

## Blessings Part 4 Behaviors Of The Heart And Tongue

Over the past few weeks, as we have read and carefully studied about some of these ordinary matters of life spoken about here in Luke chapter 6, we've been reminded that we are not on our own within them as they take place, but that the Lord Jesus is intimately involved in all of them, teaching us and guiding our steps as we respond to each of life's circumstances.

And that is so with this matter spoken about here in His words today, our seeming to always be needing and seeking the approval of the people around us.

Folks, we may not want to admit it, but the need for approval from other people seems to flow powerfully and deeply within most all of our souls, men and women doing whatever it takes to gain that approval, and especially so from those who have some control over their happiness or over their desires and plans for the future.

Men will go to strange and even foolish lengths to gain the attention and the favor of a woman. And it seems that women will do much the same, spending hours and much of their income on cosmetics, jewelry and clothing. And it is said also that a woman's efforts are often intended not only to attract the attention of a man, but to also avoid the critical eye and criticisms of other women.

Also, and unfortunately so, all the inordinate attention given to our outward appearance is only the beginning. There are also matters below the surface that we find need to enhance or to cover up.

For those things that clothing and makeup do not cover, we use clever language instead, words and expressions, suitable to the occasion, hoping that our words will help us gain approval.

Let me hasten to say that not all such efforts, in themselves, are necessarily wrong or sinful. It is most often very appropriate to dress and look suitable to the occasions we are involved in. And it is fitting and proper that we use our conversations well, choosing proper words for each occasion.

But the warnings being given to us from these scriptures today, point beyond ordinary and appropriate levels of appearance and conversation. They point on into purposes and intents of the heart that are not appropriate. And for good reason! Because while such behavior is wrong and sinful under any circumstance, it is especially wrong within the context of our Christian religion and in the context of a church congregation.

Listen to these words from the passage for today given in Luke chapter 6, beginning in verse 20!

<sup>20</sup>Then He (the Lord Jesus) lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said:

“Blessed are you poor,

For yours is the kingdom of God.

<sup>21</sup>Blessed are you who hunger now,

For you shall be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now,

For you shall laugh.

<sup>22</sup>Blessed are you when men hate you,

And when they exclude you,

And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,

For the Son of Man’s sake.

<sup>23</sup>Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!

For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven,

For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

<sup>24</sup>“But woe to you who are rich,

For you have received your consolation.

<sup>25</sup>Woe to you who are full,

For you shall hunger.

Woe to you who laugh now,

For you shall mourn and weep.

<sup>26</sup>Woe to you when all men speak well of you,

For so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:20-26)

Folks, there are things that lurk within each of our hearts that we simply are not aware are there. We are blinded to their presence. That is why God gives us careful guidance and strong warnings about our hearts.

In Proverbs 4:23 God tells us to

<sup>23</sup> Keep your heart with all vigilance,

for from it flow the springs of life. (Proverbs 4:23)

And in Mark Chapter 7, Jesus gives us some strong warnings, saying that  
<sup>21</sup> . . . out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality,  
theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> coveting, wickedness, deceit,  
sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come  
from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:21-23)

Simply and plainly put, our heart is not as benign and as caring as we might want to believe it to be. To the contrary, in words given in Jeremiah chapter 17, we are told that

<sup>9</sup> “The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

And by these words, God wants you and me to be honest with ourselves, sometimes brutally honest! We really need to know that we are not the kind and generous and loving person that we want to believe ourselves to be. And because most all of us want to “be right” in every conversation, and to always “have our way in matters,” we often tread on wrong ground before the Lord.

Those words there in Jeremiah 17 are true and they are “brutally honest”, and we ought to accept them as being so. Our hearts, by nature, are desperately wicked and deceitful, and so much so that we ourselves are fooled by it.

As I have considered the impact of this verse, my thoughts have gone to some of those scenes in “soapy movies” where we hear a well-intentioned person saying to another, “just follow your heart”, “just follow your heart”. Folks, how wrong such counsel and advice can be! Our hearts are the worse guides we can choose.

And again, you and I must understand and accept that these words are speaking about us, you and me. Within our hearts, within your heart, and within my heart are all sorts of evil. And as these words from our Lord warn us, surely those awful things will eventually flow out from our hearts, sometimes blessing people, but very often cursing them. And God offers no quarter or comfort to that destructive nature within us.

The words of our passage here in Luke chapter 6 have to do with many forms of sin. But here, in particular, God is warning us about sins that involve the use and misuse of our tongues. And while the words seem to focus most on the things

that people will say about us, the warnings are also for you and me as we observe one another and as we let our thoughts and our imaginations carry us into conversations that we should not be involved in.

Our tongues truly are able to be, as the Apostle James describes, a “unruly evil”.

May we pause here for a moment and remind ourselves about what God has to say about our destructive tongue. In James chapter 3, beginning in verse 2, He tells us that

<sup>2</sup> . . . we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, (implying that we are surely not perfect) able also to bridle the whole body. <sup>3</sup>Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. <sup>4</sup>Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. <sup>5</sup>Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

See how great a forest a little fire kindles! <sup>6</sup>And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup>For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. <sup>8</sup>But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. <sup>10</sup>Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. (James 3:1-10)

I must confess to you that it has been often in my life that I have despised my own tongue, times when I have prayed earnestly to God to silence my voice for the day. I have such a propensity for saying too much of the wrong things at the wrong times.

Unfortunately, for me and for you and for those that we speak with, the use of our tongues is an irrevocable part of the “free-will” provision given to us by God. And consequently, most all of the things that come out of our mouths are our own responsibility. And we are held accountable for them.

These words here in the Book of James are real and they are true. Listen again. Here he tells us that our

<sup>6</sup> . . . tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup>For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. <sup>8</sup>But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. <sup>10</sup>Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. (James 3:6-10)

Our tongue, and the words that come forth from it, truly are a strange and unthinkable mixture of good and evil. With it we can bless God, and with it we can curse men who are made in His image. Both blessings and curses flow over our tongues all through our day. And as we are told here in the Book of James, "My brethren, these things ought not to be so".

But also note in these words that the provocation not only comes out of our own desperately wicked heart, the devil is also very intimately involved. God tells us here that our tongue is "set on fire by hell". Listen, James 3, verse 6!

<sup>6</sup>The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. (James 3:6)

At the center of most all sinful behavior is the interactions of our soul with the demonic forces of the devil. The devil was present and tempting during the first temptation and he is present and tempting now with each provocation that takes place within your and my soul, especially with the misdeeds of our tongue.

But we must also always remember, that although you and I are tempted and beguiled by satan and his demonic helpers, we are still personally accountable for our own actions, responses and behaviors. We cannot pass off the blame to the devil. That is why we are given the simple warning, "My brethren, these things ought not to be so."

You and I can and must do our part. Remember the admonition that I give from time to time. Within our salvation, we have been given the free-will power to turn away from sin. And please don't let anyone beguile you into believing otherwise.

So then yes, you and I can stop those words that rise up on our tongues. You and I do not have to say the things that we are tempted to say.

And again, God is faithful to always give us a moment of warning and escape before we say the wrong things. So then, you and I must be sensitive to the voice of God. We must listen carefully to Him and say only that which He gives you to say.

And that is the warning being given to us here in our scripture passage for today. Here we are being warned to exercise great care, both with the words we say and with the words we receive from others. There is great danger that lurks within both.

And here, Jesus is especially calling attention to the special relationship that we have with Him, and the difficult and sometimes painful manner with which other people respond to us about that relationship. Listen! Verse 22,

<sup>22</sup>Blessed are you when men hate you,  
And when they exclude you,  
And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,  
For the Son of Man's sake.

<sup>23</sup>Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!  
For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven,  
For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. (Luke 6:22-23)

And in verse 26,

<sup>26</sup>Woe to you when all men speak well of you,  
For so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:26)

We have religious persecution taking place in America today, and we could speak a great deal about the way that our people are mistreated, and especially about the ways we are kept from expressing our Christian faith within our public schools and within our workplaces.

But for us in our local churches and in our local communities, we must admit, not a lot of those persecutions and mistreatments touch us in a hurtful way. We are free to attend this church, read our bibles, witness and share our faith quite openly.

Probably the greatest difficulty of the sort spoken about in our scripture text, takes place in a more subtle way. Hidden deeply within the attitudes and temperaments of the memberships of some of our local congregations, there is often an ongoing foment and undercurrent of displeasure swirling about, disagreements about the way the church is being run or about the materials used or about the activities that take place, so much so that sometimes the displeasure within the church is greater than the pleasure.

And much of it will not easily be seen by the average visitor. Everyone is able to put on their churchy Sunday smile and to say all the right things.

But there is a statistic I've read in recent years that paints a different picture. The statistic tells us that the average life span of a church pastor, in small local congregations is only about a year and a half. And the reason given for that short tenure is exactly the point that is being made within the words of our scripture text for today. Listen again!

Verse 22,

<sup>22</sup>Blessed are you when men hate you,  
And when they exclude you,  
And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. (Luke 6:22)

Folks, it is one thing when we are told by our government that we can't pray in our schools and we can't erect religious symbols in public parks, but it is another thing altogether when a pastor has to wonder which church member he will offend with this week's message.

We joke with the expression "preacher, this week you quit preaching and went to meddling". Thankfully, we don't have such turmoil taking place in our church and those words are truly only a friendly joke between us.

But folks, those words are not a joke in many of our local churches. There are many people within some of the local congregations that do not want to hear convicting sermons preached to them. They have their private sinful ways and desires and they do not want to be told when they are wrong.

And when a preacher dares to preach the word of God and that word conflicts with some of the more powerful church member's consciences, the subtle

undercurrent of turmoil rises to the top and the pastor either quits preaching the gospel or quits preaching at that church.

Unfortunately, the pastor often chooses that first alternative and He simply mellows down the gospel and presents it in such a way as to not offend his more sensitive members. And if that mellowing continues, it soon reduces down to nothing more than interesting stories and social comments that everyone agrees with.

When that takes place, as these words of scripture tell us, those powerful church members begin to speak well of their pastor and everyone seems happy, everyone except God. And He warns us about that here in verse 26. He tells us

<sup>26</sup>Woe to you when all men speak well of you,  
For so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:26)

This warning is to you and to me folks. The true gospel must always go forth out of our mouths and out from this pulpit, without compromise and without concern that it will offend someone.

I would ask, that as I preach the word each Sunday, you let these words of God truly begin to dig deeply into your souls and that you let them “meddle” into the daily affairs of your life. They sure do meddle into mine. And that meddling blesses me beyond measure. And I would ask that you let them meddle into yours also.

One last thought before we close. As Christians, our belief in Christ and our desire to live according to His truth should “show” both to us on the inside, and to other people as they get to know us. And sometimes, perhaps often, our Christianity will cause some of those other people to resent us, just as these words of our passage tell us.

Those people may not even realize why they are resentful towards us, but they are. And it is most likely as these words tell us. It is because their heart is being convicted by the presence of Christ in us.

And while yes, that can bring on some very difficult relationships for us, especially if those people are family members. But please understand and accept that it is all by God's own design and plan. God loves those dear ones and he wants them to suffer their convictions.



And we must not take offense to the way those dear ones respond to us. We need simply to continue to be the Christians that God calls us to be. And perhaps eventually, those dear ones will hear the still small voice of God and turn from their ways.

Listen as we close. Verse 22,

<sup>22</sup>Blessed are you when men hate you,  
And when they exclude you,  
And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,  
For the Son of Man's sake.

<sup>23</sup>Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!  
For indeed your reward is great in heaven.

May we pray.