

## A Moral Checkup for Your Mouth

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It is every Christian's heart-felt desire to live a more holy life, one that better glorifies God and displays His love. The process by which believers grow in holiness is called "sanctification." It is the result of God's powerful, transforming grace within us.

The outworking of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work is not as vague or mystical as many well-meaning Christians imagine. It can be seen in very definite ways in our conduct—particularly in the way we use our mouths. About our linguistic habits God tells us: "All of us stumble in many ways, but if anyone is never at fault in what he says, then he is mature, able to control his whole body" (James 3:2).

Reforming the way we use our words, then, is a key to sanctification. The mouth is so troublesome and sinful that, if it can be made more holy, so can other areas of our conduct. For that reason, the following "oral check-up" has been devised, summarizing much of what the Bible teaches us about the way we should speak. If Christian morality were more evident here, God would surely receive greater glory—not only among us, but also through us before the world.

### Notice the Destructive Power of Words

"Thy tongue devises very wickedness: like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.... Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue" (Psalm 52:2, 4).

"Who have whet their tongue like a sword, and have aimed their arrows, even bitter words. (Psalm 64:3)

"There is rash speaking which is like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings health" (Proverbs 12:18).

"A worthless man devises mischief, and in his lips there is as a scorching fire" (Proverbs 16:27).

"Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit: the poison of asps is under their lips" (Romans 3:13).

### Do You Defame Fellow Believers with Harsh Language?

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a grievous word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise utters

knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools pours out folly... A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit" (Proverbs 15:1-4).

"The tongue is a fire, the world of iniquity among our members which defiles the whole body...and is set on fire by hell.... It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith we bless the Lord and Father, and therewith we curse men, who are made after the likeness of God: out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.... If you have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart, glory not and lie not against the truth. This

wisdom is not a wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.... But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits..." (James 3:5-18).

### **Do You Criticize Unnecessarily or Talk Too Much?**

"In the multitude of words there is no lack of transgression, but he who refrains his lips does wisely" (Proverbs 10:19).

"He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Proverbs 11:13).

"A perverse man scatters abroad strife, and a whisperer separates best friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

"He who spares his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise. (Proverbs 17:27-28).

"For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention ceases. As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife. (Proverbs 26:20-21).

### **Do You Judgmentally or Maliciously Speak Evil of Fellow Believers?**

"Speak not one against another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law...[and so] is not a doer of the law" (James 4:11).

"You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son" (Psalm 50:20).

"Who are you to judge the servant of another? Before his own lord he stands or falls.... But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you set at naught your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God.... Let us not therefore judge one another any more. (Romans 14:4, 8-13).

"All the day long they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil" (Psalm 56:5).

"I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be...a reviler.... Be not deceived: neither fornicators...nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10).

### **Do You Speak Uncharitably?**

"Love is longsuffering and is kind...does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not its own, is not provoked, takes not account of evil, rejoices not in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

### **Do You Interpret People In The Best Light?**

The man with unsound and ungodly attitudes] is puffed up...whereof comes envy, strife, railings, evil suspicion..." (1 Timothy 6:4).

[By contrast, the inspired writer, after speaking of evil actions, said:] "But beloved we are persuaded better things of you and things that accompany salvation..." (Hebrews 6:9).

[Examples of seeing others in the worst light: 1 Samuel 1:13-15; 17:28; 2 Samuel 10:3; 16:3; 19:25-27; Nehemiah 6:6-8; Acts 24:2,5. We can take one instance —] "And when the barbarians saw the venomous creature hanging from [Paul's] hand, they said one to another, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped from the sea, yet Justice has not allowed to live (Acts 28:4).}

### **Is What You Say Kind?**

"Let not kindness and truth forsake you; bind them about your neck: write them upon the tablet of your heart" (Proverbs 3:3).

"The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increases learning.... Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:21, 24).

"She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the law of kindness is on her tongue" (Proverbs 31:26).

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

"And be kind one to another, tenderhearted" (Ephesians 4:32).

"Put on...a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering...and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:12,14).

"Finally, be all of you like-minded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humble-minded (1 Peter 3:8).

### **Does Your Speaking Show Humility?**

"Do nothing through faction or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, let each count the other as better than himself" (Philippians 2:3).

"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think....In love of the brethren be tenderly affectionate one to another; in honor preferring one another" (Romans 12:3, 10).

"With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).

### **Do You Speak Carelessly?**

"He who guards his mouth keeps his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction" (Proverbs 13:3).

"The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things" (Proverbs 15:28).

"Whosoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23).

"See a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 29:20).

"If any man thinks himself to be religious and does not bridle his tongue, he deceives himself and this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26).

"He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile" (1 Peter 3:10).

### **Do You Choose Your Words Cautiously and Fairly, or Do You Press into Service Provocative (Emotive) and Unqualified (Categorical) Expressions?**

"I say unto you that...whoever shall say to his brother "Raca" [a term of contempt] shall be in danger of the council, and whoever shall say "You fool" shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:22).

"I said in my haste, 'All men are liars'" (Psalm 116:11).

[When we oversimplify and lump together the righteous and unrighteous under one condemning rubric, note:] "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 17:15).

"Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear" (Ephesians 4:29).

"Let us follow after things which make for peace and things whereby we may edify one another" (Romans 14:19).

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in network of silver. As an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear" (Proverbs 25:11-12).

"The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver.... The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked speaks perverseness" (Proverbs 10:20,32).

"A man has joy in the answer of his mouth, and a word in due season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23)

"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 10:11).

"A grievous word stirs up anger...the mouth of fools pours forth folly" (Proverbs 15:1,2).

### **Do You Gossip or Publicly Discredit People?**

"You shall not go up and down as a talebearer among your people" (Leviticus 19:16).

"Who shall dwell with Jehovah?... He who slanders not with his tongue...nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor" (Psalm 15:3).

"And withal they learn also to be idle, going about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Timothy 5:13).

"He who utters a slander is a fool" (Proverbs 10:18).

"The mouth of the wicked and the mouth of deceit have they opened against me.... They have compassed me about also with words of hatred and fought against me without a cause" (Psalm 109:2,3).

"Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile" (Psalm 34:13; 1 Peter 3:10).

"Let all bitterness...clamor and railing be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31).

"Put them in mind...to speak evil of no man, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all gentleness toward all men" (Titus 3:1-2).

[Whisperers and backbiters are condemned: Psalm 101:5; Romans 1:29,30; 2 Corinthians 12:20] "The north wind drives away rain, so does an angry countenance a backbiting tongue" (Proverbs 25:23).

### **Do You Publicly Criticize People Before First Speaking with Them and Seeking Their Restoration?**

"He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.... He who pleads his cause first seems just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out" (Proverbs 18:13, 17).

"Go not hastily to strive, lest you know not what to do in the end thereof, when your neighbor has put you to shame. Debate your cause with your neighbor himself, and disclose not the secret of another, lest he who hears it revile thee and your infamy turn not away" (Proverbs 25:8-10).

"Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.... Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-2).

"My brethren, if any among you err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he who converts a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

"Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them who hear" (Ephesians 4:29; cf. Romans 14:19).

"And if your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone; if he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it unto the church" (Matthew 18:15-17).

### **Do You Speak with Sensitivity, the Way You Would Have Others Speak of You?**

[See preceding passages about kindness, humility, and gentleness: for instance, 1 Peter 3:8; Ephesians 4:32; Titus 3:2; Romans 12:10]

"If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy that you be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord" (Philippians 2:1-2).

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; Romans 13:9).

"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).

"All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, even so do also unto them, for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

### **Do You Exemplify the Very Things for Which You Criticize Others?**

"Judge not that you be not judged. For by the same standard you judge, you shall be judged; and with the measure you mete it out, it shall be meted out to you.... You hypocrite, first cast out the beam in your own eye, and then you shall see clearly to cast out the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:1-5).

"Therefore you are without excuse, O man, whosoever you are who judges. For in that very thing you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you who who judges practices the same things" (Romans 2:1).

### **Do Your Words about Others Amount to Humiliation or Mockery?**

"With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor" (Proverbs 11:9).

"A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit" (Proverbs 15:4).

"But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you not be consumed of one another" (Galatians 5:15).

[Examples of the sin of mockery: Genesis 21:9 with Galatians 4:29; Psalm 35:16, 21; Matthew 27:24]

[The opposite of humiliating words is commended: Proverbs 16:21, 24; 27:9, and preceding passages about kindness, sensitivity, etc.]

## **Do You Later Try to Evade Responsibility for Your Words**

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.... And I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for by your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned" (Matthew 12:34b, 36-37).

"As a madman who casts firebrands and deadly arrows, so is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, 'I was only kidding'" (Proverbs 26:18-19).

"He who covers his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

"Yet you say 'I am innocent....' Surely I will enter into judgment with you because you say 'I have not sinned'" (Jeremiah 2:35).

[Examples of attempting to evade responsibility and making excuses: Proverbs 30:20; Genesis 3:12-13; 4:9; Matthew 27:24; Luke 14:18]

## **Are You Always Careful to Tell the Truth When You Speak?**

"A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow" (Proverbs 25:18).

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20; Matthew 19:18).

"For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts...false witness, railings: these are the things which defile the man" (Matthew 15:19-20).

"You shall not take up a false report; put not your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness" (Exodus 23:1).

"You shall not...lie one to another" (Leviticus 19:11).

"Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth each one with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25).

"Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his doings" (Colossians 3:9).

"There are six things which Jehovah hates, yes seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue...a false witness who utters lies" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

"He who utters truth shows forth righteousness, but a false witness deceit.... The lip of truth shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment" (Proverbs 12:17, 19).

"Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and deceive not with your lips" (Proverbs 24:28).

"A false witness shall not go unpunished, and he who utters lies shall perish" (Proverbs 19:9; cf. 21:28).

[The mouths of unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, must be stopped by strong reproof (Titus 1:10-13).

"But for...all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

## **Do You Keep the Promises that You Make?**

[Who shall dwell with the Lord?] "He who swears to his own hurt and changes not" (Psalm 15:4).

[Among those who stand condemned by God are covenant-breakers (Romans 1:31; 2 Timothy 3:3).

### **Does Your Mouth Use Coarse Humor or Foolish Jestings?**

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you as becomes saints: nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, or jesting, which are not befitting (Ephesians 5:3-4).

"Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth" (Ephesians 4:29).

"Put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8).

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be anything praiseworthy, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

### **Do You Use Words to Boast or Flatter Yourself?**

"The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaks proud things" (Psalm 12:3).

"For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters" (2 Timothy 3:2).

"Be not wise in your own conceits" (Romans 12:16).

"I hate pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth" (Proverbs 8:13).

"Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think" (Romans 12:3).

"Let another praise you and not your own mouth—a stranger and not your own lips" (Proverbs 27:2).

### **Does Your Conversation Use God's Name Taken in Vain?**

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11).

"After this manner are you to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name" (Matthew 6:9).

[This requires that we reverence all of God's titles, attributes, works, etc.:] "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

"O Lord our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth" (Psalm 7:1).

"Swear not at all, neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King; neither by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black" (Matthew 5:34-36).

[It also requires that we profess the name of Christ and praise Him:] "If you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as the Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.... Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:9,13).

"No man speaking in the Spirit of God says 'Jesus is anathema,' and no man can say 'Jesus is Lord' but by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

"Through Him, then, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to His name" (Hebrews 13:15).

[This entails that all of our speaking must be pleasing to God:] "And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17).

[We must not dishonor our profession of His name by our behavior:] "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (Romans 2:24).

"Let your lifestyle [conduct] be such as becomes the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27).