

Control Anger, the Tongue and Criticism

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 2

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Eph. 4:29-30 ESV)

I. Controlling the Tongue: Bridle the tongue.

A. There is a great story told:

1. In a church history class where the teacher stated that Constantine, the first emperor of Rome to profess and then legalize Christianity, was not a true, born-again believer. Constantine, the teacher said, used Christianity for political advantage (ca. AD 285-337).
2. One student disagreed with the teacher, insisting that Constantine was a true believer and a great leader in the history of Christianity. He became visibly upset and proceeded to attack the teacher verbally. The teacher, in turn, became angry and defensive. The exchange that ensued became so ugly and heated that the class was dismissed; teacher and student had to walk away from each other.
3. A week later, the teacher resumed the subject, stating that Constantine merely professed Christianity.
4. “Oh,” the student exclaimed, “I thought you were talking about Augustine, not Constantine. I thought you said Augustine was not a true believer.”
5. “No,” the teacher said, “I was talking about Constantine, not Augustine.”
6. “Well then,” the student said, “I agree with you.”

B. The whole conflict occurred because each misunderstood the other!

1. Neither one listened attentively and respectfully.
2. Neither one seemed to care about the impact of his words or controlling his tongue.

C. True spiritual godliness, in contrast, is demonstrated by bringing the tongue under control:

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.” (James 1:26)

II. Controlling the Tongue: Be quick to hear.

A. In the words of James, we need to be “quick to hear” and “slow to speak” (James 1:19).

“The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.” (Prov. 20:5)

B. A wise person considers the possibility that the other person may be right!

1. Not one of us thinks straight all of the time. When we are open to learning, our opponent

may turn out to be our best teacher. So those who are wise seek to honestly understand the other person's arguments, reasoning, and position.

C. Ask questions.

1. It's amazing how little we listen and how much we overreact to those who disagree with us.
2. We immediately jump to justifying our position, defending our ego, and winning the argument.

"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." (Prov. 18:13)

III. Controlling the Tongue: Be slow to speak.

A. "Slow to speak" - Slow to spout our opinions, slow to be the first to answer, slow to dominate a conversation, and slow to pronounce judgment.

B. Wisdom from King Solomon

"When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent." (Prov. 10:19)

"Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble." (Prov. 21:23)

"Whoever restrains his words has knowledge." (Prov. 17:27)

"Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life." (Prov. 13:3)

"A fool's lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating." (Prov. 18:6)

C. Wise people benefit when they control their tongue. Fools, however, lack restraint, which leads to conflict.

IV. Controlling the Tongue: Choose the right words.

"A harsh word stirs up anger." (Prov. 15:1)

- A. We are not to respond to mean, nasty talk with more mean, nasty talk; we are not to return evil words for evil words.**
- B. When we are verbally attacked, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond with kindness and self-control (1 Cor. 4:12-13).**

V. Controlling the Tongue: Eliminate cutting words from your vocabulary.

A. After years of experience in facing painful controversy, Francis Schaeffer makes this insightful comment regarding the power of cutting words:

"I have observed one thing among true Christians in their differences in many countries: what divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians—what leaves a bitterness that can last for twenty, thirty, or forty years. . . . Invariably it is lack of love—and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences. These stick in the mind like glue."

– Francis Schaeffer

B. Elders must be careful of the words they use and eliminate cutting words!

C. The Holy Spirit does not lead believers to make cruel, mean, nasty, or insulting comments.

1. This means that we do not refer to fellow believers with whom we disagree with such rude epithets as “losers,” “idiots,” “heretics,” or “liberals.”
2. To gain victory over a cutting tongue, eliminate from your daily vocabulary all unnecessary terms of disparagement—all words that belittle, mock, insult, or demean God’s people.

“The battle for vocal holiness is a long-running one, and it needs to be waged incessantly, daily, hourly.” – Sinclair Ferguson

VI. Controlling the Tongue: Don’t use inflammatory speech.

A. Don’t exaggerate or overstate things.

1. Try to represent the other person accurately.
2. If that person were sitting next to you, would they agree with how you are presenting their view. Or, if you are speaking to that person, are you being accurate? Or are you exaggerating things?
3. For example, music: People will exaggerate, “We never sing hymns anymore;” “How come all we ever sing are hymns? It sounds like a funeral dirge;” “It sounds like a rock concert in here.”

B. Speaking truthfully, without exaggeration, is most important when addressing doctrinal differences.

1. Adherents on both sides of the debate over the doctrine of divine election and human free will, for example, often resort to extreme, inflammatory language.
 - a) Some of the Arminian persuasion, who emphasize free will, state that Calvinists base their beliefs on the Greek philosophy of determinism and ignore the Scriptures.
 - b) Some Calvinists, in turn, call Arminians heretics and presume to say they don’t think Arminians are born-again believers because of their works-oriented salvation.
2. All such language is misguided and toxic. It is never helpful for discussing profitably the truths of Scripture among those who love God and his Word.

C. Exaggerated speech is a form of falsehood that distorts truth. There can be nothing righteous or holy about it.

VII. Controlling Criticism: Stop grumbling and quarreling.

A. Example

1. Think of the World Trade Center in New York City took six long years to build, but it was destroyed in only 90 minutes on September 11, 2001.
2. In a similar way, a local church that has taken a lifetime to build can be devastated in a few months by a sinful firestorm of complaining and quarreling.

B. Grumbling (or complaining) is not constructive or edifying to the family of God.

1. Like a contagious disease, grumbling generates conflict, confusion, and unhappiness that quickly spread throughout a church body until all are infected with discontent.

“Nowhere does the self-centered heart of man more quickly take control than through the machinery of criticism.” – J. A. Motyer

2. Grumbling, Motyer goes on to say, is associated with “selfish complaining, unbalanced criticism of small matters, impatience towards what is not understood, grudging unwillingness to be helpful.”
- C. Even though we are not to “speak evil against one another” or “judge” improperly, there are times when it is necessary and legitimate to admonish, rebuke, judge, or constructively criticize (to point out a fault).**
1. Pray

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5)

 - a) Before you correct or judge, pray for wisdom, courage, and tact.

“All of us would be wiser if we would resolve never to put people down, except on our prayer lists.” – D. A. Carson
 - b) All criticism and rebuke needs to be bathed in prayer. Be assured that God is quite willing to help you know how to speak and act in difficult situations when you look to him.
 2. Check Your Attitudes and Motives
 - a) Criticism given with an attitude of pride, vindictiveness, or anger will hurt the other person and accomplish little.
 - b) Criticism must be given with an attitude of humility that demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit and conveys Christian love.
 3. Speak Gently
 - a) All criticism and rebuke needs to be done with gentleness.
 - b) Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), and the New Testament emphasizes the importance of dealing with people and their problems with gentleness.
 4. Balance Criticism with Words of Encouragement

“Blame comes best on the back of praise.” – Charles Spurgeon
 5. Use Scripture to Instruct
 6. Welcome Criticism
 7. Do what it takes to build relationships among the elders, outside of just elders’ meetings. Having stronger relationships will help to be a lubricant of sorts when you face conflict within your elder team.