

The Fiery Tongue

Why did I say that? is a question that most of us have had to ask ourselves on too many occasions. Yet, we continue to talk and talk, speaking before we think, voicing our indignant opinions, and criticizing everything and everyone in sight. James describes the tongue as a force of destruction, saying, "The tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!" ([James 3:5](#))

Why is it so difficult to control our overactive mouths? Are we desperate for recognition and validation, or do we just enjoy voicing our concerns? Whatever the case may be, our flesh seems particularly vulnerable to uninhibited expression. God's Word, however, emphasizes the importance of guarding our speech.

[Second Timothy 2:16](#) instructs, "But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness." If we need stronger support for screening our words, it can be found in [1 Peter 3:10](#): "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit."

No matter how hard we try, each one of us will struggle with controlling our speech from time to time. However, with a concerted effort and guidance from the Holy Spirit, we can conquer some of the more common "ailments" of the tongue listed here. As you read through the list, prayerfully ask yourself, Do I have a problem with: **Complaining?**

If so, read and memorize, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent. . . in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" ([Philippians 2:14-15](#)). In simpler terms, this verse instructs us to carry out the duties of our day without grumbling.

What should be our motivation for doing this? The Scripture clearly states that we live in a corrupt world, but have the opportunity to "shine as lights" amidst the pervading darkness. When complaints are removed from our speech, we cannot be found guilty of contributing to the negativity around us. The next time you are tempted to complain, take a moment to reflect on God's goodness. Think about what He has given you and what He has already done for you.

Lying?

Do untruths find their way into your conversations? Remember that "lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight" ([Proverbs 12:22](#)). There is no way to misinterpret this verse. God hates lying because He stands for truth. He is Truth.

Still, lying continues to plague the human race. According to Dr. Michael Lewis, most people lie at least 25 times a day. (abcNEWS.com, July 25, 2002) Dishonesty falls into three broad categories: to make other people feel better, to make ourselves look better,

and to protect ourselves. Although many people justify lying as "just an exaggeration" of the truth, the fact remains that it is not in line with God's standards for our behavior.

One study revealed that lies generally stem from fear. If you struggle with telling the absolute truth out of fear of rejection, bring this issue before the Lord today. The Scripture assures us that God's perfect love casts out fear. ([1 John 4:18](#)) Ask your heavenly Father to show you that, because His truth resides in your heart, you do not need to lie.

Anger or Criticism?

Do anger and criticism invade your interactions with others? If so, absorb the truth of [Proverbs 15:1](#): "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." So often, we are provoked to anger and even encouraged to criticize by those around us at work and at home.

We know these behaviors are contradictory to the fruit of God's Holy Spirit, and yet we continue to make excuses. "I'm just an angry person," we rationalize. "I am a perfectionist. No one does things the way they should be done." Although these statements are becoming the norm in our world, as Christians, we are called to a higher standard. Angry and critical thoughts must be brought under the authority of Jesus Christ before they are spoken.

Swearing or Using God's Name in Vain?

If life's frustrations cause you to blurt out expletives or to use the Lord's name in vain, listen to God's commands. "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment" ([Matt. 12:36](#)) and "You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord" ([Lev. 19:12](#)).

Unfortunately, there are many Christians from a wide range of denominations who conveniently ignore these important instructions from God. They claim Jesus as Lord of their lives, and then flippantly use His precious Name in conjunction with profanity.

A wise grandmother provided a reality check for her grandson, who had the habit of yelling the name of Jesus when he was angry. She told him, "Son, when you call out to Jesus, He responds. You'd better be ready to tell Him what you're so mad about."

If additional motivation for controlling your tongue is needed, it can be found in [James 1:26](#). "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless." Clearly, this issue is important to the Lord. Will you enlist His help as you make bridling the tongue a priority in your life?