

# TAMING THE TONGUE, Pt 2

## BRINGING GRACE

### Speech That Refreshes

By Rev. Will Nelken

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*NLT Proverbs 18:21 The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.*

Apostle James admonished: *"If we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way."* (James 3:2)

What a challenge!

Last week, I recommended two things to help bring our tongues under control: the power of the Holy Spirit, expressed through prayer and worship in other tongues; and an intentional 24-hour "speech fast."

So, we have begun to look at taming the negative side of our speech; today, I will emphasize how to enhance and expand the positive side.

#### **Control of Self**

God made man and God made his tongue, but how we use it is our choice... with one exception.

*NIV Matthew 12:34 Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*

Whatever my heart is full of will flow out through my speech, particularly in unguarded moments (this could be negative or positive; this could be a good thing or a very bad thing).

Who among us has ever said something in haste that you soon regretted?

It would seem that self-control is the answer. If that were possible, then we would have few problems in this area. In fact, it is no answer at all. To quote James: *"No one can tame the tongue."* (James 3:7)

For the follower of Jesus, there is help. According to the Bible, "self-control" is really "control of one's self" (not control *by* one's self), and it is the result of the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: ...self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23) The more He holds the reins of our lives, the more our sinful flesh is under control.

However, it is fair to say that He holds the reins with a light hand; He does not force His will, even on those who have surrendered to Him.

Thus, surrender to the Spirit, is actually a commitment to attentively cooperate with Him as He gently prompts us.

## Keep Your Mouth Shut

There are plenty of scriptural warnings against the misuse of our words, including these:

*NLT Psalm 59:7* Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths; their words cut like **swords**. “After all, who can hear us?” they sneer.

*NLT Psalm 64:2* Hide me from the plots of this evil mob, from this gang of wrongdoers.<sup>3</sup> They **sharpen** their tongues like swords and aim their **bitter** words like arrows.

*NLT Proverbs 12:18* Some people make **cutting** remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

And I’m sure, if you’re over five years of age, you could add a list of others from your experience. We are so familiar with the misuse of words, including our own misspeak, that these words from the Psalmist must sound a familiar cry of the heart:

*NIV Psalm 141:3* Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.

I have personally prayed these words over myself more times than I can count. Because I speak and write a lot, and some people seek me out for my words, I am more vulnerable to these errors; and my mistakes are more costly.

*NLT Proverbs 21:23* Watch your tongue and keep your mouth shut, and you will stay out of trouble.

A Soviet gerontologist (the science of aging) published research statistics that could transform the old adage, “He kills me with his chatter” into “He’s killing himself with his chatter.”

Professor Gurianin said his statistics showed that the less one talks, the longer one lives. Anyone in the business of public speaking knows that constant talking exhausts one physically and mentally, and ages one prematurely. Deaf people, hermits, shepherds and monks — all usually taciturn (quiet by habit) — are known for living long lives.

The New King James Version is more to the point:

*NKJV Proverbs 21:23* Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his **soul** from troubles.

While troubles in life often result from misspeak, soul troubles *always* result from misspeak. Your own words will eat you up on the inside, even when all looks fine on the outside. So, Solomon advises:

*NLT Proverbs 17:27* A truly wise person uses few words.

*NLT Ecclesiastes 5:2* Let your words be few.

James Sinclair: “At times, it is better to keep your mouth shut and let people wonder if you’re a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.”

## Spiritual Cooperation

But the answer is not a vow of silence. While that cuts off the power of death that is in the tongue, it also cuts off the power of life. The answer, though it is more tenuous, is our cooperation with the control of self by the Holy Spirit.

Paul provides a helpful guideline:

*NIV Ephesians 4:29* *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

“Unwholesome” means corrupt, foul, vulgar, abusive, or worthless. Generally, we know well what this means, even if we sometimes try to excuse ourselves — we *always* know what to accuse others of.

The Holy Spirit speaks through Paul’s pen to tell us, “Don’t let this happen.”

He knows you want to sometimes, but don’t let it. He knows you think the words, but don’t speak them. Put a figurative lock on your lips, or literally bite your tongue. Don’t let them come out.

Got it? Good! That will take care of the issue of death. Now, let’s go the second mile; this is where it turns truly Christ-like.

### **What to Say?**

The lesson is to speak “only what is helpful.” The Amplified Bible describes helpful as “beneficial to the spiritual progress of others.”

All of you are on a spiritual journey; it is God’s plan to make you like Jesus inwardly. Your heart is becoming more and more like His heart, reflecting his values and expressing His purposes.

But, more than this, *everyone* on the planet is also on this journey. God is not willing that *anyone* should perish, but that *everyone* should discover and receive His grace. Therefore, from God’s perspective, everyone is on a journey to discover Jesus Christ; that’s why we are all here.

So, even my words to an atheist or a heathen are to be helpful or beneficial to their spiritual progress. There is simply no license to rip into anyone or to bitterly criticize anyone. We will each give an account to God, who sent us, for how we helped, or hindered, those who crossed our path.

Our words will be genuinely helpful if they are first pleasing to God Himself.

*Psalms 19:14* *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

These are words that honor His character and express His purpose. They are not necessarily direct praises; more often, they are indirect, though anchored to what pleases Him.

Second, our words will be helpful if they give courage to those who hear us.

*NLT Ephesians 4:29* *Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*

We all need courage to make progress with the Lord. It is His purpose to grow us up into Christ’s image in all respects of our lives and that will bring us to the edge of our comfort zone repeatedly. The only way to move beyond that natural barrier is by courageous steps of faith.

Each of us, like Moses’ servant Joshua, will be called to tasks for which we are unprepared and inexperienced. God’s words to Joshua are also His words to us for such circumstances:

*Joshua 1:6 Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. <sup>7</sup> Be strong and very courageous.*

Paul's sidekick, Barnabas, was so good at this discipline that he became known as the "Son of Encouragement." We need more Barnabases today — people who are careful to build up and not to tear down!

*NLT Proverbs 12:25 An encouraging word cheers a person up.*

Third, our words will be helpful if they are appropriate to people's immediate need.

*NLT Colossians 4:6 Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.*

*NLT Proverbs 15:4 Gentle words are a tree of life.*

*NLT Proverbs 16:24 Kind words are like honey — sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.*

Glib phrases and trite clichés will not suffice. We must find the words that are apropos the need (or remain silent).

A young lady once said to John Wesley, "I think I know what my talent is. It's to speak my mind." He replied, "I don't think God would mind if you bury that talent."

Gracious speech refreshes those who hear it. Make it your spiritual habit.