the heart, the tongue will show itself to be under the control of grace and such speech will be manifestly out of tune with our normal speech.
 2. But without some evidence of regulation, we're not bound to acknowledge any man to be a Christian, however splendid his profession may be in other respects.
 3. In fact, this may be the one outward mark of a believer that the hypocrite can't imitate. A hypocrite can make a fair show of outward religion and appear to be very religious; but if his heart is evil, Christ says his speech will reveal it, because he can't bridle his tongue.
 4. Whatever we have “going for us,” if we don't bridle our tongue then we lack the one thing needful: a changed heart, and our religion is useless.
 5. “It is too much to seem to be evil, and too little only to seem to be good. Appearance in evil is too much, but appearance in good is not enough.” “He who has a form and only a form of godliness, denying the power thereof, is worse than the man who has not so much as a form, or makes no profession of godliness.” Rev 3.15
3. Sinful words are evidences of sinful hearts, Mt 12.34; Ps 12.2; Jer 42.20
 1. “As a man is known by his picture, so a heart is known by its words.” Mt 26.73
 2. A man may be known to be of heaven or hell by his speech.
4. Evil words corrupt men and their lives, Js 3.5-6; 1Cor 15.33
 1. Sinful words corrupt both ourselves and others. We lead both astray. We lie so often that we can scarcely tell the difference between the truth and a lie anymore. We joke and speak sarcastically so often that we can hardly get serious anymore. Life's just one big joke and we become a stranger to serious, edifying conversation.
5. The tongue is either man's glory or man's shame, Pr 10.20; Ps 37.30-31
 1. What a vast difference there is between a good and a bad tongue! The tongue of the sinful is like daggers and swords, while the tongue of the righteous heals like medicine and builds up.

6. God will judge us by our words as well as by our works, Mt 12.36-37; Pr 18.21; Ps 50.21
 1. If we must give an account of careless and idle words, what account must be given of filthy and sinful words! of words that defile ourselves and others!
 2. The reason life and death are in the tongue is because a man shall be sentenced according to it, Gen 6.5

12 Directives

1. Let your words be few, Ecc 5.2-3, 7; Mt 6.6-9; Pr 10.19; 17.28; Js 1.19
 1. "Little said, soon mended." The more you speak, the more you have to be sorry for and the more you have to take back.
2. If we must speak, let us speak as we should, Ps 15.2; Zech 8.16f; Eph 4.25, 15; cp. Jer 9.5
 1. When speaking of ourselves, let us restrain our tongues from boasting. Let us speak as poor, unworthy, sinful creatures should. Let us speak as pensioners upon God's free grace and mercy should. Let us speak as those who can't even think one good thought without God's working it in us should. Let us speak as those who own nothing but sin and deserve nothing but hell should. Let us speak as those whose every breath is a mercy should. Let us speak as those who know what we are, what we're capable of, and what we'd surely do if God ever took His hand off us should.
 2. When speaking of God, let us speak honorably and rightly. When under affliction, let us acknowledge His wisdom and mercy. When in prosperity, let us acknowledge His free and undeserved grace. When in darkness, let us acknowledge His light. When alone, let us acknowledge His presence. When in the hands of enemies, let us acknowledge His providence. When emptied by loss and bent under a cross, let us acknowledge His goodness, His love, and His faithfulness to His promises.
 3. When speaking to others, let us speak the truth, seasoned with love, and marked by purity.
 1. If in the business of life our word can't be safely depended upon without either bond or promise, then we scarcely deserve the name of Christian. For if our Lord is a God of truth, then we too must be of the truth.
 2. Let us speak of others with the bridle of love, not saying what shouldn't be published, not embellishing the story, not magnifying their failings, not insulting their persons, not slandering or gossiping, not with contempt; but instead with gentleness and compassion, making the most favorable allowances for their words and actions, putting everything in the best light until forced to speak otherwise.
 3. Let us speak with pure speech, Eph 4.29; 5.4, not suiting our speech to our company, but seasoning our company by our speech. The double-tongued discredit their religion and dishonor their Christ.
3. Use your tongue for the work for which God gave it: to speak of His truth and to sing His praise, Ps 66.16-17

**A Check to an Ungoverned Tongue, Matthew Henry*