

TAMING THE TONGUE

by Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Director

The Tongue

St. James describes the power of the tongue. “When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” (James 3:3-8)

The Forked Tongue

Native American Indians used to say, “White man have forked tongue”, whenever they were told one thing one day and something else the next. St. James writes about spiritual double talk: “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.” (James 3:9-10)

Stewards of Sanctified Speech

The following passages are worth memorizing to help manage and sanctify your speech. “Let your conversation always be full of grace.” (Col. 4:6) “The tongue of the wise brings healing.” (Prov. 12:18) “A gentle answer turns away wrath.” (Prov. 15:1) “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life.” (Prov. 15:4) “Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.” (Psalm 34:13)

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“Honey, I’m sorry for what I said yesterday. I didn’t really mean it. I was angry. Forgive me”, pleads a downcast husband or wife trying to make amends. It’s good to apologize and try to make things right again. But some serious damage may have been done which may take some time to repair. It’s foolish to yell first and apologize later. Disagreements are bound to occur in whatever relationship - marital, family, workplace, church, school, etc. When they occur, cool it. Bite your tongue. Control yourself. Above all, never insult a person’s personhood by name calling or character defamation. To angrily shout: “You

idiot! There must be something wrong with you! You’re always fouling things up! You can’t think straight! Some brain cards must be missing in your deck!”, is like pouring kerosine on a bonfire. Instead of attacking with “You” messages, calmly convey personal “I” messages expressing your opinions. And don’t beat around the bush. Openly express what you think in a gracious, polite way. Listen carefully and patiently to what another has to say. Let your body language express friendship, respect and love.

The Silent Treatment

What do you do when the person engaged in a disagreement smugly says, “I’m not going to discuss it”, and then walks away like a sulking child? Usually the goal is to upset you. Don’t let it. Any negative response on your part will only be counterproductive. A pouty silent response may be the result of passive-aggressive behavior. The best thing is to behave as if nothing is wrong. If you continue to speak and act normally, the brooder may eventually come around and a relationship restored.

Culture Coarseness

There is excessive coarseness in American culture. Politeness seems passe. Too many quickly shoot from the lip with a blasting barrage of verbal bullets to insult, disrupt and inflame. Impolite coarseness lies deep within our sinful nature. Its impulses must be subdued. Here’s an antidote. Imitate God’s love. God had every reason to fly off the handle and damn us all to hell. But He didn’t. He was not coarsely callous regarding a world stuffed and stinking in the refuse of sin. Instead, “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) The word, “loved”, (“*eygapeysen*” in N.T. Greek) means “to unconditionally forgive and forget and do good to someone who doesn’t deserve it.” Politely and graciously imitate God’s love whenever you’re ready to let your tongue fly in a rage of revenge. You’ll prevent breaking a good relationship.

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