

THE BIBLE AND HOW WE SPEAK

God's word addresses how we talk to one another. Whether an occasional slip or a habit of saying harsh, hurtful things, as believers we need to pay attention to what the Bible has to say on this all important topic. Here are a few passages, most often from the NIV (New International Version), about the words that come out of our mouths. Other translations: NASB = New American Standard Bible; TNLT = The New Living Translation. I put some words in **bold** for emphasis and easier reading:

- “Let no **unwholesome** [lit. “**rotten**”] word proceed from your mouth” Eph. 4:29
- “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, **brawling** and **slander**, along with every form of malice.” Eph. 4:31
- “But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and **filthy language** from your lips.” Col. 3:8, NIV, and in another translation...
“But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and **abusive speech** from your mouth.” Colossians 3:8, NASB.
- “Husbands, love your wives and do not be **harsh** with them.” Colossians 3:18 (NIV)
- “If you claim to be religious but **don’t control your tongue**, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.” James 1:26 (TNLT)
- “So also, the **tongue** is a small thing, but what **enormous damage** it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.” James 2:5 (TNLT)
- “The **tongue** is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person...” James 3:6
- “There is one who speaks **rashly like the thrusts of a sword**, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Prov. 12:18, NASB. Another translation puts it this way: “Some people make **cutting remarks**, but the words of the wise bring healing.” Prov. 12:18, TNLT
- When addressing the Pharisees who were accusing Jesus as gaining his power to cast out demons from the prince of demons. Matt. 12:34, “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? **For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.**” Jesus is saying how we speak to others reveals what is in our hearts.
- When Jesus was speaking to the people gathered on the hillside above the Sea of Galilee, commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wanted to address the deeper issue of the sin in our hearts. That following the Lord meant more than obeying the law. He referred to the commandment not to commit murder. He went beyond that and addressed murder in our hearts. He made it clear that not only will physical murderers face judgment, so will those who harbor anger toward their brother and who say harsh things to

those they relate closely with – indicating that hostile words are a form of “soul murder” – attempting to kill or maim another person, mentally or emotionally.

- Here is the passage: “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘**Raca**’ [Aramaic: Empty-head! – a term of extreme contempt] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘**You fool**’ [scorning a person’s heart and character] will be in danger of the fire of hell.” Matthew 5:22

In other words, calling someone “Raca” was akin to saying, “You idiot! You’re stupid! Don’t you have any brains?” And, calling someone “You fool” was an even **worse insult**; more like, “You scoundrel!” When a person uses such contemptuous words, he/she is engaging in verbal abuse --- slashing others in heart and soul. People who attack others with their words will face judgment, unless they sincerely repent, seek forgiveness, and make an effort to repair the damage.

- “Love is patient, love is kind...It is **not rude**, it is not self-seeking, it is **not easily angered**, it keeps no record of wrongs.” I Cor. 13: 4,5
- “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and **slow to become angry**, for **man’s anger** does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” James 1:19, 20
- “The tongue has the power of life and **death**, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” Prov. 18:21
- “Put away **perversity** from your mouth; keep **corrupt talk** far from your lips.” Prov. 4:24
- “**Reckless words** pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Prov. 12:18
- “He who **loves a quarrel** loves sin; he who builds a **high gate** [wall of defensiveness] invites destruction.” Prov. 17:19
- “An **angry man** stirs up dissension, and a **hot-tempered one** commits many sins.” Prov. 29:22
- “Drive out the **mock**er, and out goes **strife**; **quarrels** and **insults** are ended.” Prov. 22:10 (NIV).
- “Throw out the **mock**er, and fighting, quarrels, and insults will disappear.” Prov. 22:10 (TNLT.)

This verse makes it clear that it doesn’t always “take two” for there to be strife, quarrels, and insults in a home or workplace. [According to Webster’s dictionary, to “mock” (verb) is “*To treat with contempt; deride; ridicule.*” Therefore a “mock”

(noun – someone who habitually mocks) is one who engages in treating others with *contempt*; one who *derides* and *ridicules* others.]

Scripture is clear that verbal abuse is not acceptable behavior and needs to be sincerely repented of, due to the damage it inflicts on others.

Next is a passage that has serious implications for church and family members who live with a person who engages in verbal abuse:

- “...I wrote to you to not associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a **reviler**, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one.” I Corinthians 5:11, New American Standard Bible.

In The New Living Translation, the word for “reviler” is translated “is abusive,” quoted below:

“What I meant was that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a Christian yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or **is abusive**, or a drunkard, or a swindler. Don’t even eat with such people.” I Corinthians 5:11, TNLT. (my opinion – both phrases, “a reviler” and “is abusive” indicate a current repeated behavior, habit or ingrained character trait.)

Reviler (#3060 in Greek concordance dictionary), translated: *abusive, railer, reviler*
These words are related to Greek words meaning: *mischief, insult, reproach, abuse*

Webster: **Revile**: *To subject to abuse, now only in speech; to rail or rail at.*

Webster: **Rail**: *to revile or scold in harsh, insolent or vituperative language; scoff.*

Definition applied for **Railer**: *One who reviles or scolds in harsh, insolent or vituperative language; scoffs at others.*

Webster: **Vituperative**: *To abuse in words; censure severely or abusively; berate.*

Summary of implied meaning of I Corinthians 5:11: **Verbal abuse** is in a list with other serious offensive behaviors like sexual immorality, alcohol/drug addiction and any kind of financial or criminal fraud. Each of the behaviors listed in this verse are very damaging to others and break trust. We are not to eat with, associate with (live with?) anyone who claims to be a Christian, yet is sexually immoral, an alcoholic, engages in swindling others or is habitually verbally abusive.

This could imply that sexual immorality, repeated alcohol abuse, financial fraud and **habitual verbal abuse** are grounds for marital separation or even possibly divorce. Even if the spouse is a supposed “believer”. **Verbal abuse** is treated as a serious issue in both the Old and New Testaments and by Jesus himself. The book of Proverbs and the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians make it clear that we are not to associate with anyone who engages in this destructive behavior.