

Healing the Heart to Tame the Tongue

Luke 6:45

We are living in a time of increasing incivility, strife and division in society at large, in our homes and in our churches. According to one study on civility in America, four of five Americans experienced incidents of incivility in a wide variety of places and settings. These incidents happen most often while shopping (39%), while driving (39%) or on social media (38%). KRC Research

Moreover, the political polarization in our society, which has produced an “us against them” attitude in American politics, has spread to everyday life. Many today seem unable to have a civil discourse without resorting to personal attacks, insults, and disparaging remarks.

Knowing this, some people think that the answer is avoiding subjects like politics and religion, or any subject that might lead to contrary opinions. While Christians are called to be peacemakers and our churches are to model unity and harmony, we are also called to speak truth in love. Being loving and civil doesn’t mean that we must affirm or accept what others believe, even when it contradicts our Christian values.

As one Christian writer also noted: “A positive vision of civility isn’t simply keeping one’s voice down. It’s a generous disposition of spirit, one that can be expressed passionately and with moral force. At their best, norms of civil discourse don’t dampen zeal for just causes. There’s nothing necessarily uncivil about protesting or boycotting, and not everything that gets canceled is a victim of “cancel culture,” because humans are naturally depraved creatures who can and do create depraved things. Civility isn’t an off-ramp from moral responsibility.”

But sadly, when it comes to disagreements about moral and non-moral issues, keeping our emotions in check, truly listening to understand, and using language that builds up, often goes out the

window. People don't seem to know how to disagree without getting ugly.

How many of you have said things in pride and anger that you wish you could take back? We've all said things that we regretted. If you never have, you are a super saint, which is unlikely, or you are like a serial arsonist so full of sin that you enjoy the damage you inflict with your tongue.

God's word says in James 1:26: *"If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless."*

I don't think any of us have arrived when it comes to taming the tongue. But if you're a Christian, who is filled with the Spirit, you ought to be making significant progress. And if you're making progress, you've discovered that your tongue problem is not the main problem. The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart.

Your mouth doesn't need to be washed out with soap, like some of us may have experienced when we were kids. We don't need our mouths to be washed, we need our hearts to be cleansed. Our problem is not foot in mouth disease, our problem is heart disease.

Main idea: Controlling our tongue is not accomplished by willpower, but through the inner work of the Spirit as we grow in love.

In the remaining time we have left, we are going to consider some key principles regarding the problem of the tongue and God's remedy for taming it.

1. Our hurtful tongue is a symptom of the problem

The first principle I want us to see is that our hurtful tongue is a symptom of the problem. Jesus explained in Luke 6:45: *"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."* Luke 6:45

To provide some context here, the teachings of Jesus recorded in Luke 6 took place soon after He prayerfully chose His twelve apostles. Although the teachings recorded in Luke 6 are similar to the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5, some scholars believe that it was a different sermon given at a different time. To differentiate it from the Sermon on the Mount, some referred to it as the Sermon on the Plain (on level ground) in reference to Luke 6:17.

But whether it was the same sermon or not, Jesus' message is virtually the same, as well as His purpose for delivering it. He was not only teaching His disciples what it means to be one of His followers, He was preparing to send them to preach the good news of the kingdom. And He makes clear to them what it means to live as His kingdom representatives.

The Jewish leaders of His day were focused on the outward performance of the law and appearing righteous before men. Jesus was focused on their inward motives and how they treated others.

As Luke records in verses 32-35, Jesus taught them: *“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”* Luke 6:32-36

Concerning Jesus' sermon recorded in Luke 6, one commentator explained, “It presents a radically different agenda than what the nation of Israel expected from the Messiah. It does not present the political or material blessings of the Messiah's reign. Instead, it expresses the spiritual implications of the rule of Jesus in our lives. This great message tells us how we will live when Jesus is Lord [of our hearts].” David Guzik

Now, it was in this context, focused on how followers of Jesus ought to sincerely love others, without expecting anything in return, that Jesus said, *“for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”* Luke 6:45

What Jesus is saying here is that the words that come out of our mouths are symptomatic of the condition of our hearts. In a moment, we will consider further the conditions of the heart from which our words emanate. But it’s important to emphasize that the words that flow from the heart can do some serious damage to our lives and our relationships.

There are times in life when we need to draw a line in the sand. But what most destroys relationships, splits marriages and tears churches apart, are not disagreements over essential Christian doctrines or moral absolutes, but hurtful words that are spoken in the flesh, in pride, and in anger.

Listen to what James says about an out of control tongue: *“How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”* James 3:6-8

What most often burns down churches, is not the opiate crisis, it’s not financial mismanagement or even a sex scandal. The match that sparks the out of control fires of division and destruction is often an untamed tongue. *“It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”* James 3:8b

But again, our untamed tongue is a symptom of a deeper problem. If your mouth is repeatedly getting you in trouble or stirring up trouble, don’t excuse yourself by saying things like, *“I just tell it like is,”* like if this is a godly quality or a Christian virtue. It’s not! Don’t justify the harsh, unkind and hurtful words that come from your lips by saying to

yourself, *“that person just pushes my buttons”* or *“people today are overly sensitive.”* People are overly sensitive today. Welcome to our world.

You’re not responsible for what comes out of someone else’s mouth, but you are responsible for what comes from your lips. The problem is not that people know how to push our buttons, but that we have buttons to push. Anyone can be kind to someone who is being kind to them. But what’s suppose to be different about followers of Jesus is that we don’t treat people in kind. On the contrary, we overcome evil with good, we speak kindly to those who are unkind and rude. And by doing so, we show that we are sons and daughters of the Most High *“for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”* Luke 6:36

If we are being honest with ourselves today and recognize our need to guard our lips, a key step to doing so is to stop looking outward and blaming others and start looking inward. If you’re saved, the problem and the answer is inside of you.

2. Our heart condition is the source of the problem

Our untamed tongue is a symptom of the problem. Secondly, our heart condition is the source of the problem. Jesus said: *“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”* Luke 6:45

Jesus explained in His sermon that if our hearts are full of good treasure, it will be displayed by the words that we speak. Likewise, if our hearts are full of evil treasure, it will also be displayed by what comes out of our mouths. Our words reveal more about us than we may think. Our words reveal the condition of our hearts.

And what determines the condition of our hearts, what determines whether we are a good person or an evil person, what determines if we are becoming more like Jesus or conforming to the word, is what our hearts treasure the most—what is most precious to us.

Jesus said that both the good that one produces and the evil that one produces, including what our mouths speak, depends on the treasure that is stored in our hearts. *What you treasure the most, will most shape your life and the words that you speak.*

While I was meditating on this passage this past week, Psalm 19:14 came freshly to mind: *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”* I see this passage of scripture in a whole new light. The words of our mouths are shaped by the mediation of our hearts. What we think about the most is what we treasure the most. And what we treasure the most, will have the most influence and control in our lives.

Just a few weeks after my brother and I got saved, we were driving back to his house after a special Friday night service at church. Because we were closer to his house, he let me drop him off at his apartment and asked me to bring his car back in the morning. Although I was saved, I was a 17-year-old, with a hot girlfriend, behind the wheel of a Datsun 280 Z on a Friday night. What do you think I did? I went to the nearest pay phone, (teenagers didn't have cell phones in 1987), and called my girlfriend. She wasn't home, but I found out from her sister that she was at Diversey Bowl only one mile away. I jumped back in my brother's 280z and headed to rendezvous with the love of my life. But just a block away from that pay phone and two blocks from my brother's apartment, a station wagon blew a stop sign and I T-boned it. Because the driver of the station wagon was involved in a hit and run accident moments before, he fled the scene on foot. With my heart in my throat, I went back to the same pay phone that I used to call my hot girlfriend and called my brother. About 15 minutes later, I was sitting in back of a police car when my brother arrived. Because they needed his information, he climbed in back of the police car with me. After asking me if I was alright, and before I could even say I was sorry, he put his arm around me and said, “don't worry about the car. We're saved!” Jesus was much more precious to him than his sports car.

How many of you know, if you value your car, or your job, or a project that you're trying to get done, or your ministry more than Jesus, and more than people, anyone who knocks your idol down, even if it was an accident, is liable to get a tongue lashing from you. Just in case you're questioning your salvation at this point, none of us have this tongue of ours perfectly tamed.

But if you are saved, you ought to be able to recognize when your tongue needs to be put back in its cage. What you ought to also be aware of is that the only one who can tame your lying, conniving and loose tongue is the Holy Spirit. But what you may not be as aware of is that before your tongue can be tamed, there's some healing, there's some surgery, there's some recalibrating that the Holy Spirit needs to do in some very specific areas in your heart, in your innermost being.

3. God's healing Spirit is the solution to the problem

Our untamed tongue is a symptom of the problem, our heart condition is the source of the problem, but praise the Lord, God's Holy and Healing Spirit is the solution to the problem. Jesus said, *"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."* Luke 6:45

Remember, the unkind and unhelpful words that fly out of our mouths derives from the *evil treasure* in our hearts. If you're saved, you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit who is now residing in your body. You are a new creation in Christ. But that doesn't mean that sin has been totally eradicated from your life.

As we learned last week, your old nature is still there. We have been justified by faith in the shed blood of Jesus, "but we are also in the process of being sanctified as well, meaning that the Holy Spirit is working in us to conform us to the image of Christ bit by bit." David Guzik

According to God's word in 2 Corinthians 3-4, the most precious treasure in our hearts is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God

in the person of Jesus shining in us by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit removes the veil over our hearts so that we can behold the beauty of Jesus in His Word, become what we behold, and treasure Him above all things (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

But although we have this treasure in us to know Jesus and His love through the Spirit so that we might display His love, there's still some bad treasure in us. There's still stuff in our hearts from the past or that we picked up along the way and are holding on to, that may be dulling our spiritual senses, that may be keeping us from fully treasuring Christ.

Remember, our words and deeds are shaped by what we treasure the most. You may have pain in your heart from a broken relationship that you haven't healed from that has turned into resentment, bitterness and unresolved anger. And whether you realize it or not, that bad treasure, that bitterness, that resentment, that unforgiveness that your holding on to, is producing bad fruit in the form of words that are hurting people around you and marring the testimony of Christ in your life.

The Holy Spirit is able to heal the hurts inside of you that may have turned to bitterness, but you must seek His help to identify the hurts and the bitterness and turn it over to Him. Sometimes we need the help of other Spirit filled believers who can speak into our lives and get to the root of our problems, which through our words are not only hurting us but the people close to us.

The root of our tongue troubles can also be idolatry. Idolatry takes place whenever we try to find in something or somebody what we can only find in God. It's been said that *our hearts are like idol factories*. In other words, if we don't keep our eyes on Jesus, we are prone to look to material possessions, or our jobs, or our health, or sports, or a whole host of other things to be for us what only God can be. And whenever anyone bumps against our idols, they will know by our words what we truly worship.

Again, to keep our hearts from rolling out new idols like a conveyor belt in a manufacturing plant, we must put ourselves in a position to behold the glory of Jesus through the Spirit and in the word so that we are shaped by His love bit by bit. This insight by Tony Reinke is so helpful: “Shallow thinking about God always replaces God, and sets in His place a fraudulent idol of security or sex or wealth or power or even of religion.”

Furthermore, when we look to God’s word, we must do more than search its precious treasures to find a promise to be encouraged by. We must allow the Spirit to search us as we meditate on God’s word so that the bad treasure in our hearts can be identified and prayerfully rooted out.

In His widely read book, *Inside Out*, Larry Crabb, noted: “We must come to the Bible with the purpose of self-exposure consciously in mind. I suspect not many people make more than a token stab in that direction. It’s extremely hard work. It makes Bible study alternately convicting and reassuring, painful and soothing, puzzling and calming, and sometimes dull - but not for long if our purpose is to see ourselves better.”

But let us not forget that change from the “inside out” involves a steadfast gaze upon our Lord that radically transforms us because it reflects a deep turning from a commitment to self-sufficiency, to treasuring Christ. When our hearts treasure Christ, our words directed at others will reflect both a commitment to His truth and the kindness of His redeeming love.

Have you ever said to someone you spoke harsh words to, “Sorry, I didn’t mean that; I was just angry” or “I was having a bad day?” Although it is true that unresolved anger can lead us to say things we regret, and feeling tired and hungry can contribute to our crabbiness, let us never excuse our behavior. Rather, let us check our hearts.

As one Christian counselor wisely observed: “Go back to your heart. Sit down and write to God. What hurt are you feeling? Which person is likely the receiver of your tongue-lashing? Look for the root of the problem residing in your heart. Do I have building resentment towards this person? What does our past together look like? Do I have un-forgiveness in my heart? Is my resentment even founded? Or...Am I hurting in general? Is my view of life negative? Is there something about myself I need to accept or forgive?”

The key is to get to the heart of the problem. And to understand where the feelings are coming from and pray for healing, forgiveness, or a different perspective, we need God to do surgery on our heart so we are not dependent on our tongue, that we cannot control, to be the gate keeper. A pure healthy heart is under Jesus’ domain. If we set our hearts on Him and follow His lead, the negative words never make it to our tongue. Over time, they never even make it to our hearts.” Sue Miley

Conclusion

Let us cease making excuses for the hurtful words that flow from our hearts and come out of our lips. Let’s instead be quick to allow the Spirit to search our hearts, seek God’s healing and forgiveness, and the forgiveness of those we hurt.

Most of all, let us unceasingly pursue a high view of Christ who is kind to us when we are ungrateful, and patient when we are slow to get it. We become what we behold. And before we speak to a person, let us pray continually as the Psalmist: *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”*