

The Tongue – The power of Life and Death

“Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

Proverbs 18:21

Words – the Measure of the Man or Woman

If all our words were taped, how would your recording be?

A Grandmother’s Testimony



Visualize a bed surrounded by friends and family as death gradually approaches for a gentle elderly woman. Adult children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren and even a tiny great-grandchild come and go from the room to be at the side of their beloved matriarch. Her lucidity has departed long ago, and her mind remains completely affected by an enveloping dementia. She now inhabits her own private world of memories and dreams. Instead of conversing with those who are actually standing by her side, she sees in her mind the faces of friends and loved ones from ten, thirty, or even seventy years earlier. Right there, in this bedroom, she re-lives conversations which took place decades earlier. Her family members enjoy this sacred window into her inner world as they listen to her speaking – and even praying – for her children when they were children and young adults.



Lord please bless them. May they be healthy and pure in their college years. O Father, please bring them Godly spouses who love you. May my grandchildren serve you, O God!”

In these echoes of words from years past, all those gathered enter into her inner world of memories, feelings, and priorities. They hear her heart! According to Jesus, our words, more than anything else, reflect the true nature of our hearts – for good or for bad. Every conversation is taped in heaven, and one day will be played before a holy God in the final evaluation of our lives.

How does your recording sound?

In this lesson, we reflect upon the importance of our words.

- **How our words are the measure of our maturity**
- **The power of blessing and faith affirmations**
- **Words of life** – encouragement, thanksgiving, counsel, wisdom...etc.
- **Words of death** – Complaint, slander, falsehood, immorality, gossip...etc.
- **How to express complaints in an appropriate manner**
- **How to control our words** - – cultivating silence and discretion

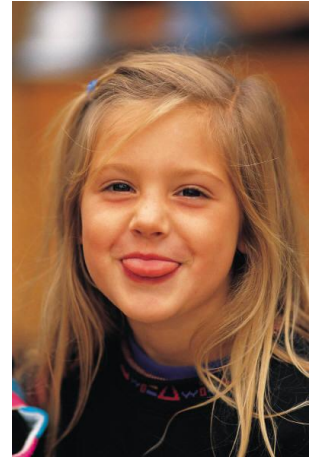
Words – the Measure of our Spiritual Maturity

“Before a Word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.”

Psalm 139:4

Stick out your tongue!

How many times has a mother or grandmother asked a sick child; “Stick out your tongue.” Analyzing this organ, she somehow can discern the child’s malady. Thus it is with our words. Our way of speaking reveals our inner being – our level of spiritual maturity. If you want to evaluate your spiritual health; “*Stick your tongue out!*”⁵



Words reflect our hearts

Key verse: Read Matthew 12:33-37

What does it mean that Jesus says, “*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks?*”

How will our words be used in the final judgment?



Words influence our destiny

Read James 3:1-12

According to this text, how do we define a “perfect” or “mature” person?

Mention the three analogies from this text that convey the power of the tongue.

1.

2.

3.

⁵ Image drawn from a sermon by Haddon Robinson; Gordon College, circa 1996.

Words have Power: To Bless; To Curse and To Confess Faith

God created by his word!

“.... Long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed... by the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire....” 2 Peter 3:5-7

The Son of God is called “The Word”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The word became flesh and dwelt among us...” John 1:1 and 1:14

Humans have been endowed with the power of language

- *Naming:* Adam names the animals and Eve! Not only does this naming process convey dominion, but also prophetic hope in the case of Eve – *“The mother of all the living.”* (See also the name change for Sarah in Gen. 17:15-16)
- *The Tower of Babel* – the unity of language resulted in tremendous power, in this case, for prideful purposes. At *Pentecost*, the reunifying of language represents a new humanity in the Spirit!

What does it mean to bless or to curse?

To Bless: *To invoke God’s favor and mercy upon a person a person, place or process.*

To Curse: *To invoke God’s punishment, disfavor or resistance to that which is evil.*

Most prayers are spoken to God, but a blessing speaks directly to the recipient, invoking God’s favor upon them. Instead of saying *“God, please heal my son.”* We pray, *“May God heal you, my son.”* The healer is still God, but our prayer is spoken directly to the recipient of God’s active favor. When we bless in this way, we fulfill a priestly function, mediating God’s power and activity on earth!

Conversely, a curse pronounces God’s resistance or punishment upon that which is evil. The New Testament teaches clearly that we are *“to bless, and not to curse,”* (Rom. 12:14) even our enemies! Jesus prayed that God forgive those who nailed him to the cross (Luke 23:34) and the first Christian martyr, Stephen, did the same! (Acts 7:60) However, the apostle Paul occasionally “cursed” those who opposed or perverted the gospel. (Elymus; Galatians; 2 Corinthians) It is clear that he did not to seek vengeance upon his enemies, but rather prayed aggressively against the efforts of those who would keep others from hearing the true gospel.

God blesses from the beginning – He pronounces his favor.

- Adam and Eve: Gen 1:28 – *“God blessed them (Adam and Eve) and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it ...’* (Repeats the blessing to Noah in Gen. 9:1)

God also pronounces curses as the result of sin – He declares the legal consequences of sin.

- The serpent: “Cursed are you above all the livestock...” Gen 3:14
- The ground: “Cursed is the ground because of you....” Gen 3:17
- Cain: “Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground...” Gen 4:10-11

Blessing and Cursing has a “legal” sense

The spiritual world functions upon legal lines, and thus God, and his authorized servants, have certain authority to pronounce blessings or curses. As a judge pronounces a sentence or reward, based on the law, so also God and his authorized servants may declare the consequences that flow to those who obey God’s law and believe his promises. For example, God’s covenant with Israel was a legal document, with certain positive consequences associated with fidelity, and negative ones for disobedience.

Deut. 28:1-3: Blessings for Obedience

¹ *If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: ³ You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country...etc..*

Deut. 28:15-16: Curses for Disobedience

¹⁵ *However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: ¹⁶ You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country...etc..*

The Old Testament Priests had the special authority to bless

The Priestly Blessing: Numbers 6:22-27

The priests were empowered to “place the name” of Yahweh upon his people through the act of blessing them!

²² *The LORD said to Moses, ²³ “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ²⁴ ““The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”’ ²⁷ “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”*

What do you think it means when God says, “so they will put my name on the Israelites...”

Patriarchal Blessings are common in the Old Testament

Throughout the Old Testament we read of fathers or spiritual authorities pronouncing blessings upon their sons and future generations. These pronouncements turn out to be prophecies which are fulfilled down the generations!

- *Gen 9:24-27* – Noah blesses and curses;
- *Gen 14:19-20* – Melchizedek blesses Abraham;
- *Gen 27:27-29* – Isaac blesses Jacob;
- *Gen 48:12-20* – Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh;
- *Gen 49* – Jacob blesses his sons;
- *Deut 33* – Moses blesses the tribes;

New Testament: The apostolic blessings in the epistles

Virtually every New Testament letter begins and ends with a blessing. Here are a couple particularly common ones...

- **1 Cor 13:14** – *“may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”*
- **1 Thes 5:23-24**: *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”*

New Testament curses

The Apostle Paul also pronounces some very strong curses, but in each case they deal with those who resist the advance of the gospel, and not those who would persecute Paul himself. On the contrary, he virtually jokes about those who try to cause him trouble and blesses their efforts to spread the gospel, even insincerely. (Philippians 1) However, in both the Corinthian and Galatian churches, certain individuals were deceiving believers by perverting the gospel. Jesus says for such individuals who cause others to sin, *“it would be better to have a millstone tied around their necks and be thrown into the sea.”* Again, believers are not allowed to put “curses” on their enemies, but certain spiritual leaders can do spiritual warfare in defense of God’s people.

- **1 Cor 16:22** – *“If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.”*
- **Gal 1:8-9** – *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”*

Different from Pagan concept of “spells”!

Pagans believe that they can pronounce blessing and cursing by their own spiritual power or by using the correct words or by positive thinking. But in scripture we see that blessing works much like prayer. We may speak in faith, but the power and decision to act lies entirely with God! He is not obliged to fulfill our declarations!!

- *Example of Balaam – Numbers 22-24 – The power is inherently God’s and not ours!*

In these Old Testament Narratives, the pagan king Barak calls on a corrupt “prophet of the Lord,” Balaam, to curse the people of Israel. Time after time, this prophet tries to curse them, but is compelled by the Spirit to bless them instead. In spite of his own desire to curse, God possesses the ultimate authority and *he was powerless to bless or curse apart from God’s will!*

- *Jesus commands us to bless our enemies – Matt 6*

And in Romans 12:14 we read – “*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*” Scripture absolutely prohibits a Christian from trying to “put a curse” on someone out of spite or vengeance. “*Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.*” Christians are to love their enemies and trust God to implement his own judgment in his own way!

Exercises: Write Blessings! (Use “you”)

Example: Noah, my son, may God give you joyful play and peaceful sleep!

Family Member: _____

Write a blessing for your boss (or coworker): _____

Write a blessing for an enemy. (not necessary to put the name)

Doxology: *An expression of praise, spoken to others rather than directly to God.*

- Jude 24 – “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”
- 1 Tim 1:17 - “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”
- Rev. 1:5-6 – “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Considering the examples below, why would we express praise to God to people, rather than directly to him, in your opinion?

Faith Confessions! *Affirmations of our belief in God’s words and promises.*

We confess our faith in Christ for salvation. Prayer to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

- *Romans 10:8-10—⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,”^[d] that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.*

We confess our faith that God will fulfill his promises to us!

- Faith and words go together! 2 Corinthians 5:13 ¹³ *It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.”^[b] Since we have that same spirit of^[c] faith, we also believe and therefore speak...*

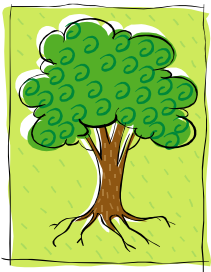
Exercise: *Write a “faith confession,” affirming the truth and trustworthiness of God’s word as it applies to an area of need in your life*

The tongue has the power of life

“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver...” (Prov. 10:20)

- 1. The tongue can heal***
- 2. The tongue can bring success in life***
- 3. Words of encouragement***
- 4. The art of giving thanks***

1. The tongue can heal



*“The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.” Prov. 15:4*

*“Reckless words pierce like sword,
but the tongue of wise brings healing.” Prov. 12:18*

*“Pleasant words are a honeycomb,
Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” Prov. 16:24*



For example.... Think of a person you know whose words bring healing. Who is it? How have you observed this gift in action?

2. The tongue can be a key to success!

*“He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious
will have the king for his friend.” Prov. 22:11*

*“Through patience a ruler can be persuaded,
And a gentle tongue can break a bone.” Prov. 25:15*

For example... How is verbal expression important in your workplace?

3. Encouragement – “The art of lifting another up!”

*“An anxious heart weighs a man down,
But a kind word cheers him up.” Prov. 12:25*

“Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.’” Isa. 35:3-4

Practice: Mention a person who you see on a daily basis: _____.

Think of three specific “encouragements” you could offer.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. The art of giving thanks – the antidote to poisonous words

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” Ephesians 5:3-4

In general, words of death are *negative* in nature. In contrast, *thanksgiving* expresses gratitude for that which is positive and cancels out much negativity in life situations!

Let’s get specific....

Mention four specific things you tend to complain about in daily life. (seeing the glass “half empty”)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Now for each complaint, try to come up with something positive related to the situation, for which you can give thanks. (seeing the glass “half full”)

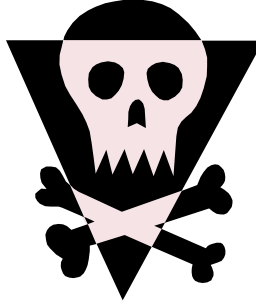
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

The Tongue has the Power of Death

“When words are many, sin is not absent...” (Prov. 10:19)

Words of Death

1. *Violence*
2. *Sexual Immorality*
3. *Falsehood*
4. *Gossip*
5. *Complaint*



1. Violence – words can be daggers

*“Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Prov. 12:18*

*“A scoundrel plots evil,
and his speech is like a scorching fire.” Prov. 16:27*

“Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.”

Mention some cases which show that the truth is otherwise! What types of speech can “cut?”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

2. Sexual Immorality

*“... it will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward
wife with her seductive words,” Prov. 2:16*

*“For the lips of an adulteress drip honey,
And her speech is smoother than oil;” Prov. 5:3*



What are some types of conversations or communication which are impure?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

“Reserve” – a critical part of relational holiness.

Some conversations can seem perfectly innocent, but in fact be part of a process which will undermine marriage or lead to sexual immorality. For example, a married person may share too openly or freely with a member of the opposite sex, forming a type of emotional connection that undermines his or her marital bond. Also, certain topics should never be discussed with members of the opposite sex outside of marriage. A certain “reserve” constitutes an important part of sexual purity.

3. Falsehood

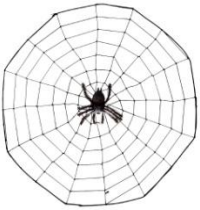
“There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him; haughty eyes, a lying tongue...” Prov. 6:16-17

Little White Lies

Mention some examples of apparently “harmless” lies which are commonplace in daily life.

1. _____
2. _____

Deceit Entangles



*“An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk,
but a righteous man escapes trouble.” Prov. 12:13*

*“Oh what a tangled web we weave,
When at first we practice to deceive.” Shakespeare*

How is it that falsehood can lead to entangled, complicated situations?

“The anatomy of a lie”

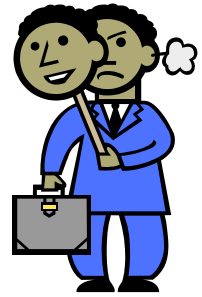
Rarely do we tell lies without a reason. Mention some of the motivations behind the lies we tell:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Insincerity

“My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords.” Psalm 55:20-21

“Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart. A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart.” Prov. 26:23-25



Mention some cues that help us detect insincerity in a person.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

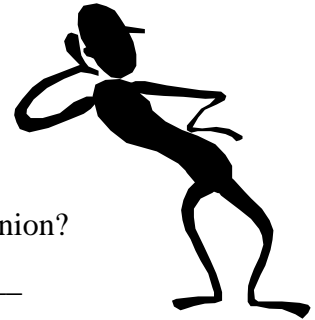
4. Gossip

It takes two! Listening is part of the sin as well!!

“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.” Prov. 18:8

What is so “delicious” about listening to a piece of juicy gossip, in your opinion?

_____.



Gossip separates friends

“A perverse man stirs up dissensions, and a gossip separates close friends.” Prov. 16:28

How so? Can you share an example?

_____.

The one who gossips to you, will gossip about you as well!

*“A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.” Prov. 11:13*

Your most recent violation!

Let's think about this past week. Can you think of a time when you passed along a piece of information about someone else that could, perhaps, be considered to be gossip? What provoked this conversation?

5. Complaint

“Do everything without complaining or arguing...” Philippians 2:14

Why are the words “murmuring” and “grumbling” used so often for the practice of complaining, do you think?

Review: The opposite of complaining is... _____.



Example: The Israelites murmur in the desert

Read: Exodus 16:1-3; Numbers 11:4-6 y Numbers 14:1-4

What are some of their specific gripes with the Lord?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Consequences of Grumbling

“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.... And do not grumble, as some of them did – and were killed by the destroying angel.” 1 Corinthians 10:6,10



In the case of the Israelites, what were the consequences of their murmurings?

And you? Mention some complaints you have whispered this week!!???

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

So what do we do when we are upset??

Legitimate ways of expressing complaints

Ought we to “suffer in silence” and never express anything negative?

Sometimes – Yes!! “Discretion is the better part of wisdom”

Sometimes – No!! We ought to express our feelings in Godly ways.

There are appropriate ways to express negative feelings:

1. Lament – being honest with God!

No one despises a child for crying to us when he or she is in pain. Likewise with us and our heavenly Father. Many Psalms of Lament freely express intense anguish in prayer to God. Moses also was a master of lament!



Read Numbers 11:11-15

“Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”
Psalm 10:1

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” Psalm 13:1

What is the difference between “lament” and “murmuring”?

Lament is complaining to the Lord in prayer.

Murmuring is complaining about the Lord in rebellion.

It may not be pretty or religious sounding – but better to complain to God in prayer rather than complain all day long to everyone else!

2. Confrontation – Being honest with others

There are moments when we ought to express complaints honestly with others in order to resolve problematic situations. Instead of gossiping, complaining and criticizing the person, we speak directly with them in love – seeking reconciliation in the relationship and resolution of the problem. However, confrontation can be hurtful and unproductive if done unwisely.

How to confront? Some basic guidelines to keep in mind...

- 1. In private*
- 2. With love*
- 3. With humility*
- 4. Balanced with affirmation*

Guidelines: how to confront?

1. Confrontation should be in private

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.” Matthew 18:15

Generally we turn this chronology upside down: We speak to everyone except the one who offended us. Thus we destroy the reputation of our brother or sister.

2. Confrontation should be in love

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” Ephesians 4:15

Some “honest” believers express their complaints and criticisms in a way that bulldozes the other person. Such truth lacks love.

3. Confrontation should be done in humility

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?” Matthew 7:1-4

Sometimes it is *we* who are in the wrong!! (Shocking but true!) We always need to be open to discovering that we have somehow misunderstood the other person, or added to the problem without realizing it. The conversation may end with the need for us to ask forgiveness, and not the other person.

4. It should be balanced with affirmation

Notice how Jesus, when bringing words of rebuke to the churches in the book of Revelation, always began with affirmation of the positive. *“Yet I have this one thing against you...”*



Read Revelation 2:19-20

Let’s get specific: *Think of a situation that has you grumbling on a regular basis. How can you express your complaint in an appropriate way? Try visualizing a conversation in which you are in private; loving; balanced and humble. How would it sound? Describe the situation below.*

How to “Tame the Tongue”

The Discipline of Silence

“.... The wise man holds his tongue.” Prov. 11:12b)

“A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.” Prov. 17:27-28

Discretion: Install a “delay” between your brain (or gut) and your mouth!

Email has the “save draft” button. Radio stations always use a delay, so that inappropriate comments can be “beeped” out of existence. By the power of the Spirit, we can install such a mechanism in our own verbal machinery. Our thoughts and feelings need not translate into spoken expression. They can be “beeped” before reaching the open air!! Praise God!

Before speaking, pass the thought through...

The Three Filters⁶

A Young disciple arrives at the house of his wise teacher and says...

“Listen, teacher, a friend of yours was saying terrible things about you....”

“Wait,” interrupted the sage, “Before continuing, have you passed this piece of information through the ‘three filters?’”

“What are these “filters” of which you speak, revered teacher?

“The first is truth. Are you sure that what you want to tell me is absolutely true?”

“Well, I suppose I heard it from a neighbor.”

“Ok, now let’s try the second filter: Kindness. Will this comment be of benefit to anyone or inflict harm?”

“Well, I suppose....”

“All right, now the last filter is “necessity.” Is it really necessary to pass along this piece of information that you are dying to share?”

“Honestly, no.”

“Very well, then,” said the wise man with a smile, “if we are not sure it is true, nor kind, nor necessary, then let’s toss this into the sea of forgetfulness.”

⁶ Maria Montero. Mexico City.

What are the “three filters?”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Always remember: The Spirit is the invisible listener to every conversation.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice...” Ephesians 4:29-31

According to this text, how do we decide if a word is edifying or not?

Let’s pray to install this “delay” in our hearts to edit our words!

Memorize these verses and pray them this week!

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

Psalm 141:3



“Let the words of my heart and meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O God my rock and my redeemer.” Psalm 19:14

Review: List some positive ways of speaking from the lesson: “Words of Life”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

List some sinful ways of speaking. “Words of death.”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

List some guidelines for Biblical confrontation.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____