

# 25 SINS OF THE TONGUE

By Brent Hunter, evangelist for the Kirkland church of Christ

**“A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the soul” (Proverbs 18: 7-8).**

**“A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Prov 11:13).** Doesn’t that about say it all? One who loves to spread tales cannot wait to reveal something that should be kept in confidence. He who is “of a faithful spirit” realizes that not everything should be told. Some things should remain secret.

Be careful when someone approaches you with, **“If I tell you something, do you promise not to tell anyone?”** That is really tempting, isn’t it? It always seems exciting to know something that others don’t. But that is often how the devil does his work, undermines others, and spreads strife and discord.

No doubt the Bible talks about these sins more than any other kind of sin because of their serious consequences. **Reputations can be destroyed by gossip. Lives can be devastated by those who spread tales. Trust can be broken when someone obviously cannot be depended on to keep something private. Friends can be divided. Churches can be torn asunder. Souls can be lost!**

At the original creation man was given **“dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air, and over every creeping thing that those creeps upon the face of the earth” (Gen 1:26).** But there is one thing that man does NOT have dominion over and that is his tongue: **“But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas 3:8).**

The Bible lists about ***twenty-five words used to describe different types of sins of the tongue!*** I was amazed at how many *shades and variations* the Holy Spirit has seen fit to reveal. Are you surprised to learn how many *nuances and subtleties* there are to the misuse of the tongue? No wonder it is so hard to tame! Why did God see fit to give so much detail and so many different words to describe various sins which involve our speech? Perhaps the answer lies in something I learned many years ago when I taught communication courses at Florida College.

For many years, communication researchers thought of words as simply the **“dress of thought.”** They assumed that all cultures observe the universe around them in the same way and simply invented different words to describe what they saw. However, the “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” states that the linguistic patterns and the ***words an individual learns determine what is perceived as reality.*** This is the reason that whenever new discoveries are made, we must “coin new words” to help expand our cognitive abilities to enable us to grasp new concepts. In

other words, we miss important realities and nuances around us if we do not have the specific words available to describe those realities. Isn't that fascinating? Indeed, **perception is reality**. But we must take it one step further; our perception is altered, for better or for worse, **by the depth or detail of our vocabulary!**

No wonder the Holy Spirit chose to give us so many different words with important shades of meanings to help us be on guard as to the misuse of the tongue. Beloved, may we ponder and think through the definition of these Bible words. In doing so, it will help us to increase our awareness of the many possible ways one can sin with their tongue and be on guard against them. Remember, Paul admonishes us that in order that **"no advantage will be taken of us by Satan," we must be careful not to be "ignorant of his schemes" (2 Cor 2:11)**. Indeed, God has given us all the instruction and a rich vocabulary, so that if we are diligent, we will not find ourselves unwittingly doing the devil's work through the misuse of our words. Here is my goal in this study: Let's all learn the words the Holy Spirit has given us to identify sinful conversation and lay up their definitions in our hearts, so that our conscience will prick us when needed! We need all the help we can get to improve in this all important and challenging area of our spiritual lives. Jesus Himself aptly warned us: **"For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt 12:37)**.

And don't forget that most of the time these sins are both a sin of the **tongue and the ear**. If no one provides willing, listening ears for ungodly speech, it just dies out. We need to be just as diligent about being a party to these sins, whether we are giving or receiving.

How important is our conversation? If you do a word search of the old King James Version, you will find eighteen references to the word in the New Testament. Later translations instead of using the word "conversation," use words such as "conduct" (Phil 1:27 NASU), or "manner of life" (2 Tim 3:10 NIV). Overtime words tend to change their meaning. Hundreds of years ago a person's conversation was seen as such a key barometer of a person's character and manner of life, that the word conversation was understood to not just refer to a person's speech, but a word that described a person's entire manner of life! They respected and well understood the importance of the use of our tongues and how what we say simply serves as a "ladle from our hearts" and represents to others who and what we are as a person.

Peter gives us somber warning: **"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation (conduct NASU) and godliness (2 Peter 3:11 KJV)?**

We must all be so careful. Guard your tongue. Guard your ears. Do not be a talebearer. May all of us only speak **"what is good for the edifying and gives grace to those that hear" (Eph 4:29)**.

Ironically, at least in the New King James Version, the word *gossip*, that we so commonly use today, is not even found! The word translated “whisperer” in the NKJV is translated *gossip* in the NASU and some of the later versions. But since the word gossip is so generic in the English language, I think in teaching on this subject it is best to use the specific words identified in this list and not confuse this study through the ambiguous term “gossip,” which means different things to different people.

I looked all around to find a comprehensive list of the “sins of the tongue,” and could not find one. I am sure others have compiled such a list, but since I could not locate one, I decided to come up with my own list, and this helped me a great deal. I may have left some words out that should be on the list, like nagging, and keep in mind that translations use different words to describe the same thing. Therefore, I have tried to avoid confusion by not listing every possible synonym used in every translation. However, I have done my best to include an English word to describe every substantive nuance of the sins of the tongue, in both the old and new testaments.

I have put these in **alphabetical order and squeezed them into one page** to make this list more useful. ***I encourage parents to go over this list with their children.*** Perhaps this would be useful to place on your refrigerator. I have included the passages where each term can be found, and when I deemed it necessary, listed the specific definition of the term. Be advised, that this is a work in progress, so I welcome your feedback as to any edits or suggestions you may have as to how to improve this list. I want it to be the best teaching tool possible.

The Bible warns countless times about the consequences of not bridling our tongues. I assume generic references to sinning with our tongues could be a reference to any the twenty-five sins of the tongue listed in the attached list. May this be a help to all of us as we seek to be separate from the world and speak in ways that will glorify God and be a true **“adorning of the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Titus 2:10).**

# 25 SINS OF THE TONGUE

**1. Accusation against an elder without two or more witnesses** (I Tim 5:19)

**2. Backbiting** (Rom 1:30). "To speak against someone, especially in their absence." Note: No one likes to be talked about behind their backs! Try to speak about others so you would not be embarrassed or ashamed if they were in the room with you.

**3. Blasphemy** (Lev 24:16, Col 3:8). "Defamatory speech against the Divine Majesty."

**4. Boasting or Bragging** (Rm 1:30).      **5. Crooked Speech** (Prov 4:24). **6. Coarse Jestng** (Eph 5:4) and **Filthy Speech** (Col 3:8).

**7. Complaining or Grumbling** (Num 11:1, James 5:9).

**8. Cursing** (James 3:10). "Taking the Lord's name in vain (Ex 20:7), or simply uttering profanities." Note: To be profane is to treat sacred things as common, or holy things as unholy. Be on guard. The word Gosh is just another word for God!

**9. Deceit** (Romans 3:13).

**10. Evil Speaking** (Eph 4:31) or **Malign no one** (Titus 3:2). "Words that tend to harm." Note: The statements may be true, but if unnecessary, hurtful, and unkind, to tell others is to malign another and to speak evil.

**11. Evil Surmising or Evil Suspicion** (I Tim 6:4). "Assigning the worst possible motives to someone's actions." Note: Jesus warned us "To judge righteous judgments, and not according to appearances" (Jn 7:24). This is the opposite of being charitable and giving others the benefit of the doubt.

**12. False Teaching** (Titus 1:10-11).

**13. Fault Finding** (Matt 7:1-2). "Harsh, caustic, vindictive criticism."

**14. Flattery** (Ps 12:3, Prov 20:19, 26: 28).

**15. Foolish talking** (Eph 5:4). "Fruitless discussions."

**16. Harsh Criticism** (Matt 5:22).

**17. Idle Words** (Matt 12:36) or **Idle Chatter** (2 Tim 2:16). "Words spoken without any consideration for their soundness; without any thought as to the effect it might have on others."

**18. Lying** (Rev 21:8).

**19. Meddler or Busy Body** (I Peter 4:15).

**20. Profane Babblings** (2 Tim 2:16).

**21. Reviling** (I Cor 6:10). "To speak reproachfully, to abuse and get back at someone, rail against."

**22. Slander** (Ps 15: 2-3). "Words of falsehood spoke with malicious intent." Note: Be on guard. The very word devil means "the slanderer." When we slander another, we are doing the work of the devil! See Jn 8:44.

**23. Sowing Discord or Spreading Strife** (Prov 6:19). "Say things to gender strife and division."

**24. Talebearing** (Leviticus 19:16, Prov 11:13, Prov 18:8). "Literally, become an informant. To act as a disloyal betrayer to hurt another." Think of Judas when he betrayed Jesus and informed the enemies of Jesus where He had been hiding.

**25. Whisperers** (Romans 1:29, 2 Cor 12:2) The word is translated "Gossip" in 2 Cor 12:2 ( NASU).