

Go to Hell!

*One reason a dog is such a lovable creature is his tail wags instead of his tongue.
(Source Unknown)*

On a windswept hill in an English country churchyard stands a drab gray tombstone. Bleak and unpretentious, it leans slightly to one side, beaten almost smooth by the blasts of time. But if you stoop over and look closely, you can still read the barely visible epitaph: "Beneath this stone a lump of clay / Lies Arabella Young who on the twenty-fourth of May / Began to hold her tongue." Arabella Young has become famous; her name being proclaimed from lecterns and pulpits; written in books and spoken on the airwaves. Her epitaph, whether fictitious or real, is summed up in the words of Benjamin Franklin, "Better slip with foot than tongue."

One thing requiring two lifetimes to master is the tongue. If your lips would keep from slips; five things observe with care: to whom you speak, of whom you speak—and how and when and where you speak (William Norris). The tongue is incredibly hard to domesticate; all kinds of wild animals have been tamed but the tongue is the most difficult and problem causing organ in the human body. There should be mandatory classes in education on tongue control and recovery programs for those hopelessly addicted to negative word use.

Still vivid in my memory are two scenes that transpired on the same day. One morning Ronnie, Johnnie, Wayne and I were walking to Frostproof Elementary School, practicing our new cuss words and discussing their definitions. Wayne challenged me to use the Lord's name in vain and I did. On the way home we were taunting two girls and I called one of them a bitch. After that the stopper was pulled from the obscenity bottle and vile filth flowed. Six years later I took my first step of faith in God and everything changed, beginning with my mouth. At times I slipped, but less and less frequently as I matured.

One does not outgrow the possibility of failure. Seventeen years later my wife and I were arguing. She was in the living room letting me have it; and I was in the bedroom speaking rather loudly, giving her a piece of my mind. I was losing the war of words. Finally, I blurted out, "Go to hell!" With that inappropriate remark I went down in defeat and the battle ended. We laugh about it today but it was not funny then. I failed to guard my heart and heed the advice of Josh Billings who said, "The best time for you to hold your tongue is the time you feel you must say something or bust." A knife wound heals, but a tongue wound festers (Turkish Proverb).

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