

Seasonings for the Tongue

The Depravity of Man . . . The Deliverance of God – Part VI

Romans 3:14

Introduction

I want to begin our study today by asking a question, “How beautiful is your tongue?”

I would imagine you have probably never considered it in terms of attractiveness. More than likely you did not stand in front of the mirror this morning and get it to curl just right. In fact, you probably did not even look at it. And, you probably do not have an appointment, any time soon, with a tongue beautician. For that matter, Avon and Revlon do not sell cosmetics for the tongue.

I was at the mall walking through J. C. Penney, trying to find the men’s section, and ended up wandering around the lady’s cosmetics. That section is huge! I never thought I would make it out! In my wandering, I do not recall seeing anything for the tongue.

There are no cosmetics sold for the tongue. There are no fashion shows featuring the tongue. In fact, you have never gone on a diet to get your tongue back into shape, have you?!

Yet, the truth remains, it is your tongue, not your figure, not your wardrobe, not your bank account, not your position or job title that defines you more than anything else. It is your tongue that makes the greatest impact on your life, and the lives of others, more than anything else about you.

The Bible mentions many different kinds of tongues:

- a flattering tongue (Psalm 5:9),
- a proud tongue (Psalm 12:3),

- a lying tongue (Proverbs 6:17),
- a deceitful tongue (Psalm 120:2),
- a perverted tongue (Proverbs 10:31),
- a wicked tongue (Psalm 10:7),
- a soothing tongue (Proverbs 15:4),
- a destructive tongue (Proverbs 17:4),
- a gossiping tongue (Proverbs 25:23).

It is the tongue which:

- makes or breaks apart a marriage,
- makes a home a pleasant environment or a desert,
- makes friends or loses them,
- strengthens a church or divides it,
- attracts people to Christ or repels them,
- honors God or curses Him.

No wonder Solomon wrote, in Proverbs, chapter 18, verse 21a,

Death and life are in the power of the tongue

...

Thus far in our study of mankind’s sinful communication, we have watched the Divine Physician get out His instruments and open the mouth of humanity.

Divine Diagnosis of Mankind’s Mouth

In Romans, chapter 3, verses 13 and 14, God will diagnose the throat of man, the lips of man, the tongue of man, and the mouth of man. None of these diagnoses are flattering – but they are all true.

Mankind's throat exposes hidden depravity

1. The first inspired diagnosis, in verse 13a, was that mankind's throat exposes hidden depravity.

Their throat is an open grave . . .

Literally, their throat is like a newly opened grave, containing within it the horror of death and decay. Just as taking the lid off a coffin reveals the stench of death, so opening the throat reveals the stench of sin and death below in the human heart.

Mankind's tongue produces great deception

2. The second diagnosis, in verse 13b, is equally unflattering, stating that the tongue of mankind produces great deception.

. . . with their tongues they keep deceiving, . . .

If the throat exposes hidden depravity, then the tongue produces great deception. The tense of the verb means that mankind is naturally, continually deceptive; mankind is consistent and proficient at lying.

Mankind's lips inflict untold damage

3. Then, thirdly, the Divine Physician reveals, in verse 13c, that the lips inflict untold damage.

. . . the poison of asps is under their lips

In other words, we each have within our mouths a sack of venom and we strike at one another with venomous words. Untold heartache; untold sorrow; unbelievable pain is inflicted by our words.

Have you ever heard the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"?

It is not true is it?!

I can remember this big dirt hill near my childhood friend's house. We would get out there, with a bunch of other boys in the afternoon, and have dirt clod fights. What magnificent fun that was – "beaning" each other with dirt clods that would splatter on impact.

You might say, "That was a foolish thing to do."

Well, grown men do it today – with paint balls. It looks more sophisticated and grown up, but the motive is the same – splatter 'em!

Two Christmases ago, my three brothers and our families met at my parent's home in Virginia. My two younger brothers had paint ball rifles and pistols, my own sons had brought their rifles with them, and all the cousins had guns and masks. One of my brothers, who makes more money than the rest of us combined, had all of this special equipment – an air pressure tank, camouflage pants, boots. They went to a hill beyond my parent's front yard. I did not have any equipment, but went out to watch the massacre. They insisted that I have my own paint ball pistol, and said, "Look, you can stand in the front yard and try to shoot over to the hill at us to help your son's, and their cousin's, team."

I did not think I could reach the hill – and neither did they. I stood on the front lawn aiming carefully at my two brothers, but all the paint balls came short. Then, I started aiming high into the air. I can still remember hearing one of my brothers yelping, as he cried out, "Owww, you got me on the leg!"

That was one of the best Christmases I ever had!

I personally cannot remember any of the pain from those dirt clod fights. My brother does not remember the pain from that one paint ball – at least I hope not, he is bigger than I am!

The truth is, sticks and stones may break your bones, but the wounds of the tongue can last a lot longer. When they hit their target and splatter all over the soul, it does great harm.

Paul delivers the divine diagnosis, when he says, "There is venom in our mouths."

Mankind's mouth reveals internal despair

4. The fourth, and final, observation that we glean from this divine examination of our mouths is found in verse 14.

Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness

That is another way of saying, fourthly, that the mouth of mankind reveals internal despair.

The word for "cursing," is the Greek word, "ara". It is a word that refers to a person publicly criticizing and defaming another person. It has the worst intentions in mind. Its only desire is to inflict

pain and to discredit the other person about whom they are speaking.

Mankind curses God, attaching His name to expletives, or simply using His name out of context. Profanity is the natural language of someone far from God.

Several years ago, I was having lunch with a very wealthy real estate baron, and his wife, who had just begun coming to our church. I got the impression that this man wanted some form of prestige and power and was basically asking me out to find out how he could get next to me. Early on, however, he let some profanity slip. I could tell his wife was mortified, but he kept talking, trying to get past it. I did not say anything, I just kept eating. Later, he said, “I want to know how to make a significant contribution in your church.”

I said, “Listen, what I think you need to do is come to church and let us minister to you. Even though you’ve been going to church for years, your use of profanity earlier in this meal let me know that you’ve got some spiritual growing up to do. Your vocabulary will change as you grow in the Word.”

His wife was nodding her head up and down. We did not hang around for dessert. He never came back.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are children of the King. Do not use the language of the gutter – use the vocabulary of godliness. Stay away from the dirty innuendo and the off-color jokes and comments. Do not be shady.

It is interesting to note how our ancestors understood civil and improper language. An old Latin name for a church or cathedral, in medieval Europe, was the word, “fane”. To say, several hundred years ago, that the church cathedral was a beautiful “fane,” would have been immediately understood as a compliment. Later, they added the prefix “pro,” in front of “fane” to create the word “profane”. This literally meant, “out in front of the church”. With a little tongue-in-cheek humor, they thus created a word to refer to the language “outside in front of the church” that you would never use inside the church. And, that kind of language became known as profanity.¹

The things you would never say inside the church – just wait until you get away! Do you have one vocabulary for church, and an entirely different one for work, or in the home, or on the campus, or on the ball field?

The authenticity of Christianity relates directly to the tongue. James writes, in chapter 1, verse 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.

I have read that during the time of the Welsh Revival of the early 1900’s, many of the coal miners used pony-drawn carts to haul the coal out of the mines. After the revival came, and these coal miners experienced redemption and radical changes, they had a problem in the mines. The trouble was, their ponies were no longer able to understand their commands – because their language had so drastically changed.

According to the apostle Paul’s description of fallen humanity in this passage, one of the most distinctive differences between an unbeliever and a believer should be the tongue!

He writes, “The unbeliever’s mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”

The Greek word for bitterness, “pikria,” refers to the hostility and anger of the human heart. The truth is, you cannot cover up your heart. Paul has already said, in verse 13, that the throat is an open grave; that is, the throat keeps lifting the lid on the coffin of your heart.

- If there is bitterness in your heart, it will come out through the mouth.
- If there is hatred in the heart, it will come out through the mouth.
- If there is greed in the heart, it will come out through the mouth.

Jesus Christ said, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 12, verse 34,

. . . the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Whatever is treasured in your heart, comes out of your mouth. If you love sports, you are going to talk about sports. You are going to talk about N. C. State’s victory over Maryland last weekend. You just cannot help it – it is going to come out. If a person loves money, when you get around them, that is what they are going to talk about. If they love things, they are going to talk about their latest acquisition. If they love themselves, they are going to talk about themselves.

Paul’s point, in Romans, chapter 3, verse 14, is that mankind, as a whole, is bitter, angry, resentful,

upset, discontented, spiteful, malicious, and revengeful and the mouth reveals the hidden decay of a sinful and selfish heart.

Becoming a Christian does not automatically erase the problem.

One of the great problems in the Corinthian church was their unbridled tongues. Paul was sort of holding his breath, as he anticipated visiting them. He writes in II Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 20,

For I am afraid that . . . when I come . . . there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders . . . disturbances

Who is he writing to? Hockey fans? The coaching staff at Duke University? My friend, he is writing this to us! He is writing to the church – to people who ought to know better!

And, this list of things are all performed by the tongue – strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, disturbances. Ladies and gentlemen, this is profane speech. But it is not out in front of the church – it has found its way into the hallways; into the business meetings; into the Sunday school classes; onto the gymnasium floor.

It is stuff that does not belong in the mouth of a believer.

Paul wrote in Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 29,

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

That reminds me of another verse that I mentioned in our last discussion. It is found in Colossians, chapter 4, verse 6, where Paul encouraged the church,

Let your speech always be with grace, . . .

(literally, “gracious”),

. . . as though seasoned with salt . . .

What did he mean?

You need to know that salt was extremely valuable in Paul’s day. It was akin to treasure. It could be used to buy products in the marketplace. In fact, Roman soldiers were often paid in salt. The phrase, “a man’s gotta be worth his salt,” comes out of Paul’s economy.

So, you did not throw salt around; you did not treat it lightly. You would carefully season your food with it; you would not want to waste any of it.

Perhaps Paul is saying, “Don’t throw your words around carelessly – they are valuable and you don’t want to waste them.”

Furthermore, just as salt makes food more palatable by enhancing the natural flavor of the food, so choice words, used appropriately, enhance a person’s reputation as being a gracious person.

Valuable Words For Mankind’s Mouth

What are some of the words that season a person’s vocabulary with grace? What are some valuable words? Let me give you a few. In fact, practice some of them today.

Please.

1. The first one is, “Please.”

Say that word. When you say, “please,” you are revealing humility and you are treating the other person, not as an object placed on planet earth to serve you, but as a person with dignity and honor.

Thank you.

2. Add to that word, the words, “Thank you.”
Say that with me, “Thank you!”

It may have been a long time since some of you husbands said, “Thank you,” to your wife for the myriad of things she does for you. Amen? When was the last time you thanked her for dinner, “Thank you, honey, that was delicious.”?

If you could not say it was delicious, at least say, “Thank you, honey, that was unforgettable . . . that was really unusual.”

I have said this before, and a few weeks ago I asked a waitress again to make sure it was still true, “What’s the worst day to work in the week?”

She said, “Sunday . . . you are treated the worst and you get the smallest tips.”

I appreciate you.

3. Another set of words that will season life with grace, like salt seasons food, are the words, “I appreciate you.”

Talk about a treasure in words. Like flavoring to food – so these words bring spice and flavor to the heart.

I am sorry . . . I was wrong.

4. Another sentence that could change your life, if you would say these words, “I’m sorry . . . I was wrong.”

What rare words. Look at the person next to you – if you are married, look at your spouse, and say those words, “I’m sorry . . . I was wrong.”

You might say, “But I didn’t do anything wrong!”

You will! Go ahead and apologize ahead of time! “I’m sorry . . . I was wrong!”

There are no loopholes in these words; there is no escape clause; there are no excuses – just full admission.

I forgive you.

5. The responding words to that, are the words, “I forgive you.”

Perhaps there are no more powerful words in the human language than those.

There might be a marriage that would instantly begin to heal, if those words were spoken.

“I’m sorry . . . I was wrong.”

“I forgive you.”

There might be a relationship between a son and a father, business associates, two believers caught in

conflict, whose lives would once again enjoy the flavor of life itself, if those words were spoken.

How seasoned is your tongue?

Professionals, who are supposed to know this kind of statistic, say that the average person has around seven hundred opportunities to speak every day. And, the average person will indeed, speak some twelve thousand sentences, formed out of approximately fifty thousand words, every day.

Fifty thousand words is the size of a small paper back book. I wonder, at the end of the day, how much of it would be worth writing down; how much would be worth repeating?!

The mark of the unbeliever is his mouth, Paul says – his throat, his lips, his tongue. So also, the Bible says, the authenticating characteristic of the believer should, in fact, be the distinctive, pure, wholesome, edifying use of his tongue.

I want to end with the same question I began our study with. It is a question that others could answer for you, but would not dare. “How beautiful is your tongue today?”

There is a prayer that someone wrote in a book that I have long forgotten the name of. The prayer is, “O Lord, fill my mouth with worthwhile stuff, and then nudge me when I’ve said enough.”

What a great prayer. “O Lord, fill my mouth with worthwhile stuff, and nudge me when I’ve said enough.”

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/10/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Donald Grey Barnhouse, Romans (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), vol. 1, p. 240.