

# Sins of Speech

(An Every-Verse Method Study)

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Not all oppressive Christianity comes in the form of rules imposed upon Christians. Oppressive Christianity also comes in the form of Christians' anti-biblical behavior toward others. Some anti-biblical behavior is opposed by the church, such as adultery. I feel no need to address sins like these, because nearly all churches are on the right track by opposing them. However, other sins are often committed and even promoted by churches, such as abusive speech, greed, pride and judgmentalism. Amazingly, churches commit and promote these sins despite the overwhelming attention the Bible pays them.

It's important to list all these verses to demonstrate how important our speech is in God's eyes. We need to divert our focus from the man-made rules of the Christian faith and direct it toward the following verses.

## The Lord's Name

**Exodus 20:7**, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain."

**Context:** This is the third of the 10 Commandments.

**Analysis:** While nearly all of the Law addresses our behavior toward others, the first three commandments address our behavior toward God. God wants us to admire, adore, and respect Him for creating us and the universe. All the good we enjoy comes

from Him. We are not to take Him for granted; therefore, we are not to take His name for granted.

Webster's first definition of *vain* is "having no real value or significance; worthless, empty, idle, hollow, etc (1)." When we carelessly use God's name, we behave as though God is insignificant and worthless. How can the One who created us be worthless? Without Him, we would be the ones having no worth, because we wouldn't exist.

It's surprising that this law receives no additional attention in the Bible. One reason for this might be that the Israelites took this law seriously from the beginning. In fact, they avoided saying His proper name altogether. They usually referred to Him as "the Lord."

It's unlikely that the breaking of this law was a problem when the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire in the first century, because the Romans had never heard of God. We modern-day Americans, on the other hand, grew up knowing and hearing God's name, so we tend to use it carelessly. This is especially true among those who lack a personal relationship with Him and esteem Him to be insignificant or worthless.

### **Cursing**

**Exodus 22:28**, "You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people."

**Context:** This is one of many laws that follow the 10 Commandments.

**Analysis:** What does it mean to curse someone? Thanks to the term *curse word*, many of us think it means to speak to someone by using one of a handful of words that are said to be profane. However, in the Bible, to curse a person usually means to call damnation or some other ill fate upon them. Biblical curses have nothing to do with the technicality of which words are used to convey the curse. All that matters is the meaning of those words.

As for cursing "a ruler of your people," how many of us break that rule? Again, we Christians may avoid using foul language when doing so, but even when we call a leader "evil," we violate this command, because we are effectively damning that leader with our words, saying that he or she is of Satan.

**Leviticus 20:9**, “Is there anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his blood guiltiness is upon him.”

**Context:** Numerous, unrelated laws are listed in this portion of Leviticus.

**Analysis:** Those whose mothers and fathers neglect or abuse them find this verse difficult to accept. Nonetheless, God knows that children must submit to parents if they are to be raised to love others well. If children show disrespect toward their parents and fail to obey them, society falls apart.

**Psalms 10:7**, “His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is mischief and wickedness.”

**Context:** The psalmist beseeches the Lord to bring justice upon the wicked and rescue the oppressed.

**Analysis:** Notice that curses are interconnected with deceit and oppression. What do all three have in common? They ruin peoples’ lives. Our curses of others oppress their souls. It doesn’t matter whether we call someone a curse word, call them an idiot, or tell them they’re useless, our words chip away at the foundation of their sense of self-worth. Those who are down on themselves tend to be less productive for God and in loving others, because they feel that there’s little they can contribute.

**Proverbs 20:20**, “He who curses his father or his mother, his lamp will go out in time of darkness.”

**Analysis:** Why does the lamp go out in the time of darkness for the one who curses his or her parents? Is it simply that God will punish them? Or is it because failing to love parents can have practical, negative effects on a person’s life? It might be that

failing to follow parents' instruction will lead to an undisciplined lifestyle. Or it might be that parents will refuse to lend a hand to their children who disrespect them.

**Ecclesiastes 10:20**, “Furthermore, in your bed-chamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound, and the winged creature will make the matter known.”

**Context:** Proverbs and Ecclesiastes contain miscellaneous sayings which are often unrelated to the verses that precede and follow them.

**Analysis:** God warns against cursing someone in private as well as in public. Of course, this verse uses hyperbole; birds don't carry messages that they hear to others. Nonetheless, it never does good to speak evil of another. Even when we do so our hearts, people can sense it.

**Romans 3:14**, “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness....”

**Context:** Paul uses Old Testament quotes to demonstrate that all people sin and, therefore, need justification through faith in Christ.

**Analysis:** Here cursing and bitterness go hand-in-hand. Have you ever noticed that people who frequently use foul language and put down others are always miserable, always bitter? Their own anger toward others ultimately proves self-destructive.

Paul's use the words “open grave” and “poison” relay just how serious cursing, bitterness, and deception are. Today we fail to acknowledge the life-ruining nature of abusive speech. A husband who hits his wife just once is a criminal, but the man who verbally abuses his wife for years is deemed innocent, even though the verbally abused woman bears deeper emotional scars.

**Romans 12:14**, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.”

**Context:** Paul urges the Christians to live a life pleasing to God.

**Analysis:** A curse is the opposite of a blessing. When we bless, we call on God to love the object of our blessing; when we curse, we call on God to damn the object of our

curse. So our cursing of others is the equivalent of pronouncing our own damnation on them.

Many of us Christians find it acceptable to curse those in power. Not only does the Bible forbid that, but this verse even prohibits cursing those who directly harm us.

Why does God command us in this way? Perhaps because good can never come from cursing others. Even if they never hear our curses, the evil we speak of them reinforces the hatred in our hearts. We must extinguish our hatred before it flares up into something more powerful than we can handle. Catching ourselves before we speak evil of someone is an excellent way to do that.

**James 3:8-9**, “But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God....”

**Context:** Verses 1-12 proclaim the power of speech and the importance of controlling it.

**Analysis:** Again, these verses mention no illegal words, but count any judgmental or hateful speech as a curse.

These verses apply as much to us Christians today as they did to those who initially received this letter from James. The modern Evangelical church focuses on praising God, on having worship services Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, etc, and yet remains hard-hearted toward most of society, judging those who live differently as enemies. Often, these feelings are expressed through judgmental speech that is, essentially, cursing.

### **Perverted Speech**

**Proverbs 8:13**, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverted mouth, I hate.”

**Analysis:** What do pride and arrogance have to do with the perverted mouth? Today, we define the word *perverted* as sexually-oriented speech. However, the biblical definition is broader.

**Proverbs 10:31-32**, “The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, but the perverted tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverted.”

**Analysis:** For the perverted tongue to be cut out, it must be both worthless and dangerous. Unlike the mouths and lips that flow with wisdom and bring forth what is acceptable, the perverted tongue belongs to the mouths of the wicked. Just as the wicked harm others, so does their perverted speech.

**Proverbs 15:4**, “A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit.”

**Analysis:** Here we have further biblical proof of the power of words. When we speak as God commands us to, we uplift the spirit of those who hear us. But when we speak in a manner that defies God’s commands, we destroy the self-esteem of others and help cause their destruction.

This verse gives us the bible’s definition of perverse speech: it is speech that crushes the spirit. Perverse speech has little or nothing to do with sex in the Bible; rather, it has everything to do with hurting others.

**Proverbs 16:28**, “A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends.”

**Analysis:** One manner in which perverse speech harms others is by destroying relationships. Why does God define such behavior as perverse? Because God desires for us a society in which we love one another well. Anything we say that hurts others is perverse in God’s eyes, because He defines perversion as anything that strays from His will.

**Proverbs 17:20**, “He who has a crooked mind finds no good, and he who is perverted in his language falls into evil.”

**Analysis:** Crookedness and perversion are basically the same thing. The original meaning of both is that they stray from the path God wants us to follow.

People with crooked minds are often the same ones who use perverted speech. According to this verse, these people find no good. Have you ever noticed that people who speak evil and use harsh language tend to be miserable and negative? They find the bad in everything, but take the good for granted. This is also true of Christians. Even though we refrain from using curse words, many of us find fault with just about anyone. This verse speaks of us as much as it does foul-mouthed non-Christians.

**Proverbs 19:1**, “Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.”

**Analysis:** This verse defines perverse speech as the opposite of integrity. What is integrity? The dictionary defines it as being of a whole and perfect nature or as being moral, honest and sincere. So we can conclude that perverse speech is imperfect, immoral, dishonest and insincere. Again, it’s not just sexual speech.

**Titus 3:9-10**, “But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”

**Context:** Paul instructs his understudy, Titus, on church management.

**Analysis:** Finally, the Bible labels a factious person as perverted. Biblical perversion creates strife and disputes; it drives people apart and tears down the church. The righteous person builds and strengthens relationships. He or she avoids pointless arguments and anything else that tears people apart.

### **Quarreling & Contention**

**Proverbs 17:14**, “The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.”

**Analysis:** Disagreements are a part of life. God never commands us to agree with one another on all matters. We are free to share our views with each other, especially when our views can improve someone’s relationships with God and others. However, God forbids quarreling. Why? Because heated debate creates enmity between its

participants. This verse tells us that the resulting strife is unstoppable once it begins, just like a dam bursting. Once it lets loose, the momentum builds and the destruction is devastating.

**Proverbs 20:3**, “Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.”

**Analysis:** Again we see quarreling and strife mentioned together in the same holy breath. To be honorable in God’s eyes, we must refrain from all quarreling, because all quarrelling leads to strife.

**Proverbs 21:19**, “It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.”

**Proverbs 25:23**, “It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house with a contentious woman.”

**Proverbs 27:15**, “A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious (‘quarrelsome’ in the NIV) woman are alike.”

**Analysis:** Being alone is difficult. God designed us for companionship with other people. However, having a quarrelsome companion is an even worse fate than loneliness. Loneliness is hard on the spirit, but quarreling crushes our spirits. It fills us with bitterness and stress that smothers the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

**Proverbs 22:10**, “Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, even strife and dishonor will cease.”

**Analysis:** Most of us love to make others laugh. Laughter is great for the soul when it’s in line with God’s will. However, scoffing is the equivalent of mocking. When we scoff or mock others, we create laughter at their expense. Even if we mock someone away from their presence, we lead people to lose respect for that person. When we lose respect for others, we stay away from them rather than befriend them, and those we disrespect suffer alone.

I know from personal experience that scoffers create resentment among those around them. People feel free to fire back at the scoffer, since the scoffer is willing to

“dish it out,” and since people see the scoffer as heartless and deserving of being mocked. Naturally, when people fire back, the scoffer isn’t content to let the conversation end, so he or she fires back with more scoffing. The insults fly back and forth, and even if the participants say it’s all fun and games, resentment builds between all involved. From this resentment comes the contention, strife, and dishonor of which this verse speaks.

**Philippians 2:14**, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing....”

**Context:** Paul explains how God is at work in the lives and conduct of Christians.

**Analysis:** When we grumble about our lives, we effectively argue with God about the life He has given us. We as Christians are called to look on the bright side as much as possible. Rather than complain about our lives, we need to appreciate how good we have it, even when we don’t have everything we want.

Have you ever been unhappy with your life, and then found yourself in a much worse situation due to health, employment, or personal problems? You then think to yourself, “If only I could go back to the situation I was in before my life took a turn for the worse. This time I would appreciate it rather than complain about the minor problems I had (compared to what I’m currently experiencing) at the time.” Unfortunately, life can always get worse, so we need to give thanks over the good things God has given us, rather than grumble and argue with Him.

**1 Timothy 6:3-4**, “If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions....”

**Context:** Paul warns Timothy against false teachings.

**Analysis:** This verse convicts me personally as I love to address controversial issues with the messages that resonate throughout the Bible. I love to persuade others and lead them to the truth. I don’t know why, exactly. I think it’s because I can’t stand to see people practicing and promoting anti-biblical behavior in the name of Christ. This verse is a word of caution to all of us when we address such issues.

Of course, those whom Paul writes about apparently disagreed with him and the other apostles, even though they had the best knowledge of what Jesus was all about; whereas, we Christians today disagree with each other about what the writings of the apostles (and other Bible authors) have to say to us today. None of us ever knew Jesus directly.

**Titus 3:1-2**, “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one [‘speak evil of no one’ in the NRSV], to be uncontentious [‘avoid quarrelling’ in the NRSV], gentle, showing every consideration for all men.”

**Context:** Paul instructs his understudy, Titus, on church management.

**Analysis:** While Proverbs presents us with numerous warnings against quarreling and contention, Titus 3:1-2 presents God’s alternative – speech that’s “gentle, showing every consideration for all men.” There’s nothing wrong with having theological disagreements, especially since we don’t have Jesus or the apostles with us for guidance; but we must be gentle, courteous and respectful in our discussions.

### **Slander & Gossip**

**Leviticus 19:16**, “You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people....”

**Context:** Numerous, unrelated laws are listed in this portion of Leviticus.

**Analysis:** What is slander? Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, defines it as, “the utterance in the presence of another person of a false statement or statements, damaging to a third person’s character or reputation: usually distinguished from libel, which is written.”

**Psalms 50:19-20**, “You let your mouth loose in evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son.”

**Context:** God’s words to the wicked are quoted in this psalm.

**Analysis:** This verse defines *slander* much like Webster’s does — an act of deceit that God judges as evil.

**Proverbs 10:18-19**, “He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool. When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.”

**Analysis:** At first glance, this verse appears to tell us to reveal our hatred for others rather than conceal it, and that we are liars if we hate someone and fail to reveal that hatred. Naturally, such a message is inconsistent with the rest of the Bible. Since verse 19 speaks of using many words, the beginning of verse 18 may refer to flattery, where we conceal our disdain for another person while speaking as though we really like them, so that we may benefit.

**Proverbs 16:28**, “A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends.”

**Analysis:** Like perverse speech, slander is divisive. Slander creates suspicion between friends and even relatives. If someone slanders a friend of yours, and you believe that lie, you become suspicious of your friend and think less of them. If the slander is widespread, so that everyone has heard it, you may no longer want to be seen with your friend, because you don't want people thinking the same of you.

**Proverbs 11:13**, “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.”

**Analysis:** Some bibles translate the word “talebearer” as “gossip.” Secrets exist for a reason, and in many cases the reason is to cover up past sin. We are not called to reveal the past sins of others, but to forgive and forget them.

**Proverbs 17:9**, “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.”

**Analysis:** Have you ever spread the news of a sin committed by someone you didn't like? I know I have – lots of times. In my mind I was merely informing others, but in my heart I hoped to turn others against the sinners, because I hated them and wanted them to suffer socially. Had I obeyed God by loving these people as myself, I would have kept their sins a secret as this verse suggests.

**Proverbs 18:8**, “The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down to the innermost parts of the body.”

**Analysis:** Like I stated earlier, the negative things we hear about others, even our friends, stick with us. We might even deny what we hear when we hear it, but the seed of suspicion has already been planted in the “innermost parts” of our minds. Therefore, we must be mindful of this effect when we are tempted to speak evil of others.

**Proverbs 20:19**, “He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets; therefore, do not associate with a gossip.”

**Analysis:** This is a lesson that we all learn sooner or later: our friends who always gossip about everyone else gossip about us, too. Being friends with a gossip is the fastest way to revealing your vulnerabilities to the world.

Let’s not take this verse too far by totally shunning a gossip, but we must be wary of them. It might be best to inform such a person of the effect their gossip has on their relationships and encourage them to change.

**Proverbs 25:9**, “Argue your case with your neighbor, and do not reveal the secret of another, lest he who hears it reproach you, and the evil report about you not pass away.”

**Proverbs 26:20-22**, “For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer (‘gossip’ in the NIV), contention quiets down. Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body.”

**Analysis:** Gossip fuels division. When we learn that a friend has revealed our secrets or spoken evil of us to others, we rarely choose to keep that person as a friend. Resentment and lack of trust make it difficult to associate with that person in any way.

**Romans 1:30**, ‘...they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents....’

**Context:** Paul explains how God gave atheists over to sinful and self-destructive lifestyles.

**Analysis:** Romans 1 is well-known among Christians as the chapter that speaks in detail against homosexual immorality. However, it then goes on to list many other evils that God hates. It never says that these other sins are lesser evils than homosexuality, so we can conclude that gossip, slander and boasting are just as sinful.

Today, American Christians behave as though homosexual immorality is sin number one. The truth is that we Christians regularly commit acts of slander, gossip and boasting that are every bit as evil. Yet we excuse ourselves as less sinful and pass judgment on those who commit sexual sins that we don't.

**2 Corinthians 12:20**, “For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you not to be what you wish; that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances....”

**Context:** Paul anticipates a visit with the Corinthian church.

**Analysis:** What do all of these evils have in common? They drive people apart. God's goal for us is that we live in harmony with everyone as much as we possibly can. That's impossible if we engage in gossip and slander and the other sins of speech listed here.

**Ephesians 4:29-31**, “Let no unwholesome word (‘evil talk’ in the NRSV) proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice.”

**Context:** Paul educates the Ephesians on Christian living.

**Analysis:** Many Christians interpret this as a *bad word* verse. But as we can see in the NRSV translation, “word” means “talk” or *message*, not a specific word. For example, the “*word of God*” is a message from God, not a specific word like *hello*. The “unwholesome word” which these verses prohibit is a message of bitterness, anger, slander, etc.

Likewise, this verse requires that we use "such a word that is good for edification..." If we interpret the word, *word*, to mean a single article of speech, then this verse directs us to use a single word to build up others, and that makes no sense. It's not as if there's a magic word that automatically makes people feel better. We pretty much have to talk in sentences to encourage others; therefore, the word, *word*, as used in this passage, can only refer to a message.

**2 Timothy 3:1-3**, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good...."

**Context:** Paul warns Timothy about a future increase in sin among Christians.

**Analysis:** When we gossip, we don't just commit one sin. In order to gossip, we must arrogantly love ourselves more than others. Otherwise, how can we speak evil of someone we view as an equal? In order to gossip, we must be ungrateful for how God has enabled us to overcome sin in our lives, so that we look down on those who commit sins we don't. In order to gossip, we must be disobedient and unholy, because gossiping defies God's instructions. In order to gossip, we must be unloving, because we look to build up those whom we love, not tear them down. In order to gossip, we must be irreconcilable, because we drive people apart when we gossip; we reconcile nothing. In order to gossip, we must be brutal and without self-control, because those who have godly self-control refrain from gossip. And finally, in order to gossip, we must, at least momentarily, be haters of good, because gossip is evil.

**Titus 2:3-5**, "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good...."

**Context:** Paul instructs his understudy, Titus, on church management.

**Analysis:** Yes, even 2000 years ago, old women were known for gossiping. Sometimes, we use our years of experience that come with age to develop arrogant attitudes toward others who haven't had the same experiences, and these attitudes fuel

gossip. However, God commands us to use our experience to teach and help others rather than maliciously condemn them.

**James 4:11-12**, “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one lawgiver and judge, the One who is able to save and destroy; but who are you to judge your neighbor?”

**Context:** James encourages the recipients of this letter to put an end to the fighting and quarrelling among them that resulted from their own selfish desires.

**Analysis:** Brief paraphrase: In order to slander or gossip about someone, we must first pass judgment. Judgment is God’s right; it is never ours.

**1 Peter 2:1**, “Therefore, put aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander....”

**Context:** Peter explains the significance of being a Christian.

**Analysis:** Malice, guile, hypocrisy and envy tear people down and tear relationships apart, much like slander does.

Also, these sins inspire our slander. To be malicious is to desire to harm someone; slander accomplishes that. We often incorporate deception and scheming into our slander; that’s known as guile. We contradict the Bible we claim to follow when we slander others; that’s hypocrisy. And sometimes it’s out of envy that we slander others; we tear them down so that others will see us as better than they are.

**3 John 1:10**, “For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words....”

**Context:** John opposes the teachings of a man named Diotrephes who rejects the message of the apostles.

**Analysis:** “Unjustly accusing...with wicked words” is the definition of slander. Here John sought to overcome this slander with truthful arguments. While we need to be careful not to get into feuds with others, we do have the right, like John did, to defend ourselves from others’ false accusations.

**Jude 1:16**, “These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.”

**Context:** The book of Jude warns against false teachers in the church.

**Analysis:** Grumbling goes hand in hand with fault-finding and slander. Those who constantly grumble tend to complain about others as slanderers do, and they often do so without just cause, because few of us have it so bad that we have cause to grumble continuously.

Complaining once in a while is normal. We all find ourselves in bad situations, some of which are the fault of others. But to consistently find fault with our employers, churches, families, etc. requires us to lie and exaggerate as a slanderer would.

In Numbers 11, the Israelites grumbled against God for giving them manna with no meat. They complained that He was wrong to bring them out of slavery in Egypt and, in doing so, they passed judgment on Him. He, of course, punished them for their slander.

### **Deception (Lying)**

**Exodus 20:16**, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

**Context:** This is the ninth of the 10 Commandments.

**Analysis:** When we bear false witness, we harm others. Whether we do it in a court of law or in daily life, the innocent pay a price while the guilty go free and sin again.

**Exodus 23:1**, “You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.”

**Context:** This is one of many laws that follow the Ten Commandments.

**Analysis:** We don't always bear false witness in the heat of the moment. When it comes to situations that have a significant impact on others' lives or our own, we plan our lies ahead of time. And we even conspire with other liars when our lies benefit multiple people whose interests we serve.

**Exodus 23:2-3**, “You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.”

**Context:** This is one of many laws that follow the 10 Commandments.

**Analysis:** This verse opposes lawsuits in which groups of poor people attempt to steal from the wealthy by making false claims. Not all lawsuits are evil, but we must only sue with just cause and honest testimony.

**Leviticus 5:1**, “Now if a person sins, after he hears a public adjuration to testify, when he is a witness, whether he has seen or otherwise known, if he does not tell it, then he will bear his guilt.”

**Context:** In this chapter, God describes sins that required a guilt offering. These offerings are no longer necessary if we believe in Jesus.

**Analysis:** As a long-time sales rep, I’ve had managers, frustrated with my refusal to lie, tell me that they weren’t asking me to lie; they were asking me to withhold the truth from potential customers. This verse teaches us that withholding the truth is just as bad as lying. It’s called deception.

**Leviticus 5:4**, “Or if a person swears thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, in whatever manner a man may speak thoughtlessly with an oath, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know it, he will be guilty of one of these.”

**Context:** Same as verse one above.

**Analysis:** This “swearing” is not the use of a *bad word*, but the uttering of an oath. When we give our word, we are obliged to keep it. To give our word and not keep it turns our words to lies.

**Leviticus 19:11-12**, “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.”

**Context:** Numerous, unrelated laws are listed in this portion of Leviticus.

**Analysis:** Lying and dealing falsely are the same in God's eyes. To lie is to say something that's untrue, while dealing falsely involves any form of deception.

Since this verse forbids swearing falsely by God's name, it brings to mind the saying, "I swear to God..." However, any time we Christians deal falsely with others, we do it in God's name and disobey this verse, because we represent God in all that we do.

**Psalms 10:7,** "His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is mischief and wickedness."

**Context:** The psalmist beseeches the Lord to bring justice upon the wicked and rescue the oppressed.

**Analysis:** Here the evil man of whom the psalmist speaks oppresses the poor with his speech. We do the same today when we conduct scams which rob the unsuspecting and when we defame others with lies.

For most of my Christian life, I believed it was a sin to lie simply because it's a sin to lie. Verses like this one, however, imply that deception is a sin, because it's usually used to take advantage of others. So it may not be a sin after all to lie about an upcoming surprise party so that the recipient is actually surprised, but it is a sin to lie or deceive in order to trick someone out of their money or possessions.

**Proverbs 4:24,** "Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put devious lips far from you."

**Context:** Almost all proverbs have no context; they are an assortment of wise sayings.

**Analysis:** Are we to put away from us the deceitful mouths and devious lips of others? Or are we to put deceit and deviousness far away from our own lips? We would almost have to isolate ourselves in caves to avoid hearing the deception of others, since there are few people who are consistently honest. But we know from the rest of the Bible that it's a must that we refrain from deceit and deviousness, so the later interpretation is likely to be the correct one.

**Proverbs 6:16-19**, “There are six things which the lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.”

**Analysis:** Three of these seven evils are sins of speech: lying, bearing false witness and spreading strife. In God’s eyes, they are on the same level as shedding innocent blood. That’s a powerful concept. Just about any American sees the shedding of innocent blood (such as abortion) to be the worst of all sins. But God sees lying arrogance, and the division that comes from strife to be just as wicked.

How can this be? In our society, we see death as the worst thing there is, but the truth is that *everybody* dies. Not everybody, on the other hand, has to suffer. Lying, arrogance, wicked plans, false testimony, and strife ruin people’s lives. God hates when we do that as much as He hates death.

**Proverbs 10:18-19**, “He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool. When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.”

**Analysis:** As I mentioned in the slander section, this concealing of hatred is probably flattery rather than peacekeeping. In flattery, we hide our true feelings toward others so that we may benefit from their positive impression of us. In the case of a politician, that benefit is a vote in his or her favor. In the workplace, that benefit may be a promotion. We also tend to flatter when we secretly stab someone in the back, so that they least suspect us of wrongdoing.

**Proverbs 12:19**, “Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment.”

**Analysis:** According to **Revelations 22:15**, “everyone who loves and practices lying” will be barred from heaven. Only the truthful will enjoy eternal life. That’s not to say that anyone who tells a lie is barred from heaven. We all sin. It’s when we fail to turn from our sins that we find no forgiveness.

**Proverbs 12:22**, “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are his delight.”

**Analysis:** As a long time sales rep, when I think of dealing faithfully, I think of business deals. To deal faithfully is to tell the truth and refrain from concealing unpopular facts that might make the deal fall through. Unfortunately, American businessmen see promoting the good (even if the good is not always true) and hiding the bad as nothing more than the way business is done; and it’s okay since everyone else is doing it. I’ve even known devout Christian sales reps to think the same way, because they follow an Americanized version of Christianity where greed is good. This mentality, however, is an abomination to God and a misrepresentation of His name.

**Proverbs 17:4**, “An evildoer listens to wicked lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.”

**Analysis:** How do we know which advice is good and which is evil? We must know the Bible well – all of it, not just the verses we like. Once we know the Bible, we can discern between good and bad counsel.

**Proverbs 17:7**, “Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool; much less are lying lips to a prince.”

**Analysis:** This verse’s message is similar to Jesus’ message of, “...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart.” A fool is unable to speak brilliantly; someone who’s noble in God’s eyes cannot lie. Most of us Christians are unaware that this and many of Jesus’ other teachings were inspired by the Old Testament.

**Proverbs 19:5**, “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.”

**Analysis:** This verse must speak of God’s punishment in the afterlife, because many liars go unpunished in our society. It’s the liars who come out on top in a cut-throat economy. Some of the most severe liars are caught and punished, but lying is such an accepted form of business practice, that those who choose honesty experience business failure.

**Proverbs 19:22**, “What is desirable in a man is his kindness, and it is better to be a poor man than a liar.”

**Analysis:** I’ve known many Christian sales reps to lie or withhold important information from potential customers in order to make a sale, and I’ve known many managers to encourage them to do so. The excuse they give is, “I have to provide for my family,” or, “I have a big mortgage to pay.” These excuses are unacceptable. God would rather have us be poor than to prosper by lying.

**Proverbs 20:14**, “‘Bad, Bad,’ says the buyer; But when he goes his way, then he boasts.”

**Analysis:** Like deceptive business practices, many of us accept “the art of negotiation” as a standard way of doing business. That, however, doesn’t make it right in God’s sight. To Him, it’s just another way of deceiving others in order to put their money in our pockets.

**Proverbs 21:6**, “The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death.”

**Analysis:** Our earthly wealth accounts for a tiny percentage of eternity. It’s not worth God’s eternal wrath. Also, as the old saying goes, money doesn’t buy happiness. While God doesn’t desire poverty for His people, He knows that beyond a certain point, the wealth we acquire creates little enjoyment. So why be dishonest to gain wealth when it’s both fleeting and pointless?

**Proverbs 24:28-29**, “Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, ‘Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.’”

**Analysis:** Deception is often used as a means of getting revenge. We believe that our deception is justified in these instances, because the other person has wronged us, and it’s okay to get even with them. But getting even is not our right. God is in charge of justice.

When we bear false witness as a means of getting even, we expose ourselves as liars and misrepresent Christianity. Also, our fighting back escalates conflicts with our neighbors. When we get even with them, they fail to realize why we're doing it, especially if they feel they were right when wronging us initially. They simply use our deceptive revenge as a reason to launch another attack on us, prompting us to seek revenge yet again.

**Proverbs 25:14**, “Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely.”

**Analysis:** While many of us prefer sunny days to rainy ones, people in arid regions like Israel looked forward to rain, because without it their crops would fail and famine would ensue. Dark clouds and the breeze that normally precedes rain were a welcome sight. Their optimism turned to despair when the rain failed to follow.

We feel that same disappointment when people promise that their superior abilities will guide us to a better life, and then they don't deliver. Politicians who fail to fulfill campaign promises are the most obvious example. Also, corporate leaders assure their employees bright futures only to increase their workloads, lower their compensation, and cut their jobs. Even in our personal lives, potential mates offer us hope of a better life only to make our lives more difficult.

**Proverbs 25:18**, “Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.”

**Analysis:** What do clubs, swords and sharp arrows have in common? They hurt and even kill people. Bearing false witness, especially against somebody on trial, isn't any better than attacking them with deadly weapons. Either way, the life of the person you attack is ruined if your attack succeeds.

**Proverbs 26:18-19**, “Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, so is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, ‘was I not joking?’”

**Analysis:** Most of us will say anything when caught in a lie. We'll say that we were kidding, or even worse, we'll deny ever having lied at all. We'll say, "I never said that."

**Proverbs 26:28,** "A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin."

**Analysis:** We can only deceive others if we first consider their well-being to be of lesser importance than our own. Since lies harm others, and we seek to protect those whom we love from harm, then we only lie to those whom we hate.

**Ecclesiastes 5:4-5,** "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

**Analysis:** Any vow not fulfilled is the equivalent of a lie.

**Jeremiah 9:3-7,** "And they bend their tongue like the bow; lies and not truth prevail in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me,' declares the Lord. Let everyone be on guard against his neighbor, and do not trust any brother; because every brother deals craftily, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. And everyone deceives his neighbor, and does not speak the truth, they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity."

**Context:** Jeremiah prophecies of Judah's infidelity toward God.

**Analysis:** These verses reveal some of the reasons why God imposed judgment upon Judah. He hates deceptive behavior. He even goes as far as to say that deceivers do not know Him. In other words, they are not His people and have no inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

**Jeremiah 23:32,** "Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,' declares the Lord, 'and related them, and led my people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people with the slightest benefit,' declares the Lord."

**Analysis:** God also hates false prophecy, so be careful to avoid following someone who predicts future events that fail to occur.

**Micah 6:12,** “For the rich men of the city are full of violence, her residents speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.”

**Context:** God opens this chapter with a recall of past events like the exodus from Egypt. He then uses verse 12 as a reason to bring judgment upon His people.

**Analysis:** Here we see that wealth and deception go hand in hand. Unfortunately, many American Christians see wealth as a reward for honest, hard-work. The reality, both in biblical times and today, however, is that deception and exploitation create wealth, especially in the corporate world.

**Zechariah 8:16,** “These are things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates.”

**Context:** God promises future blessings for the Jews.

**Analysis:** Here we see the Bible associating truth with judging. Whether this verse speaks of legal judgments or personal ones, we don't know. If it's legal judging, then this verse is a call to speak the truth in a court of law.

**Matthew 5:33-37,** “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is The City of the Great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil.”

**Context:** Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount.

**Analysis:** Why does Jesus command us not to make oaths to God? It may be that, by doing so, we create additional opportunities to sin. In other words, if we make no oath to God, then we can't sin by breaking that oath. We are effectively adding laws to God's laws when we take oaths, and as we know from Paul in Romans 7, sin finds opportunity in the law, so adding to His law increases sin. For more on how God's hates when we add

laws to his laws, read the Christian Freedom study on the Essentials page at [www.biblicalfreedom.com](http://www.biblicalfreedom.com).

**Romans 3:14**, “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness....”

**Context:** Paul uses Old Testament quotes to demonstrate that all people sin and, therefore, need justification through faith in Christ.

**Romans 16:18**, “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.”

**Context:** As Paul closes the letter to the Romans, he warns them to keep an eye on those who teach false doctrines.

**Analysis:** Flattery is yet another form of lying. It’s more complicated than the heat of the moment lying we do when caught in a difficult situation. Flattery is a lie that sets someone up so that we can take advantage of their favor. Some people do it to take advantage of others sexually. Others do it to gain favor and upward mobility in the workplace. Regardless of the circumstances, we flatter out of selfishness and disregard for others.

**Ephesians 4:25**, “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.”

**Context:** Throughout chapters 4 and 5, Paul instructs the Ephesians on proper conduct.

**Analysis:** What does it mean to be “members of one another?” It’s hard to say, exactly. But it implies close personal relationships with our fellow human beings. Trust is essential to such relationships. When we lie to one another, trust vanishes. We reason that if a given person lies to us once, there’s no reason they won’t lie to us again. Without trust, relationships become distant, because mistrust forces us to hold back our feelings.

**1 Timothy 1:10**, “...and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching....”

**Context:** Paul lists the types of people the law was created for; the law was not created for the righteous, but for the unrighteous (verse 9).

**Analysis:** Other translations, such as the New King James Bible, translate “immoral men” as “fornicators” and “homosexuals” as “sodomites.” Regardless, most Christians see these sins, as well as kidnapping, to be the worst of all sins. Sexual sins are issue number one to so many of us today. But here in the Bible we see that lying (as well as perjury) is every bit as sinful as sexual immorality in God’s eyes.

**James 3:14**, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.”

**Context:** James encourages believers to bear the fruits of the spirit and avoid sins of a demonic nature.

**Analysis:** I must admit that I have no idea what specific “truth” James is referring to. Whatever it is, it’s the opposite of jealousy, selfish ambition, and arrogance.

**1 Peter 3:10**, “For, ‘Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile (‘deceit’ in the NRSV)....’”

**Context:** In verses 8-9, Peter encourages Christians to live in harmony with each other.

**Analysis:** Living in harmony with others is essential to having an enjoyable life. This harmony cannot be achieved, however, when we commit acts of evil toward others and deceive them. Lies and selfish deeds create strife which leads to stress and misery which, in turn, makes us hate life.

**Revelation 21:9**, “...the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

**Context:** Chapter 21 reveals the new heaven and earth that we will experience upon our own resurrection. It will not be open, however, to those listed here in verses 8 & 9.

**Analysis:** Here we have 36 passages that oppose deception. I think that’s enough to label deception as a mega-sin. Yet many of us take it lightly. We lie to make money, to get

jobs, to get people to like us, to get out of dates (A-ha! Take that! – all you women who lied to get out of dates with me.), etc. It’s human nature, yet still a sin, to lie to get out of trouble. What’s worse than that, however, are pre-meditated lies.

Why do we practice lying when the entire Bible forbids it? Most of us are unaware that the Bible forbids it so frequently, because our churches fail to address the issue. Many of them would rather lecture us on how we must believe in a 6000-year old universe or why we can’t touch alcohol—things that that Bible never says.

### **Miscellaneous**

**Proverbs 11:9**, “With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.”

**Analysis:** How do we destroy our neighbor? Do we do it by saying a bad word, or do we do it by lying, slandering and gossiping? It’s our messages that destroy others, not the technicality of which words we say.

**Proverbs 15:1**, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

**Analysis:** Have you ever had someone correct you in an angry manner? Didn’t it make you want to keep arguing even though you knew you were wrong? In fact, we sometimes cling to erroneous beliefs out of our desire to vindicate our hurt feelings. When we are corrected in gentleness, however, we are more likely to embrace the truth.

Some might claim that the term, “harsh word” refers to *bad words*, but it is used in this verse to counter the phrase, “gentle answer.” So again, the word, “word”, refers to a message rather than a specific word. Even if the word, “word,” designated a specific word, there are many words that stir up anger that aren’t *bad words*, such as *idiot* or *loser*. So this verse cannot be interpreted as one that forbids the use of *bad words*.

**Proverbs 17:5**, “He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.”

**Analysis:** I’ve known few people who rejoice at calamity, but many of us Christians speak evil of the poor, blaming them for their circumstances and refusing to help them.

**Proverbs 18:21**, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

**Analysis:** This sounds like an overstatement. The tongue just produces words. Certainly, words can’t determine life or death. Only weapons and physical destruction can do that.

However, let’s think about suicide for a minute. What drives a person to suicide? Their thoughts do. What kind of thoughts do suicidal people have? They have thoughts of self-doubt, inferiority, self-hatred. Why? Were they born with these thoughts? No. Someone put those thoughts in their head. So it’s from the words others that our suicidal thoughts originate. Likewise, it’s from the words of others that we develop much of our confidence and healthy self-esteem (not to be confused with unhealthy, arrogant pride which the Bible opposes.)

**Proverbs 23:9**, “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words.”

**Analysis:** This is a weird one. I would think that we should speak wisdom around those who are foolish. Jesus did it. So did the prophets and the apostles. In fact, there are so many fools around that we’d rarely have the opportunity to speak away from their presence. I think we’ll just have to temporarily write this verse off, because it’s apparent message conflicts with what we see throughout the rest of the Bible. We’ll just count it as another example of why it’s so important to use the every-verse method of Bible study.

**Proverbs 26:4-5**, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”

**Analysis:** In other words, don’t stoop down to the level of someone who speaks foolishly. Those of us who discuss such important, controversial topics as religion and politics have frequent opportunities to heed this verse. Quite often, our opponents rant and rave, engaging in name-calling and mockery, as they argue their point. Their emotional outbursts convey their lack of logic and calm reasoning. We must never stoop

to such a level. We need to take the high road when discussing important issues, treating our opponents with the respect that all human beings deserve and that the Bible requires.

**Proverbs 27:14**, “He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be reckoned a curse to him.”

**Analysis:** We Christians today are guilty of disobeying this verse when we bless people for show. We have a tendency to address other Christians with religious-sounding talk in order to look like men and women of great faith.

**Ecclesiastes 5:2**, “Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; therefore, let your words be few.”

**Analysis:** This verse is more of a prayer instruction than anything. We must not take prayer with God lightly. Imagine yourself kneeling before a king when you pray – a king who has the power to exalt you or destroy you. Would you waste a king’s time by rambling on with many words or by bothering Him with frivolous requests? Why then should we talk to the King of the universe any differently?

**Matthew 5:22**, “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”

**Context:** Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains that we are guilty of the sin of murder when we have hatred in our hearts.

**Analysis:** Have we finally found words that the Bible forbids us to utter? Interestingly, “fool” is not considered a bad word among American Christians. As for “raca,” I’ve been told that it’s the equivalent of the m-f word in our language, today. That’s probably why Bibles don’t translate it for us.

However, if it’s a sin to utter such harsh words, was Jesus a sinner by uttering them in the Sermon on the Mount? Not at all! Jesus’ point here is that we’re guilty of murder in our hearts even if all we can get away with is calling our enemy a name. It’s

not the utterance of these words that counts as sin, it's using these words, or any others, to insult and judge people whom we deem to be less righteous than ourselves.

**Matthew 12:36-37**, “And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.”

**Context:** In verses 33-35, Jesus explains how good speech comes from good-hearted people and evil speech from evil-hearted people.

**Analysis:** Jesus uses the phrase, “every careless word,” to emphasize that everything we say is scrutinized by God. So we must monitor our speech. Some might interpret this verse as one that forbids *bad words*. But that interpretation is inconsistent with all of verses we've reviewed thus far which show God's hatred for gossip, slander, lying, etc.

**Matthew 15:17-20**, “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

**Mark 7:20-22**, “And He was saying, ‘That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, murders, thefts, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.’”

**Context:** Jesus continues to explain why the Pharisees' man-made, religious rule of eating with unwashed hands served no good purpose.

**Analysis:** Not all of these sins mentioned by Jesus are sins of speech. Only false witness and slander are. However, speech can be used to carry out the sins of adultery, fornication and pride. For example, men who are smooth, deceptive talkers are the ones who take advantage of women sexually. Also, slick speech is needed to accomplish both legal and illegal theft in the business world.

**Ephesians 5:4**, “...and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”

**Context:** Paul educates the Ephesians on Christian living.

**Analysis:** We love to take general terms like “filthiness” and “silly talk” and define them as we see fit. Some of us insist that this verse forbids sexually-related humor. While most sexually-related humor is inappropriate because it promotes sin, I have heard some over the years that doesn’t. Humor that neither promotes sin nor abuses people is permissible.

**Titus 2:6, 8**, “Likewise, urge the young men to be sensible...sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.”

**Context:** Paul instructs his understudy, Titus, on church management.

**Analysis:** Unfortunately, many Christians might limit their interpretation of this verse to the choice of good versus bad words, when, in reality, this verse opposes all of the sinful speech we’ve covered thus far. One reason sound speech is so important is that we must represent God in a manner that’s fitting, so that the world will experience God’s character through the words we say.

**Colossians 3:8**, “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.”

**Context:** Paul instructs Christians to stop living as they did before knowing Christ and to conduct themselves as Christians should.

**Analysis:** Unfortunately, the NIV, which is considered by many to be a thought-by-thought translation rather than a word-by-word translation, translates the words “abusive speech” as “dirty language”, thus making this verse the one most commonly quoted as a command forbidding *bad words*. That’s a shame, because “abusive speech” covers a multitude of messages that harm others; whereas, “dirty language” implies that we must only refrain from several words that hurt no one.

The concept that we offend God by uttering a given word, even when no one is around to hear it, is preposterous. No verse in the Bible states that any word offends God,

nor does the Bible ever record God, Jesus, or any of the apostles being angry over someone's use of a given word.

**2 Timothy 2:14, 16**, “Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers....But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness....”

**Context:** In Paul's last letter, he gives Timothy advice on running the church.

**Analysis:** The instructions of the epistles (Paul's letters to the first century churches) address church issues of which we are often unaware. We don't know which words the Christians wrangled about or what kind of worldly and empty chatter they shared. All we can gather from this quote is that we should avoid saying things that lead “to the ruin of the hearers” or that “lead to further ungodliness.”

In examining every speech verse in the Bible, we've found no verses stating that the utterance of any given word is a sin, yet we've found numerous verses opposing lying, slander, gossip, and quarreling. God's speech priorities throughout the Bible align with His purpose for the entire biblical law – that we love others as ourselves and abstain from hurting others. Lying, slander, gossip, and quarreling oppose love because they hurt people. They may do so by cheating people out of their money, costing them friendships, ruining their relationships, creating divisions in the church, plummeting people into depression, and even leading some to suicide. God wishes to spare us these sufferings, so He has promised His wrath to those who practice these sins of the tongue.

Despite God's opposition to harmful speech, many Christians practice it, not only in private, but even in the church. In church I have heard pastors, Sunday school teachers, and congregation members slander celebrities, politicians and even Christians from other denominations. We Christians also gossip about opponents, quarrel with each other, and tell lies to support our viewpoints. Most amazing of all is that many Christians who witness these sins nod their heads in approval while nobody objects.

But if someone were to say in the presence of these very same Christians, “I got home last night to find that my dog shit on the floor,” all eyes would pierce the speaker while stunned, judgmental silence filled the room. Yet who does this statement hurt?

Does it cause anyone to lose a friend, lose money, or fall into depression? It hurts no one and, therefore, in no way violates the purpose of the law, which is to protect others from the harmful effects of our selfishness.

Words don't hurt people; messages do. When we use any word, whether it's a *bad word* or not, to lie, slander, gossip, or quarrel, we hurt others and sin against God. When we avoid these sins in our speech, we are guiltless before God, even when we use a *bad word* in a harmless context as I have in this example.

The concept that it's a sin to say a given word is bizarre. Words are merely tools used to convey messages. Yet we Christians today focus on the tools we use to speak rather than the biblical crime of saying things that hurt others. It's the equivalent of sentencing someone to life in prison for shooting a gun, even if it's used on a paper target, but then letting someone go free for committing murder with a knife, because the knife is an acceptable tool.

Like many man-made religious beliefs, the so-called sin of saying *bad words* is a measurable sin. You either say a *bad word* or you don't; there's no grey area. Lying, slander, gossip, and quarreling, on the other hand, are difficult to define. Lies appear to be true when we first hear them, and some lies contain some truth (like fish stories or deceptive arguments) that makes them difficult to label as lies. Slander is a little easier to define, but is often deemed necessary to present examples of evil to Christians so they can avoid sin themselves. As for gossip, it's difficult to determine whether we're gossiping or just sharing information about others. And quarreling may be the most difficult of all to define, as it's hard to determine at what point a thought-provoking discussion over a theological issue becomes a quarrel. The fact that these sins of speech are hard to define leads us to downplay their importance, because they're harder to eliminate from our speech than a few bad words.

Avoiding *bad words* is easy. All we have to do is use substitute words that mean the exact same thing. On the other hand, obeying God's commands to steer clear of lying, slander, gossip, and quarreling is difficult. That's one of the primary reasons that we Christians preach against saying *bad words* more than we preach against the biblical sins of speech.

The avoidance of saying *bad words* also serves as an excellent way to wear the Christian uniform. It's a measurable change in behavior that new Christians can practice immediately after converting to the faith. It's also an easy concept for children to grasp.

I'm not trying to say that we Christians should curse like rappers. Most *bad words* are words of frustration. We do not sin by being frustrated or by expressing frustration. But if we express continual frustration, we prove that we lack the contentment that Christians are called to have. Also, continual expressions of frustration and anger ruin other peoples' good moods. Turning other peoples' cheer into depression helps no one.

The main purpose of this chapter has not been to promote the use of *bad words*, but to alert Christians to our distortion of God's biblical will regarding our speech. The church's emphasis on avoiding the utterance of *bad words* has distracted us from God's will. As a result, many Christians continue to oppress others with lying, slander, gossip, and quarreling while ignoring God's repeated biblical attempts to eliminate such behavior.