



LIFE APPLICATIONS "I CORINTHIANS"

Chapter 10

CONTROL WHAT YOU SAY

Have you ever said something that deeply hurt another person? Have you ever told a story about someone, and learned later that the story had spread around the school? Have you ever been caught lying, or had someone tell you that you complain too much?

If you think about it, your mouth is probably your most dangerous weapon. What you say can offend and hurt other people; it can even irrevocably destroy their reputations. There are times when the things you say can even come back to hurt you.

This may be the reason that, when St. Paul wants to show us that no person is truly good, he uses our mouths and words as examples of how evil we can be: "Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit'; 'the poison of asps is under their lips'; 'whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness'" (Romans 3:13-14). The fourth century Christian Ambrosiaster says about this passage, "The words of men are like tiny mice. They speak in order to deceive, and just as poison flows from the lips of a serpent, so trickery and deceit flow from their lips."

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, an eighteenth century Russian monk, notes that even otherwise pious people can engage in destructive speech: "[Some] abstemious, devout-living people, give scandal by their action, and spread scandal with their tongue like an incendiary fire."

It is particularly easy for us to sin through our speech because, while it is difficult to believe that something like taking illegal drugs is a good activity, we can gossip about people or criticize them and convince ourselves that we are actually doing it for a good reason. St. Maximos the Confessor, a seventh century Christian, warns us, "Give no ear to the slanderer's talk nor let your talk run on in the fault-finder's hearing, by readily speaking and listening to things against your neighbor; otherwise you will fall from divine charity [love] and be found a foreigner to eternal life."

You can control your speech by relying on God to empower you to engage in helpful - rather than harmful - speech. First, you should pray, as does the priest during the Divine Liturgy, for God's forgiveness for all the harmful and evil things you say. St. Symeon Metaphrastes, a tenth century Christian, prays, "Ever protect, preserve, and keep me from every soul-corrupting deed and word." Second, you can use your mouth to praise God instead of condemning others; remember the hymn you sing after Holy Communion, "Let our mouths be filled with Thy praise, O Lord, that we may sing of Thy glory."

You should be careful not only to control what you say, but also what you hear. Lorenzo Scupoli simply states, "Beware in general, of listening to any words and speeches which may harm your soul." St.

Anthony the Great, the third century founder of monasticism, further explains, “Intelligent men should not listen to all kinds of conversation, but only to those which are profitable and lead to understanding of God's will; for His will is the way by which men return once more to life and eternal light.”