

## CHAPTER 10

# SOME SINS OF THE TONGUE

**"In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise"**

**(Proverbs 10:19)**

- A) Lying**
- B) Swearing (Oaths)**
- C) Gossip, slander and speaking evil**
- D) False witness**
- E) Revilement**
- F) Coarse jesting**
- G) Flattering**
- H) Murmuring**

The sins of the tongue are so numerous that we cannot - as a matter of practicality - cover them as they deserve, since each of them needs a separate research. We try to understand them in a quick manner.

## A) LYING

This is when a person speaks contrary to the truth, knowingly.

### WHY DO PEOPLE LIE?

(a) **Lying is usually made to hide trespasses and other sins.** After a person commits an evil he resorts to lying to hide his sin and his wrong doing.

(b) **He might resort to lying for a personal gain,** such as avoiding a loss, attracting some gains, or for a certain purpose, ... etc.

(c) **One is pushed to lying by his desire for fun,** as for example what they call "**April Fools Joke**", or the desire to make fun of others, especially if they are weaker than him, less educated or in a lower position, for the purpose of amusing himself.

(d) **One might lie because of a psychological problem** from which he suffers since his early upbringing, which makes him scared, hesitant, and feeling that fear is chasing him in everything he does. Scientists say that lying is among the problems well related to fear. Some researchers see constant lying by children is only created by fear, as its main aim is to protect the self. For such person, a psychological complex may accompany him as he grows older.

(e) **The causes of lying might be other psychological factors,** such as the feeling of inferiority or shyness; or the youth who sits with some frivolous friends who boast of their evil adventures, which makes him imagine and tell about comparable adventures. Or like the youth who grew up in a poor family and mixes in circles of higher social status. So he lies when he speaks about his origin and his family.

(f) Beside those mentioned, the causes of lying might be other subconscious factors, out of a person's hand, which we have no place to examine here.

**In any case, whatever the reason for lying, it is evil and sinful,** because it does not agree with the law of perfection and love which does not seek its own and does not rejoice in iniquity. It is sufficient that the Lord Jesus was pleased to call Himself "The Truth" (John 14:6). **Because of lying, dealings are mixed with fraud and families are destroyed. It also leads to vain oaths, disputes, quarrels and other kinds of evil.**

### DANGER OF LYING

**1 - Lying is dangerous because it hides other sins.** The 'devil of lying' coordinates lying with other sins, encourages and assists them. When a person does an ugly unacceptable thing, and succeeds in hiding it by lying, he is encouraged to do more evil. It is the custom of the devils after they succeed in trapping a person in a certain sin, that they leave him to the 'devil of lying' to

prepare with him the next plan.

**2 - There is strong connection between lying and some of the other sins**, such as stealing and fraud. The researchers found out that in the crimes of youngsters in particular, a youngster who lies, usually steals and cheats also, and vice versa. No wonder; these three characteristics have one thing in common; dishonesty. Lying is dishonesty in describing the truth, stealing is dishonesty in regarding the property of others, and cheating is dishonesty in speeches or in deeds in general.

**3 - He who lies commits a sin against God Who is "The truth"** (John 14:6), **against whom he lies, and against himself** which are born in the image and likeness of God. From the beginning God forbids His people to lie by saying "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another" (Leviticus 19:11).

**4 - Lying is not consistent with the new life we have in Jesus Christ.** The Apostle says "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds" (Colossians 3:9). When this apostle advised the believers from the Church of Ephesus not to join the Gentiles in their behaviour and to put off, concerning their former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness, he continued by saying "**Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another**" (Ephesians 4:22-25). We notice here that the advice of the apostle concerning lying came on the top of his advice about other vices which followed; anger, wrath, stealing, bitterness, blasphemy, and malice (see Ephesians 4:26-31). This indicates that lying is the source of many other vices. It is worthwhile for the believer to get rid of the sin of lying before any other vice.

**5 - To show the seriousness and danger of lying, it is enough to know that lying is related to the devil, even is considered a son of his.** The Lord announced that to us about the devil by saying "For he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). The Wise also showed how does God loathes lying by saying "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight" (Proverbs 12:22). On the contrary to that is "truth" which is one of the characters of God. The Lord said by prophet Isaiah "I, the Lord, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isaiah 45:19). In the Book of Revelation, John said about Him "The Faithful and True Witness" (Revelation 3:14).

## **IS THERE ANY JUSTIFICATION FOR LYING?**

There is no justification for lying. Lying is an absolute evil and it does not agree with the good nature of God. There is no acceptable lying and unacceptable lying. **Christianity does not qualify different kinds of lying! There is no white lying as some imagine.** We, as children of God Who "Wished and born us by the Word of Truth" ought to behave in the truth.

There is no justification **for lying no matter how the reason seems straight or holy. Under no circumstances, as some imagine, that the aim justifies the means.** A commandment is not kept by breaking another commandment.

Some one may ask "If my lying will save the life or the future of a person, for example, is it not acceptable in this case?" The answer to this question is "No". Lying is wrong, and the person who cannot find a means for saving the life of another person except by lying, does two deeds at the same time, one is good and the other is evil. We might excuse him by saying that he was not in full control of his senses, and he had good intentions. In spite of all that, lying is wrong, while the reasons for lying lessen the liar's responsibility and intervene for him.

**Experience showed that any problem solved by means of lying, has a momentary solution,** which will soon result in other errors. Besides, this will be on the expense of the welfare of others. To explain this point, we present the following actual case:

"A mother went to the principal of the high school of her son complaining of the lack of discipline in the class room which is harming her son who could not absorb his subjects. The principal called her son and confronted him with the complaint of his mother and asked him to name the students who disrupt the class. The son out of hand, named three of his colleagues. The principal called them to his office and asked one of them if he smokes. The student denied, though he was actually a smoker. The principal asked one of the teachers - who was present - to examine and smell the student's fingers. But out of pity to the student - who was previously kicked out from another school because of bad conduct - the teacher answered with the negative. The matter ended, may be, by an advice or with a light punishment. The end result is that the disrupting student continued disrupting the class.

We see here that the teacher did harm to the disrupting student himself, because the lying of the teacher encouraged him to continue his bad conduct, because of which he was kicked out of a previous school. The teacher also did harm to himself by not being truthful and committed a sin. He did harm to the truth itself by hiding it. Besides, he did harm indirectly to others, such as to the family of the complaining mother who did not want her son to be a failure, to the families of the rest of the students, for wasted time and the lack of expected gain in the class room, and to the whole society as a result of an irresponsible member in it. The teacher should have said the truth, and the disrupting student should have carried the punishment, as this is better for him and for others. We do not think that by his behaviour, the teacher has solved the problem of this student and of forty others in his class.

**All truthful people found out that the string of lying is short and it does not lead except to a temporary solution, if any. But truth rescues from eternal punishment first, and in most cases, from the evil in the world, or at least reduces the punishment.**

**We do not deny that there are very critical circumstances which require the literal untruth, and lots of wisdom, eloquence, and consideration.** As an example to that, a doctor who is treating a patient in a late state. What will be the answer of the doctor, if he is asked by the patient about his health? Definitely, the doctor could not give a frank answer, as it may harm the patient even more. The duty of the doctor is to calm the patient in order to help him to recover, and calming the patient is part of the treatment. In this case, the doctor should be courteous in his answer, in such a way as not to lie and not to harm the patient by saying the truth. What we mentioned here may be an example for similar situations.

## WHAT IS CONSIDERED LYING?

**Intentional exaggeration in speech is considered lying as well as not being exact.** This - while considered lying - is also a complex sin because it has another aspect, depending upon the aim for which it is said. As an example, the case of a person who exaggerates for the purpose of bragging, boasting and pride, or who exaggerates to cause harm and hurt to others.

**Intended unclear, or twisted talk for the purpose of giving untrue information, is also considered lying.**

**Some dress lying in another robe,** in order not to appear obvious, and think they are wise or clever, .... This and similar behaviours are nothing but lying.

## PUNISHMENT FOR LYING:

### 1 - Timely Punishment:

(a) **No matter how clever the liar is, he will be discovered,** even when he succeeds time and time again. God Himself said "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (Matthew 10:26), and He "Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5), uncovers him and shows his lying. If lying is the devil's work, and if the Lord had said "Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops" (Luke 12:3), the liar and his lying will not abide. The Wise said "The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment" (Proverbs 12:19).

(b) The natural result on discovering the liar, is that he loses **the regard of people, their respect and their trust of him and his talk.** As a result of his previous reputation, all what he says is doubted and is put on the scale in front of God before believing and accepting it, even when he speaks the truth and the fact.

(c) Discovering liars and what follows as a result of losing the trust and respect of others to them, is considered a social punishment they brought on themselves. **Yet they also acquire a material loss.** Consider Gehazi who lied to his master Elisha, extracted the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:20-27). And Ananias and his wife Sapphira who lied to the Apostles, fell down at once and died after Ananias heard the rebuke of St. Peter "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-10).

### 2 - Eternal Punishment

The liars are not only punished in this present life, but also in the life to come. David the prophet said "You shall destroy those who speak falsehood" (Psalm 5:6). The Wise Solomon said "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape" (Proverbs 19:5).

John who scribed to us about the life to come told us in the Book of Revelation what will happen to the liars, said "**All liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone**" (Revelation 21:8). The rest of this verse is that the liars will be in one lake with the unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, and the idolaters!!

## **TREATMENT FOR LYING**

\* When we reviewed the causes of lying, we mentioned many different causes, and to deal with lying, we need a special treatment for each of these causes.

\* The matter needs **mental convincing of the ugliness of lying**, by which one hurts himself, and brings contempt to her when his lying is discovered. Even more than that, others are not willing to believe him because of his frequent lying, because he is a "liar".

\* The matter also needs **mental convincing of the worthlessness of lying**, when used to save one's self. All truthful people experienced that lying is short-lived and it only leads to a temporary rescue, if any. But truth gives a permanent rescue - and at least reduces the timely punishment, and entirely rescues from eternal punishment.

\* Lying which is caused by fear, needs courage of the heart resulting from the belief of the person in his Creator "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him" (Psalm 91:14-15). We should accept with clear conscience any loss we encounter because of saying the truth. We know that the wicked enemy threatens us with encountering losses if we say the truth. But if we get hold of our God and of our truth, the enemy vanishes from in front of us, and his threats exist no more.

We ought to imitate the three young men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego who answered the king, with great courage, when he threatened to throw them in the burning furnace if they do not deny their God. They said "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

\* **In general, lying needs in its treatment to true repentance and a holy life with the Lord.** We said that lying comes as a second step to covering and hiding a sin one committed. Thus when we live an acceptable life with God, we strive to get rid of our trespasses, and we need not refuge to lying in order to hide them!

When one lives the life of the Spirit, he becomes - if he weakens or falls in sin - ready to admit it, confesses it, and apologizes to whom he trespassed and erred against. He would even be ready - with good conscience - to accept the punishment he deserves. With this holy life, one rises above enmity and hatred, and his love and affection expands to all people, and he is no more delighted to hurt them.

\* Lastly, lying which is caused by psychological reasons - as we previously mentioned - is treated by confession and by living in a holy spiritual atmospheres, either by the help of a spiritual father - if this is at all possible - or by psychological specialists.

### **DUTIES OF THE TEACHERS:**

There is an important duty for teachers concerning the subject of lying and the sins of the tongue in general. By teachers we mean parents, religious or secular teachers, brothers or counsellors. Scientists say that if a child grows up in an atmosphere which respects the truth by words and deeds, naturally, he will grow up truthful in his sayings and in his deeds. That is beside other factors which are needed for his physical emotions for security, freedom, respect, love, feeling of success, and getting good counselling and guidance. **If all these factors exist, he does not need to substitute for a deficiency, or aim for any cruelty, or revenge, or any such means which finds in lying suitable forms to express them.**

## **B) SWEARING (OATHS)**

Swearing or the Oath, as is known by the theologians, is calling the name of God as a witness, on either the truth of a saying, or registration of a promise. **Using names other than the name of God is also considered swearing**, as St. James says "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth **or with any other oath**. But **let your "Yes", be "Yes", and your "No", "No"**, lest you fall into judgment" (James 5:12).

### **REASONS FOR SWEARING:**

- (a) To confirm the truth of what one is saying.
- (b) To show one's innocence of an error or an accusation related to him.
- (c) As a habit for any trivial reason, and sometimes for no reason.

## WHY SHOULD WE REFRAIN FROM SWEARING?

(a) If swearing is calling the name of God as a witness, **it is a disregard of the Great Name to be called for witness of truth or of lying.** God forbids swearing completely by saying "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your "Yes" be "Yes", and your "No", "No". For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:34-37).

Before saying these verses about swearing, the Lord Jesus said "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord". But I say to you, do not swear at all ... "(Matthew 5:33, 34). That is, after the Lord Jesus pointed to what was the custom, He gave the commandment to forbid swearing in any form and for any reason. St. John Chrysostom said in this meaning "If you ask: what harm will occur from swearing out of necessity?, I answer you: There is no iniquity on the unbeliever. But when the law is broken, there is no regard for the necessity. The necessity is one thing which is, one should not be an enemy to God".

(b) Notice the saying of the Lord "For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37), which is from the devil. St. James confirms this meaning by saying "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ""Yes", be "Yes", and your "No", "No", lest you fall into judgement" (James 5:12). The Wise Ben Sirach also said "Do not inure your mouth to oaths or make a habit of naming the Holy One" (Sirach 23:9).

(c) We should not swear, because we do not own the object we swear by. I do not own myself that I swear by, I do not own one hair in my head, and I cannot change its colour, so I should not swear by my head. But if the Lord had sworn by Himself at some times in the Old Testament (Genesis 22:16, Isaiah 45:23), it is because He owns Himself. While God owns Himself and may swear by Himself, He did not want, in any of the four testaments, that the Lord Jesus - Who is God appearing in the flesh - to swear at all. But when He wanted to confirm an important matter, He used to say "Most assuredly, I say to you ... " (John 3:3), which is believe Me, or I am telling you the truth.

**When the Lord Jesus gave us the commandment not to swear, He gave it as an absolute commandment in strict words which have only one meaning. For this reason, one should not swear by God, by the saints and martyrs, nor by any other matter or place.**

- (d) It is feared that if we allow ourselves to swear, that one swears in a state of anger or for a

state of exaltation, ..., and when that cause no more exists, one finds himself bound by the swearing, and the devil keeps after him, and inflames him until he finishes it. This is what happened with king Herod, when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. "Therefore he **promised with an oath** to give her whatever she might ask". So when she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter, the king was sorry; nevertheless, **because of the oaths** and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her. "So he sent and had John beheaded in prison" (Matthew 14:6-10).

## **SWEARING AS A MATTER OF HABIT**

For some people, swearing has become a habit of speech. They do that without thinking, as they confirm their sayings by the name of God, while they do not mean that. Without doubt, this is a saddening sin which renders all the meanings of sin. Mentioning the name of God as a habit for the purpose of swearing, shows a slack conscience, wide enough to do all kinds of offences, since a clear conscience does not allow committing offenses.

## **REPERCUSSIONS OF SWEARING:**

1 - Those who are accustomed to swear harm themselves without knowing it, since nobody believes them as compared to a person who is known to be truthful without swearing. The respect of a person to God's commandment not to swear, gives others an idea of this person's piety, and make them believe him. **St. John El-Assuity said "Continuous swearing is truly lying and the speech without swearing is full of truth".**

2 - The Lord God has a great revenge on those who have disrespect to His Holy name and His honor. Prophet Zechariah said "Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll. And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits". Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: Every thief shall be expelled, according to this side of the scroll; and, **Every perjurer shall be expelled, according to that side of it.** I will send out the curse, says the Lord of hosts"; It shall enter the house of the thief **and the house of the one who swears** falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it, with its timber and stones"" (Zechariah 5:1-4).

Ben Sirach also said "**A man given to swearing is lawless to the core**" (Sirach 23:11). King Belshazzar drank from the vessels of the Lord, and God punished him greatly (Daniel 5:22-27). This will happen to any one who chews the name of God in his mouth, like Belshazzar. For this, the Apostle said "The name of God is blasphemed because of you" (Romans 2:24).

## **TREATMENT OF SWEARING:**

1 - Those who swear to confirm lies, commit a double sin. Naturally, they cannot stop swearing before they stop lying, which pushes them to swearing.

2 - If swearing is for others to believe us, we are not bound to do that; let God convince them of the truth of our speech and of our innocence, no doubt He will do. In dealing with each problem in our life which requires breaking of a commandment of God, one should look to God on one side and to sin on the other side, and balance between them, remembering the divine saying "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

3 - If swearing is to make others believe us, because of the bad opinion they have about us from our bad past, then if we have left our past life - with it's lying - in this case we also let God work on our behalf, and time will show our new life. The person you talk to, might not believe you, once, twice and three times, but he will believe you at the end.

**4 - But those who are accustomed to swear for a trivial reason, or for no reason at all, they should be convinced of the magnitude of this sin, and should have daily exercises to get rid of it,** and no doubt they will. St. John Chrysostom points to a strict exercise for those who are accustomed to swear and says "When you watch yourself, one of your servants, or your children, have the habit of swearing with definite oaths, do not give him any food. Do that with yourself as well, if you are accustomed to swear. When the bold tongue is disciplined, it does not dare to swear later on, because the pains of hunger makes it refrain from doing it". He also says "Deal with your friends and your house hold, because when the tongue is disciplined, it runs away from swearing as it runs away from bitterness".

They should also ask for the grace of God in every prayer, to get rid of this habit. They should also try to use words such as "believe me", to replace their swearing.

## **C) GOSSIP, SLANDER AND SPEAKING EVIL**

These three sins have many similarities and aim nearly at the same thing. Gossip is a speech for the purpose of tale bearing and is said as rumour to harm, slander is mentioning the bad characters of a person in his absence, and speaking evil is the opposite of speaking good. Their aim is distorting the reputations of people in front of others trying to destroy their lives socially. Those who commit such sins fit the description of the Wise "An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire (Proverbs 16:27).

### **CAUSES OF THESE SINS:**

As we explained, these sins result from the thoughts of condemnation, hate or envy, and in turn these are derived from pride and lack of love.

### **THEIR SERIOUSNESS:**

1 - God hates these sins and detests those who commit them, because behind them hide other sins such as pride, hostility, bitterness and envy. God forbids them by saying "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbour" (Leviticus 19:16). And when God started to count the sins of Jerusalem by prophet Ezekiel, He said "In you are men **who slander** to cause bloodshed" (Ezekiel 22:9). About gossip, prophet David said "**He who does not backbite with his tongue**, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; He who does these things shall never be moved" (Psalm 15:1-5). About slander he said "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. I will not know wickedness. **Whoever secretly slanders his neighbour, him I will destroy**; the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure" (Psalm 101:3-5), and about speaking evil, St. James says "**Do not speak evil** of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law" (James 4:11).

The four gospels told us very little about the teaching of John the Baptist "born before the Lord and the greatest among those born by women". Yet this very little includes teaching against these sins, indicating their seriousness. Responding to the question of the two soldiers he said "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely" (Luke 3:14). Ben Sirach said also "Do not get a name for being a gossip or lay traps with your tongue" (Sirach 5:14).

The Lord hates these sins to the extent that He uncovers them and quickly proves the innocence of those who they are committed against. It happened when the Lord was casting out a demon from a dumb man that some Jews said about Him "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Luke 11:15), but immediately a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" (Luke 11:27).

2 - People also hate these sins which destroy others and their homes, and plant hatred and strife between friends and cause trouble among them. For this the Wise said "A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 16:28) and said "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases" (Proverbs 26:20). People consider these sins worse than stealing. A thief steals material things which can be replaced, but a person who gossips deprives others their reputations and their honor, which cannot be brought back with money, as the Wise says "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1).

3 - What increases their seriousness, is their mismatch to the new life which a man lives after the Divine Grace touches his heart. Listen to Zacchaeus the tax collector saying to the Lord Jesus "Look, Lord, ... and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold". The Lord's answer to him was "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:8, 9).

4 - The person committing these sins harm himself more than he harms others. His evil to the innocent will be uncovered by God. This evil will hunt him, and he will be the only one with a bad reputation. Prophet David said "Let not a slanderer be established in the earth" (Psalm 140:11). He is like a person who cleans the wick of a candle or of a gas lamp. He dirties his fingers, yet their lights increase in strength and brightness. Soon people will be disgusted with him and guard

themselves against him to avoid the harm his tongue did to others.

### **SAINTS AND THESE SINS:**

Because of the ugliness and seriousness of these sins, the Lord commanded us not to associate or mix with those who commit them as the Wise says "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips" (Proverbs 20:19). The saintly fathers confirmed that in their advice. A father counselling his disciples said "The tongue of a snake is lighter than the tongue of the devil, as the latter causes chaos and fights between the brethren, develops uproar and evil among peaceful people, and divides the assembly of many. The tongue of the person who gossips does not differ from the tongue of a serpent. It is better to live with a serpent and a scorpion than to live with a person with a gossiping tongue.

Now, I advise you to flee away fast from the gossip, even if he is an ascetic, a hermit, or a striving person. If your father or brother gossips leave him, as it is better to live with a lion and a lioness than to live with a gossip. Do not be reluctant to flee from him, else he kills you with his poison which is sin.

The saintly fathers advised us also that if we gather in one place with a person who starts to speak evil about others, that we do not go along with him, and be not timid, but divert the talk to a useful matter, or show our reluctance to hear such talk. **St. Macarius the Great said "Guard your hearing from the words of gossip, in order for your hearts to be pure".**

## **D) FALSE WITNESS**

**This is a multiple sin as it constitutes lying and vain swearing. It might also be against love when it aims to harm one of the two conflicting sides.** That is by hiding facts and hushing them from the judges or the jury to give a wrong and unjust verdict. The rights of one of the sides will be lost and may be his honor and reputation as well.

### **GOD AND FALSE WITNESS**

God made a special command concerning false witness, which is the ninth of the ten commandments. He said "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). God is "Truth" and "Love" and those who bear false witness resist and distort the truth, work against the law of love, and assist in the spread of injustice and increase the prospect of deceit. No wonder that we see the divine response warns us greatly from falling into this sin by saying "**Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness**" (Exodus 23:1). God also in the past commanded to punish the bearer of false witness to do to him as he thought to have done to

his brother (Deuteronomy 19:16-19). The Wise said "**A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape**" (Proverbs 19:5).

### **OUR DUTY TOWARDS FALSE WITNESS:**

A person who is asked to bear witness, usually has many emotional feelings, specially if justifying a condemned man depends on his witness, and meanwhile no harm will be caused to another person - or at least that is what he believes. However, a bearer of false witness should realise that by his sin he commits many other sins:

(1) **Against himself**, as he commits a deed which is an abomination to God, as the Wise says "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 17:15).

(2) **Against the person to whom he falsely bears witness, for his benefit**, as the punishment which he would receive in this life is going to save him from the eternal punishment.

(3) **Against God Who gave this command**. We are supposed to give proof of our love to God as children who submit to Him by keeping His commandments, regardless of any other factor "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

**\* When somebody is requested to witness in a certain case, he should give a true witness and free himself from all other considerations, regardless of all circumstances.** Mercy and love are two divine commandments, and also bearing witness to the truth is a divine commandment. How do we then fulfil the first commandment by breaking the second one?!

\* Perhaps the required witness is to decide upon a dispute between two people, or between an actual personality and an abstract one (such as a government department, an organisation or a company for example). The person may be encouraged to give false witness in the latter case, the fact that no harm will come to another person. **But we restate that a commandment is a commandment, and keeping it is the sign of love to God.**

\* A person may be requested to witness in a court case, the outcome of which will affect the future of a person he knows, such as the firing of this man from his job, putting him in prison, or some severe harm. We should not think about the outcome of the court case, as the goal does not justify the means. But the goal should be good and holy and the means also, and we should be honest in giving our witness. As for the feelings of love, affection and mercy, God is more loving to this person and more affectionate. If we are sure of the innocence of this person, we should give a witness worthy of truth and honesty.

\* If you were ever moved to bear a false witness - even for a good purpose - remember the two persons who gave false witness against the Lord Jesus in front of Caiaphas the high priest, and He was sentenced to death because of their witness (Matthew 26:60, 61).

## **E) REVILEMENT**

Castigation is an insult said to a person's face, and results from anger moved by wrath, jealousy or hatred, or even from a distorted religious zeal.

### **WHAT TO DO ABOUT BEING REVILED?**

Some ask about what to do when we are reviled, and say "what about reviling for the purpose of scaring or chastising? Should parents apply castigation with their children, teachers with their students, bosses with their employees, masters with their servants?".

#### **1 - When We Are Reviled:**

For building our spiritual lives, there is no better way than to look unto the Lord Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), upon Whom St. Peter said "**Who (Jesus) when He was reviled, did not revile in return;** when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). We should not answer back those who revile us in similar words. The Lord taught us to bless those who curse us, and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us (Matthew 5:44). St. Paul said "Bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14), and St. Peter said "**Not returning** evil for evil **or reviling for reviling**, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

It happened in the past that Shimei the son of Gera started cursing continuously the prophet David who was also the king of Israel, and he threw stones at David and at all the servants of king David. One of the king's people wanted to kill this reviling man. But David - and he was a king - said in complete meekness "So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, "Curse David". Who then shall say, "Why have you done so?" It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day" (2 Samuel 16:5-12). The book 'The Paradise of the Monks' tells us about a striving noble brother who was reviled by a man whose reputation was not good. This noble brother answered this man by saying "**I am able to answer you according to your speech, but the law of my Lord shuts my mouth**".

**Bearing unjust criticism and not answering back in the same way creates humility in the soul**, by which man is worthy of many graces. For this St. Paul said "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, ... for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

#### **2 - Reviling:**

**If we are required that no corrupt word proceeds out of our mouth (Ephesians 4:29), how can a man revile his brother who is in the image of God!"** The person you revile, whether he is working for you or a servant, is a human being like you created in the image of God. The tongue with which we pray and bless God the Father is not suited to be used to curse the people and revile them. In this St. James said "My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?" (James 3:10, 11).

This is our position as Christians who are called to a holy life and "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). We never read about the Lord Jesus - when He was in the flesh and was subject to and withstood many insults - that He reviled and that any unsuitable word came out of His Holy Mouth "**He was oppressed, yet He opened not His mouth**" (Isaiah 53:7).

**Therefore there is no justification for disparaging anyone, even for the purpose of scaring or chastising youngsters.** A reviling word cannot come out from a good man - neither forged nor deliberate - for "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Moreover, reviling is not a means of scaring or chastising, and reviling people are responsible in front of God for giving themselves as examples to their children, to their subordinates and to their servants. This does not mean that we refrain from using expressions to exhort and rebuke. The apostle Paul said to his disciple Timothy "Rebuke, exhort" (2 Timothy 4:2). This is totally different from the words of reviling.

Some may think that in certain jobs they occupy, their workers do not give good production without reviling them and scaring them. Hence they are obliged to do so. This is contrary to reality, because criticizing is not good for building healthy personalities. Besides, there are better ways and means for exhorting careless employees. Perhaps, correct counsel and showing kindness are enough to embarrass the inattentive and careless, and encourage them.

## **TREATMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Psychological persuasion is needed to show its wickedness, ugliness and bad effect and one needs to pursue a good spiritual life to overcome it.

This type of berating mostly results from angry emotion, which when met with corresponding emotion, increases the differences and gap between the reviling parties. It is like fire which intensifies more as it is supplied with new fuel. When you are faced with violent criticism, meet it with modesty and calm, which are like water which extinguishes a blazing fire. Imitate your Master and "Quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Ephesians 6:16). We know from the words of the Wise that "**A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger**" (Proverbs 15:1). Apostle Paul also teaches us, not to be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). If you can control yourself in an insulting situation, or when a curse is directed at you, do not disdain yourself or consider that as weakness and humiliation, but rather as strength and victory. The Wise says "**He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city**" (Proverbs 16:32).

As we mentioned, **the treatment of this problem needs an overall spiritual life.** Reviling is not an isolated sin, or it would be easy to combat. But it expresses other sins such as anger which in turn shows an inner evil inside the person, such as hatred, envy and hostility, ... , and these result from the lack of love. Hence we should treat the illness from its root.

**If reviling is used as a habit of the tongue,** and comes out during common conversation, then the matter requires the person to be diligent and give account of himself in the evening of every day, as a kind of exercise to control his tongue against this sin. That is if he is striving for a holy spiritual life.

### **REVILING AS A HABIT:**

We notice that for some people, this type of abuse runs like water from their tongue. It is more serious, when the person does not mean what the word intends. One may intend to praise others by his joking revilement, and another during ordinary conversation as a sign of his accord with them!! What we have said about swearing which some do as a matter of habit, we here repeat and say that he who lets revilement come from his tongue without thinking, has a rotten conscience, and has to be waken up and be diligent and sensitive.

**Prayers and supplications concerning this matter are means to help get rid of this sin,** in order that God may give His needed help. The person who is defeated in this sin should study the situations in which he commits this sin, in order to be careful in such circumstances. For example, he notices that he swears when he jokes with his brethren, or when they joke with him by cursing, and he does the same. Hence he should be specially careful in such situations. No doubt, by giving account of himself and training, at the end - by the grace of God - he will get rid of swearing and replace it with good words.

### **THE END OF THE REVILERS:**

Dear brother, do not belittle reviling and consider it a trivial matter, as it does not seem in our eyes as serious. But St. Paul speaking to the believers of the Church of Corinth, warned us not to keep company with a reviler "**Do not to keep company** with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-- **not even to eat with such a person**" (1 Corinthians 5:11).

The Holy Bible draws to us a horrifying picture to the end of the revilers in the life to come. Our teacher St. Paul says "Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, **nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God**" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). Let us then look carefully at the bitter end of reviling, and not belittle it. Who commit it are counted among the adulterers, idolaters, and the committers of the ugly shameful sins ... !!, and they all have no inheritance in the everlasting kingdom of Christ.

## F) COARSE JESTING

\* As a means of vain entertainment and by jesting, one debase himself with ugly expressions, dirty jokes, telling tales and stumbling stories, and singing cheap songs.

\* Jokers think that joking and what it contains of unsuitable coarse jesting, is nothing but a means of passing time and entertainment. But this is not the way for the children of God who live by the Spirit and for the Spirit, and also rejoice in the Spirit. Our route is the route of grace and salvation, and our entertainment is in the fellowship with the Beloved and His loved ones, as the Apostle said "If there is any comfort of love" (Philippians 2:1).

\* Coarse jesting is encompassed under bad speech which does not suit our lives as the children of God. The Lord taught us that every idle word we say, we will give account of in the day of judgment (Matthew 12:36). And the Apostle commanded us by saying "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, **filthy language out of your mouth**" (Colossians 3:8).

\* We should not be satisfied by just not speaking coarse filthy jesting, but also we should not sit in the council of the scornful. In the opening of his psalms, the Psalmist blessed those who do not sit in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1). Prophet Jeremiah affirmed the same meaning by saying "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts. **I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice**" (Jeremiah 15:16, 17).

\* Jokers think that they alone are the happy people with their jokes and jests, and they describe others who do not share their jests and trash, as rigid and backward. Sometimes, some young men weaken when they are described by such names, and go along with their colleagues in this behaviour. But let these young men and those jokers hear the words of the Lord Himself "**Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep**" (Luke 6:26). Let them also hear the words of St. Paul "Let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; **neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting**" (Ephesians 5:3, 4), but the joy of

the children of God is a deep hearty joy, which the Apostle describes as "Inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

\* The person who has the habit of joking and coarse jesting, think that as people respond to him, they describe him as 'light hearted' and like him. But let this miserable person know that people between themselves describe him as 'light minded'!

\* **Excessive joking and coarse jesting are bound to extinguish the heat of the spirit,** even when the joking is innocent and use totally innocent words. It does to the heat of the spirit and the warmth of the heart what water does to the flaming fire. **St. John El-Dargy says "Joking eliminates the reverence, disperses the mind, spoils formality, abolishes the heat and distorts prayers".**

\* **We wish to attract the attention of some ministers who use the means of exciting laughing during their teachings or preaching in order to gain the love of those they minister to,** thinking that this makes a good introduction to their speech. They think in the spirit of the world that those ministered to, would not be repelled by their teaching or preaching. Let those ministers know that our preaching and service aim for the repentance of those who hear us. Repentance, never result from laughing but from our feeling of regret for our sins and the lukewarmness of our love to God. That is besides what results from the lack of regard to the houses of God and the reverence to His words, and also familiarizing the believers with them.

\* What we said does not mean that a person should appear miserable and sad within himself, and heavy handed in his dealings with others. St. Paul commanded us to "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4), and to "Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12).

\* **Along with coarse jesting goes mocking expressions which some love to say to others for entertainment sake - not to entertain those they mock but to entertain themselves!** They mock for example, a person who is weak, poor, disabled, blind, deaf, mad, or ugly looking. In the past God warned His people from such sin and said "You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:14). Perhaps some people are created in this image which you mock. Is not your mocking in these cases considered a reproach to God? The Wise said "He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker" (Proverbs 17:5). And Isaiah said "Now therefore, do not be mockers, lest your bonds be made strong" (Isaiah 28:22).

\* Mocking offends the feelings of our brothers who are weak, poor or disabled, and this is against the law of love which teaches us "For we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25), and which asks that the strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves (Romans 15:1). It is also against the spirit of Christian humility which prevents me from insulting others, despising them, or even being haughty over them.

\* Finally we wish to mention an important point; we are in need to be diligent in our words and in our dealings. Some people are accustomed to use expressions - which do not agree with

perfect Christianity - for joking, and they do not feel that they are wrong. Such people need to reconsider what they are accustomed to say in words and of expressions.

## G) FLATTERING

\* This is one more sin of the tongue which some use to get what they want. In doing that, they flatter the rich, the great and those with authority, and they cling in their praises even when it is opposite to what they believe in their hearts and conscience.

\* Flattering is a sin, because it is against frankness and against the truth. The Lord Jesus never flattered anybody. Also His predecessor John the Baptist did not delay in rebuking Herod for taking the wife of his brother to be his wife, and preferred to die as a martyr than to cover-up the truth (Matthew 14:1-12). The apostle Paul warned us of this sin by saying "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (Colossians 2:4).

\* **Flattering leads to hypocrisy, for which** Jesus kept wooing the scribes and the Pharisees (see Matthew chapter 23). The hypocrite imitates Judas Iscariot who came to deliver his Master to the enemies. He showed dishonest love that he went to kiss Jesus saying to Him "Greetings, Rabbi!" (Matthew 26:49).

\* The Lord - Who is the Truth itself - hates this sin, because it is against the fact and the truth. It also implies lying, as it does not express reality. Prophet David said "They speak idly everyone with his neighbour; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things" (Psalms 12:2, 3).

\* Agreeing with others on their wrong opinions and their bad speech (such as scorning people), in order to keep their friendship and the fear of offending them, knowing that what they say is wrong and against what we believe, is also considered flattering. Truth is truth, and Truth is Jesus Himself. Put this fact in front of your eyes, so that you should not laud a person, and keep his friendship, while you offend the Lord.

\* Avoiding flattering, does not mean to be dry and coarse in our dealings and our talks with our superiors and influential people, and that our speech should come out empty of the spirit of gentleness and courtesy. We should be gentle with all, rendering honor to whom honor due (Romans 13:7), denying ourselves. But at the same time, we withhold the truth which pleases God

and which satisfies our conscience.

## H) MURMURING

### MURMURING COMES OUT FROM UNHEALTHY SOULS

Words of wrath express what is inside the heart due to gloom and unhappiness. We here ask: does a person speak the words of wrath as a result of his disgust with rotten matter around him, and he uses that to reflect his own bitter sick soul?!

**If the soul is healthy and it encounters a rotten matter, it chooses one of two things routes:**

**In the first route, it tries to find out the good points in this matter.** Such as to find out some good characteristics in a troublesome person, and based on these good sides starts to collaborate with him. The Bible says "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness" (Matthew 6:22, 23), and also "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled" (Titus 1:15).

**The second route is to be kind to the weak person and find out an excuse for him,** then his weakness would not disgust you, but rather make you compassionate and extend your hand to help him. Perhaps this is what the poet means when he says:

The accepting eye does not see shameful matters,  
but the eye of wrath shows the errors.

If a man sees some disorder in his own house, with simple eyes, he goes to help the workers, and puts things in order. But if he looks for the defects with critical eyes and with anger, the defects would seem big in his eyes, and other things also would look defective, and he might start to rebuke and blame others for that. The eyes of the children of God are the eyes of love and kindness. They look to the good sides of people, are compassionate and help them in their weaknesses. They do that quietly and lovingly, as the Book says "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, ... Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1, 2).

**The healthy loving soul expresses its criticism with words full of kindness and encouragement to correct the errors.** It does not speak the words of wrath or murmuring, imitating the Lord of Glory. **In most cases wrath expresses what is inside the soul out of bitterness, resulting from its own troubles. It expresses murmuring with strong expressions, heavy criticism and rotten words.**

It happened that the Corinthians criticised apostle Paul, accused him falsely and complained against him. Paul however, worked hard to correct what was evil in them, until he succeeded. In

describing their case, he said "O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, **but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open**" (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). This shows that their murmuring was not because of an outside defect but from themselves.

## **MURMURING LEADS TO OTHER SINS:**

Murmuring leads the murmurer to hate the others, and use bad and unjustified words, which in turn spoils the atmosphere of understanding and creates an atmosphere of turmoil. Moreover, the murmurer lets the feelings of pride, jealousy and partiality get hold of him. In this, the Apostle says to the Corinthians also "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbiting, whisperings, conceits, tumults" (2 Corinthians 12:20).

**The murmurer pulls himself to blaspheme against God.** As he sees the blessings of God through dark glasses, he does not thank but blasphemes. As he does not understand the wisdom of God in any issue, he does not do as St. Paul did when he shouted saying "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?" (Romans 11:33, 34). He rather blasphemes on God as the children of Israel did after they went out of Egypt and reached the borders of Canaan. They sent spies to study the land of Canaan who came back carrying samples of the goods of the land. They did not thank God Who helped them and fulfilled His promises to them and to their fathers, but forgot every thing. They forgot the support of God against strong nations which resisted them. They started to speak against God, and decided to go back to Egypt; the land of slavery and idol worshipping. That, for them was better than moving to the land of freedom and worshipping the Holy God. God was very angry with them and decided that none of them would enter the promised land, but that all will die in the wilderness. Only the new generation, born in the wilderness, whose mind was not contaminated by idol worshipping, will enter Canaan (see Book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14),

To guard against this spirit, apostle Paul says "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). It is clear that this verse carefully distinguishes between the different issues which the tongue expresses as a result of the bitterness in the heart, such as anger, shouting and blasphemy. The same Apostle says in his epistle to the Colossians "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8).