



Lessons By: Rev. Dr. Johnny R. Freeman

**8 Week Bible Study Series**

**Wednesdays | 6:50pm**

**United Institutional Baptist Church**

**802 E. Market Street, Greensboro, N.C. 27401**

# THE POWER OF THE TONGUE!

Week 3 | Text: Ephesians 4:29-32

We've all heard the age old saying that sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. Anyone who's lived long enough to be on the receiving end of hurtful, and spiteful communication knows all too well that words have power. Our words can build up or tear down the spirit. Our words can motivate and inspire others to reach for their absolute best. The influence of words can challenge others to strive to fulfill their dreams and potential, just as our words can injure, by causing others to turn so deeply within themselves, so that no one can ever hurt them or reach them. Our words have power.

The bible makes reference to the word 'tongue/tongues,' 'mouth,' 'word/words,' 'answer/answered/answereth/answering' for more than 64,300 times throughout the Old and the New Testaments. That means how we use our words really does matter. The bible goes a step further by reminding us to choose our words wisely as well as teach us, that there is a right and a wrong way to respond in everyday situations we may experience. **The book of Psalms describes the wicked as those who's 'mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud; under his tongue is mischief and vanity;' (Psalm 10:5) Those who seek to do mischief with their tongue and use their words to destroy and**

malign others are those that 'give their mouth to evil and their tongue [are always thinking] of ways to deceive.' (Psalm 50:19AMP) The ways of the wicked, which use their tongue to do evil, are distinguished from the just or righteous that is wise and careful in how they use their words. The righteous understand the power of the tongue, and the importance of choosing their words wisely by "keeping thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile {deceit}" (Psalm 34:13) as the pathway to a fulfilling and purposeful life.

The book of Proverbs distinguishes those who use their words to edify others and build unity, versus the ones who are divisive and destructive for 'he that speaketh truth showeth forth righteousness; but a false witness deceit. There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health. The lip of truth shall be established forever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Lying lips are abomination to the Lord; but they that deal truly are His delight.' (Proverbs 12: 17-19, 22) Indeed, "death and life are in the power of the tongue." (Proverbs 18:21) and "a soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger." (Proverbs 15:1) The book of James goes even further by connecting the righteous use of your words with religious faith, by adding "if any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart {in terms of what

he/she knows to be right} this man's religion is vain..." (James 1:26) The writer concludes by describing the power of the tongue as 'a little member [that] boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire...out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be {among those who have been transformed by the power of Christ}.' (James 3:5-10) One can easily see, from this brief survey just how important our words really are.

The previous point about the use of our words being an indication of genuine religious faith is a key to understanding **the Ninth Commandment which says "thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."** (Exodus 20:16) It is the ethics of good/righteous communication that restrains our speech, especially about one another. The Jews define the phrase "bear false witness" as giving 'false testimony' about others. The idea of one being a 'witness,' or giving 'testimony' is a legal term used in either a courtroom or a public place where one may be called upon to refute or verify charges brought against another person. The point is that a person's reputation and character hinged upon another's 'testimony' or 'witness' of their actions. In Jewish life decisions were made, as to whether one be charged, excommunicated, punished, based largely upon the 'testimony' of someone, who was by virtue of their alleged personal knowledge of the matter in question, in a position to decide a person's fate.

It is important to remember that, as God's covenant people the Jews were expected to be persons of strong spiritual and moral character. After all they were taught that, as God's own people they were to reflect God's righteous nature in their dealings with one another. **The bible teaches that, as God's covenant people they were to "be holy, for I, the Lord your God am holy." (Leviticus 20:26)** Since God is holy, just, and righteous in all His ways, those who are God's people are to strive to emulate His character in their dealings with one another. The point is the Jews understood that they were expected to live up to the high moral and ethical standard God had established for them. The Jews were expected to be a people of strong religious faith and high moral and ethical standards.

However, the Ninth Commandment is proof positive that God is well aware of the pitfalls of human nature. God gave us the Ninth Commandment as a safeguard to help us avoid the temptation of yielding to our weaker, immoral impulses. When we open the door, and travel down the road, the direction of our worst possible selves, we are capable of doing terrible and irreversible damage to one another. I'm reminded of the story of Samuel Mudd, for whom the popular phrase 'his name is mud' has its origin. As the story goes, Samuel Mudd was accused of aiding and conspiring with John Wilkes Booth in the 1865 assassination of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. The point was, that whether or not Mudd actually participating in the plot to assassinate President Lincoln he was guilty by association. Mudd did

meet with Booth prior to the assassination, but regardless of the subject of such meeting it is indisputable that they met. Thus the phrase 'his name is mud,' because the American public demanded justice for the loss of a great leader, and anyone determined to be connected with Booth in any way was guilty by association.

The previous point suggests that we are more willing to believe the worst about others instead of giving them the benefit of the doubt. The view assumes that people are guilty until proven innocent. As such, people are more inclined to believe what they hear about others, and the worse it is the more believable it is, whether it is true or not. The Ninth Commandment goes a step further by insisting that we not be the ones who pass on what we hear without taking the time to verify what we hear. In short, **as believers we are commanded to, not only get the facts first, we are to weigh the impact of our communication about others before we pass on anything about one another.** One example that comes to mind is how quickly people are to reveal the sordid details about the dead. Some assume that they are released from guarding the reputations of others once they are dead. Their reasoning is that there's no harm in divulging another's secrets since they are no longer alive to be harmed, or judged by their secrets being made public. I've heard people say, after the fact of another's death, well you know she had a boyfriend for years, or you know he fathered other children. People feel justified that they held another's reputation intact for all those years, while they were alive

and now they need to set the record straight, or tell the whole truth about such persons. This is especially true of those who have lived with a good reputation as though those who know less than favorable information about them can't wait to soil the good impressions others may have about the deceased. The sad reality is that there are believers that hold to the same warped sense of 'duty' to expose others, even when they are dead and can no longer defend themselves.

This was the reason for the word the Holy Spirit gave the Apostle Paul to share with the church at Ephesus. The Ephesians had a twisted and incorrect interpretation about the grace of God. They assumed that the grace of God gave them license to think and act anyway they pleased. However, the message of God's grace, as the Holy Spirit gave it to Paul was a call to a higher standard. Not only are believers to be law abiding, upstanding citizens of the State, whenever possible believers are to strive to set a new standard of behavior. Believers, who understand the example of Jesus, recognize that our Lord lived a life that was above reproach. **When Jesus was done wrong, He forgave and held no grudges, and when maligned and attacked Jesus said, "Pray for those who despitefully treat you." (Matthew 5: 38-48)** The epistle of Ephesians illustrates the Ninth Commandment when it says, **"wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good**

to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:25, 29) Not only do we as believers have a duty to not spread gossip we also have a spiritual responsibility to make every effort to communicate about others in ways to build them up, and teach one another to do so as well, “even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32) In other words, just because you don’t spread gossip doesn’t release you from the mandate of the Ninth Commandment. God wants believers to seek every possible opportunity to guard one another’s reputation, as well as teaching others to do the same as part of our duty before God.

The point made in the Ninth Commandment is that there is no statute of limitation on guarding the reputations of others. I’ve heard others say that ‘if you can’t say anything good {about others} then don’t say anything at all.’ The Ninth Commandment goes even further by teaching us, that as people of faith in God, we have a duty to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to not be a part of a culture that seeks to destroy others, by spreading gossip or rumors about others, period. We have a duty to God, and to one another to safeguard one another’s reputation. Someone said it best that, **when gossipers come around, wanting to pass on rumors about others, we are to make it clear that ‘I don’t have time for it, and I don’t want to hear it.’** The bible says “give no place to the devil,” (Ephesians 4:27) and “resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7) The point is that being a part of



spreading gossip about others is as demonic as being a stumbling block in others coming to the knowledge of God's saving grace. Spreading gossip is sinful, evil and should not be given a place among the people of God. Additionally we are just as guilty, if we take the time to listen to gossip even if we don't spread what we hear because we lead others to assume that it's okay to do. It is just as sinful and evil to listen to gossip as it is to spread it. Both lead to the destruction of our fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, and the human family and do not please God.