

EVIL SPEAKING

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The Bible has a great deal to say about the tongue and its usage. It instructs us as to what not to talk about and how to keep our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking guile (Psalm 34.13).

The word evil is usually taken to refer to something that is very wicked such as murder or terrorism, but the word also means that which causes harm such as slander and defamation of character which is to speak unfavourably about someone and their circumstances. The word evil is the opposite of kindness, gentleness and graciousness.

Guile refers to deceit, a snare or a bait. Deceit is to mislead, to be unfaithful to one's partner, to repeat something said in confidence. A snare is a trap for an animal or bird, but it is also something that could trap a person unawares. Bait is best described as a piece of food on a hook to catch a fish or other creature, but it is also something to annoy or tease another person. It can also mean something to entice a response....in other words, to wind you up.

To say something about someone which is personal and unkind is guile. It is also malice as it can cause harm or upset.

When you are in a marriage or a relationship, you will have times to privately discuss problems you have with people because there needs to be trust in such a relationship.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice, writes Paul in Ephesians 4.31.

Bitterness, wrath and anger are similar words. It can also refer to unwarranted hatred. The Bible warns, Be not angry and sin not (Ephesians 4.26). Anger can lead to injudicious speech and sin. Often someone can be angry with someone else and express that evil speaking to an innocent party.

But there is justifiable anger. If you have been spoken to unfairly, perhaps cruelly, if an attack has been made upon you or your circumstances, if a confidence has been broken, then anger is understandable. Even if what someone says may be truthful but is unkind or derogatory, it can still engender anger.

'There is always rubbish in your garden and you need to get out there and tidy it up' may be true but it could be unkind and not anyone else's business. It is an attack on you as a person and against your character.

That they did not mean to upset you is no excuse. The fact is, it did.

Saying sorry is ineffective today. It is just a word and people believe that to say sorry is sufficient to bring closure to a matter.

Clamour is the word that describes the cry of a raven and is used to indicate an outcry which is a protest. It is understandable to protest at someone interrupting and commenting, for example, on my garden needing attention, but the Bible instructs us to deal with the issue as far as it is practicable and to inform that interfering person to cease from their comments.

It may seem unfair but the Bible teaches us to avoid people who taunt and cause us distress. It also teaches repentance on the part of the wrongdoer and if that repentance is real then we should be forgiving.

Luke 17 makes it clear. If they do not repent and continue with derogatory comments then you are not expected to forgive. If someone offends you and repents, then you forgive.

Titus 3.2 tells us to speak evil of no one but to be gentle and kind to all.

This verse needs to be understood for, at first, it implies that you have to be a doormat and let others walk all over you.

In the context of the epistle, Paul is telling us to be occupied with good deeds and words, to be public-spirited and he is referring to the dealings with other believers. In churches today, people do talk unkindly about other believers and that is evil speaking as some of us can testify. We are told to judge not lest we be judged.

If, for example, George in our church, (there is no George in our church) has a seriously-wrong doctrine we do not judge George and speak against him. We graciously explain the doctrine trusting that he will accept it.

Take the case of Ian Huntley who murdered two girls in Soham last year. He is evil and what he did was evil. We are not expected to refrain from expressing our horror and disgust at his evil ways.

The comments made about my garden are certainly not evil in the same sense but they have caused me to be offended and it was nobody else's business. The Bible teaches that we speak to that person kindly but firmly, and trust that we receive the appropriate apology and no further adverse comment.

What we say can affect our whole being. James 3. 6 tells us that the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the course of nature and is sets the fire of hell.

Here is someone who harshly criticises the appearance, dress and character of another and that evil criticism remains with the one who is offended. It affects their mind, thoughts and behaviour and causes continual and real distress which does not ease up.

There is man in my road who is a Rastafarian. He is very unkempt and has metal piercings in his face and he smells, but I talk with him and he is very intelligent and a kind man. I hate to think what others say of him.

But to return to the person criticised about their appearance, dress and character and how these remarks have caused them great distress over a period of time. The do-gooders will say, 'Oh, forget about it' but damage has been caused by this evil speaking and a remedy is the only answer. God is the God of Justice. The Psalmist wrote, The Lord executeth righteousness and judgement for all that are oppressed (Psalm 103.6).

This introduces the fact that evil speaking causes oppression. The Biblical word for oppression is the power that someone has to harm another. Oppression means anything from 'to put someone down', to be controlled by another, to be treated cruelly or simply with disdain which means to be treated as being inferior.

People offend others and speak evil of others because they have the power and believe that they have the right to exercise it. In a marriage or partnership, one expects honesty and frankness and both parties should accept that.

There are those who believe that an offended person should leave the remedy to God alone and let Him deal with it. Matthew 18. 15 tells us otherwise.

Another matter should be mentioned. Often people are very kind to another and help them out sometimes in very serious cases and do not get a thank you commensurate with the kindness they have been shown. Often the benefactor is treated badly whereas the Bible teaches, Let not your good be evil spoke of.

There are people who dwell on your shortcomings and forget the good that you do.

I know a man where his wife constantly belittles him and in public and does so with venom. That is evil speaking; it is unkind; it is not the thing a partner would do. What action should he take?

Evil speaking includes insults and one definition of abuse is insult. An insult is to treat or speak to someone rudely. It has to be dealt with, or that person will continue to be insulting and offensive.

There is another problem. What if the insults and offensive remarks are being made to you by a family member? What does one do?

It will be said that the family member may be going through a bad patch. Maybe they are ill or experiencing some private trauma, although you may not know about it.

This behaviour is unreasonable and it is a form of bullying and if you do not take action it may continue and give the bully the impression that it does not offend you and you don't mind, whereas you do.

One does not want to be at loggerheads with anyone in the family but the principle of Matthew 18 still applies. You have to tell the offender that harm is being caused to you and tell them to cease, apologise and refrain from future abuse. Some of us are very sensitive; it is our nature and unchangeable. We cannot live our lives having to adopt a different set of rules for every person and situation we encounter.

There is an old rhyme

Sticks and stones
May break my bones
But words will never hurt me.

It is simply not true.

Many people, even those who are not Christians, approve in principle to the Ten Commandments, one of which is Thou shalt not bear false witness. This bans lying, attacks and abuse upon a person and false comments which are paraded as evidence. Exodus 23.1 also says, Thou shalt not give a false report or join forces with others to issue a wicked report.

2 Thessalonians 3.11 talks about those who are disorderly with nothing to do but be busybodies. 1 Peter 4.15 defines a busybody as someone who does not attend to their own business and circumstances and who take pains to meddle in other people's matters. 1 Timothy 5.13 takes it further calling such people idle, going from house to house and gossiping and spreading rumours. Others are called tattlers meaning babblers and garrulous. A babbler is someone who talks, often in a fast way, speaking foolishly or in a muddled way. But one definition refers to someone who discloses secrets carelessly to the detriment of others. Garrulous means always talking and chatting. This is gossip, idle talk usually about other people's private lives and comments of a disapproving or malicious nature.

This is rife in churches where a newcomer is jumped upon and almost immediately invited to tea and is asked many questions which constitutes prying and nosiness and yet the 'interviewers' wrongly call this fellowship. It is meddling, interference and can be offensive. Gossip usually follows. Fellowship is not tea, gossip and cake.

Some years ago a group of Christians had a slogan, Let's gossip the Gospel!

We will leave the last word to the apostle Paul to Titus chapter 1 verse 10 ff

For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching and saying things they ought not to!

(1804)

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