

The Abbreviated Doctrine of the Sins of the Tongue

Preface: The Sins of the Tongue are a devastating category of sins. I know this personally because I lost a job based upon sins of the tongue. It began with three female teachers speaking evil about me to one another and ended with students spreading false rumors about me. They are an insidious category of sins, because most of the time, those who commit these sins do not realize just how vicious and destructive this category of sin is.

1. There are three categories of sins: mental sins, verbal sins and overt sins. As our society moves *forward*, we have tended to ignore the first two, as well as groups of the last. Mental sins generally motivate the overt sins. When one person murders another, the motivating factor is often hatred. When one person commits adultery, the motivating factor is generally lust. However, many verbal sins occur apart from clear, motivating mental sins.
2. The third commandment enjoins us not to use the Lord's name trivially. Like several of the Laws of the Ten Commandments, this Law was distorted by the Jews. One of the things that they did is they no longer pronounced the proper name of Jehovah (which would have been something like Y^ehowah). When reading Scripture aloud, the name *Y^ehowah* was never pronounced, but they said *Adonai* instead (actually, the true pronunciation is closer to *aw-DOHN*; the construct form of this noun is closer to our English pronunciation). However, when the Jews took an oath, particularly one which invoked any name referring to God, and one which they had no intention of keeping, this was actually closer to the concept of using God's name in a trivial manner. It is almost impossible to find a movie where God's name is not taken in vain. Sometimes, a character's primary characteristic is a litany of blasphemies streaming from his or her mouth. Furthermore, it is not unusual for this characteristic to be presented as humorous. Since the 1990's, we have had television show after television show trivialize God's name with the phrases *Oh God* or *Oh my God*. Having been a teacher for over twenty years, I have observed the use of this phrase on television far exceeds its use by youth. I might hear a student use profanity (e.g., *God* attached to a *damn*) once or twice a year. I may hear a student use God's name trivially once or twice a week. Those who write television scripts and those who produce television often claim that they are doing nothing more than holding up a mirror to society (that is, what is found on television is no different than what we find in real life); however, in almost any category of sin, we find it in much more abundance on television than we do in real life.
3. In the ninth commandment, God tells the Jew, **You will not bear false witness against your neighbor** (Ex. 20:16). Although this certainly has application in the courtroom, it applies outside the courtroom as well. When we gossip about someone, we often tend to embellish or inadvertently add to the story, so that we are speaking that which is partially false about someone else. That is bearing false witness against your neighbor.
4. Of the seven worst sins, three are verbal sins. **There are six things which Jehovah hates; in fact, seven which are an abomination to Him: Arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood (homicide); a heart that devises evil conspiracies, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers** (Prov. 6:16–19). The first verbal sin is one who simply lies—this is about oneself. When quizzed on their activity, they lie; when representing their strong or weak points, they lie. The second of the great verbal sins is a person who gossips (that is, *bears false witness against his neighbor*). The third of the great verbal sins is a person who intentionally stirs up trouble between two or more other parties.
5. Paul, when he logically concludes that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin, he quotes Old Testament passages which deal primarily with verbal sins. **To what conclusion are we forced? Are we better than they? No, for we have already indicted Jews and Greeks all under sin. As it stands written: There is none righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks for God. All have turned aside; together, they have become depraved. There is no one who does good; there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues, they continue deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips. Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their paths and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God in their eyes** (Rom. 3:9–18)

Psalm 14:1–3 5:9 10:7 Isa. 59:7 Psalm 36:1). The first sins named and the most sins named were all sins of the tongue. As believers, we tend to have a lot of goofy ideas and we disdain those who are guilty of sexual sins, drunkenness, drug abuse; and certainly of those who commit murder. However, when listing the worst sins, we generally find more verbal sins listed than overt ones.

6. In any list of sins, there are as many verbal sins as any other category. **Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19–21).** Four of the twelve sins mentioned are verbal sins; and several of the other sins can have elements of verbal sins.
7. Verbal sins extend to heresies which are taught in the Church of God: **But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master Who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them, the way of the truth will be maligned; and in greed, they will exploit you will false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep (I Peter 2:1–3).**
8. I don't intend to exhaust this doctrine in this short dissertation; so let me conclude with what James wrote: **Now if we put bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Listen, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Listen, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it, we bless our Lord and faith; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth comes both blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be. Should your kitchen faucet send out both drinking water and waste water?¹ (James 3:3–11).**

¹ I obviously took some liberties with the final line and brought it into the 21st century.