

GIVING GOD CONTROL OF YOUR WORDS

Living for Christ requires having the kind of faith in God that gives Him control over every aspect of your life (Proverbs 3:5-7). One element of giving God control of your life is giving Him control over your words. This lesson will focus on some basics about what this should look like.

MATTHEW 12:33-37

The first step to give God control of your words is to give Him control of your heart. The Pharisees had not done this (vv. 22-32). You will always be fighting a losing battle with your words if your heart (affection, allegiance) has not first been given to God. However, if you deeply desire to serve and honor God, your heart will be a storeroom of good your words will come from rather than evil (though there may be old habits you are trying to break). Then, recognize that only God is qualified to identify what “good” and “evil” speech is (not what you feel is right, societal standards, etc.). Furthermore, this passage should cause you to think soberly about every word you speak. You will answer for them all on the Judgment Day and your eternity will, in part, be determined by them (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 3:10-12; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8). Furthermore, even those words that may seem trivial and unimportant reveals the inner person of the heart!

JAMES 3:1-12

Words are powerful! Despite the tongue being a small member of the body, it is capable of much good and much harm. The task of harnessing the tongue’s power to only accomplish what is good, then, is tall! It is presented as one of the most challenging aspects of living for Christ. In fact, you must never think you reach a place when your

tongue is fully controlled/tamed and do not need to watch it carefully (like working with a deadly animal). This will require great mindfulness about every word you speak! Furthermore, you must carefully watch over the tongue so that you do not let it be used for both good and evil. For, while you should use your tongue to praise God (Hebrews 13:15), you must not then use your tongue in ways that would dishonor God – including through cursing (speak dishonorably of) people who are made in God’s likeness. This would include things like slander (Colossians 3:8), gossip (1 Timothy 5:13), and malicious and judgmental speech toward others (James 4:11). Such hypocritical speech undermines any good you are trying to accomplish that would bring honor to God (Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Peter 3:1-4)!

EPHESIANS 4:25, 29-32

You must actively work to let the word of God transform your speech. First, you must put off lying and replace it with speaking the truth. Any false and/or deceitful speech that is intended to mislead or manipulate someone must be eliminated (Revelation 21:8; Romans 1:28-32). Instead, truth must be spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15). Second, you must not allow any foul language to come from your mouth. This is speech that is corrupt, unwholesome, worthless, and rotten (like decaying fruit, Matthew 7:17) and would apply broadly to words that do not portray the image of Christ (i.e. profanity, abusive speech, blasphemy, etc.). Instead, God expects only what is good for building up someone in need to be put in its place. So, this raises the bar on speech in such a way that should cause us to only speak in ways that would honor God and help others to be built up in the faith (i.e. eliminating any questionable speech, Colossians 4:5-6). Third, you must remove all bitterness, anger, wrath, shouting, slander, and malice. Although these go deeper than your speech, they certainly include your speech. All these deal with animosity with others and have the potential to cause great harm in the way you speak to or about others. Instead of speaking with hostility that has been harbored in your heart, commit to being kind

and compassionate to speak in God-honoring ways like the ways you would want others to speak to/about you (Matthew 7:12; 5:43-48).

EPHESIANS 5:3-4

Christians must put away things that are not proper for saints (God's holy people redeemed by Jesus's blood). Therefore, the words you use are not just a matter of taste but about what is suitable for people who belong to God! Of the things that are not suitable is obscene talk (anything morally repulsive and offensive, i.e. profanity). Foolish talking (talk that lacks sense and accomplishes nothing good) is also not suitable. Then, crude joking (humor/wit that runs contrary to purity) is labeled as being inappropriate. Rather than God's people being known for such unrighteousness, they should be known for giving thanks!

JAMES 1:26-27

James teaches Christians that there is more to living for Him than just hearing God's word and practicing some form of religion. Instead, you must be committed to obeying God's word (1:19-27)! For, religion and spiritual knowledge does not cover a life that is rebellious and unwilling to submit to God. This includes the way that you speak. While there is a growing process and sin may still occur (1 John 1:8-10), the Christian cannot let his/her speech continue unchecked! Instead, you must be highly aware of your speech so as to set a guard at your lips (Psalm 141:3) so that they are purposed to serve God (Psalm 19:14). To think that you can refuse to control your tongue and have a religion that pleases God amounts to self-deception!

CONCLUSION

Giving God control of your words will impact everything you say. While many words are said without thought, letting God mold your words will cause you to be aware of each word so that you can make sure each word is properly employed in the service of God. Therefore, you must humble yourself to accept and obey these and all of God's instructions about your words.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

How are your words and your heart connected?

Why is every word you speak important?

How does the power of the tongue compare with its size?

Why is it essential to carefully control the tongue?

What can the tongue be used powerfully for both good and evil?

What should transformation in your speech look like?

What are some examples of speech that is not fitting for God's holy people?

What affect can your speech have on your religion?