

Transformed Talk

A man working in the produce department was asked by a lady if she could buy half a head of lettuce. He replied, "Half a head? Are you serious? God grows these in whole heads and that's how we sell them!"

"You mean," she persisted, "that after all the years I've shopped here, you won't sell me half-a-head of lettuce?"

"Look," he said, "If you like I'll ask the manager."

She indicated that would be appreciated, so the young man marched to the front of the store. "You won't believe this, but there's a lame-brained idiot of a lady back there who wants to know if she can buy half-a-head of lettuce."

He noticed the manager gesturing, and turned around to see the lady standing behind him, obviously having followed him to the front of the store. "And this nice lady was wondering if she could buy the other half" he concluded.

Later in the day the manager cornered the young man and said, "That was the finest example of thinking on your feet I've ever seen! Where did you learn that?" "I grew up in Grand Rapids, and if you know anything about Grand Rapids, you know that only two things come from there: great hockey teams and ugly women."

The manager's face flushed, and he interrupted, "My wife is from Grand Rapids!" "And which hockey team did she play for?"

Folks, loose lips can get you in heap of trouble, amen?

This morning we are going to talk about talk. Scripture has a lot to say about our speech. You could spend a lifetime just applying what the book of Proverbs says about speech. Today we will look at what Paul says in Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4: 29-32

- 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.**
- 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**
- 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.**
- 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.**

Remember as we have studied Ephesians chapter 4 we have discovered from God's Word that :

1. **Every believer** is **Called** to a new life in Christ, 4:1-6
2. **This change** makes us progressively more **Christ**-like. Ephesians 4:1-6
3. **Christ's power** through His Spirit makes change **Possible**. Ephesians 4:7-10
4. **The church** is God's primary **laboratory** for change in our lives. Ephesians 4:11-16. We all grow more Christ-like as we build each other up and serve one another.

5. We live-out this life-change by God's **three-fold principles of transformation**: Ephesians 4:17-24

- a. **"Put -Off"** the old self. Day by day, moment by moment I decide to live in the reality that my old self died with Christ and everything associated with that old way of life has to go.
- b. **"Be Renewed"** in the spirit of your mind. I must allow the Holy Spirit through the word of God to change the way I think. Change happens from the inside-out.
- c. **"Put -On "** the new self. Living the brand new life is like putting on a brand new clothes. It's conforming my outside to what God is doing on the inside.

Then Paul moves on in verses 25-32 and begins to show us what the new life looks like in some specific areas. We studied the first of these last time when we saw that the new life in Christ is characterized by:

We put off lying, put on speaking the truth, because we are all members of one another.

We put off misplaced anger, put on resolving angry feelings quickly by forgiving, so that we do not give the devil a foothold in our lives.

We put off selfishness and instead put on hard work and generosity so that we can help those in need.

Now in verse 29-30 Paul deals with one of the most important areas of our life that God wants to transform, our talk.

In his book "The Weight of Your Words" author Joseph Stowell tells the following story:

"My junior high school had scheduled its annual operatic production. Talented students were quick to try out for the various parts. I was not so certain of my abilities and had decided that singing in an operatta wasn't really for me.

Then Mrs. Wilson, my music teacher, asked me to try out. It was not a coveted role, but it did have three solos.

I am certain that my audition was only mediocre. But Mrs. Wilson reacted as if she had just heard a choir of heavenly angels. "Oh, that was jusst beautiful. It was perfect. Your are just right for the role. You will do it, won't you?" I accepted.

When the time came for the next year's operatta, most of the students who had played the leads the year before had graduated. And Mrs. Wilson had transferred to another school. In her place was a rather imposing figure who had an excellent singing voice and a sound knowledge of music theory.

As tryouts began, I was ready. I felt confident that my talent was just what the operatta needed. With approximately 150 of my peers assembled, I knew everything would go well.

But if I live for an eternity I will never forget the words spoken on that day. When my audition was completed, the teacher asked, "Who told you you could sing?"

The timid youth of a year earlier was suddenly reborn. I was totally destroyed. Harsh words are bad enough under any circumstances. To a young idealistic boy, they can be devastating. From the time those six words were stated, it took eight years and coaxing of my fiancée before my voice was raised in song again."

Try as we may, we all have said things that have hurt other people. All of us have said things we wish we could take back. We have all erred with our tongues! James 3:2 says, **"For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body."** James goes on in verse 8 to say, **"But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."** While we may never achieve perfect control over our tongues, I'm convinced that if husbands and wives would consistently apply Ephesians 4:29, we would rarely see divorce. If parents practiced this verse toward their children, we would see few children from Christian homes rebel against their parents. If we applied it towards one another in the church, we would see few churches split over personality conflicts or minor doctrinal issues. In short, Ephesians 4:29 is a verse that would bring radical change in all of our relationships if we would apply it conscientiously: **"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."**

This passage that Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:29 encourages us to use our words carefully to build others up. Our words have a tremendous ability to heal and bring peace or to destroy and hurt others. Paul is saying that...

Rather than using your words to tear down others, use them to build up others.

We will follow Paul's outline by first looking at the problem and then at the solution.

A. Put-off: Corrupting Speech (v.29a, 31).

Paul says, **"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth."** "Corrupt" comes from a word that was used to describe rotten fruit, vegetables, bad fish, and other spoiled food.

A **"corrupt word"** is something that pollutes. Such rotten speech, like rotten fruit and rotten fish, will not nourish anyone. It contaminates. It will make you sick. And, it smells bad and creates an unpleasant atmosphere for anyone who gets near it. So Paul tells us to throw it out like rotten fruit or fish.

You could probably come up with a long list of examples of rotten speech. Just a few verses into Ephesians chapter 5, Paul mentions obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking. I think it would also include:

- Name calling, 1 Peter 3:9 says, **"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing..."**
- Griping and complaining, Philippians 2:14 says, **"Do all things without complaining and disputing."**
- Destructive criticism, If your words are not aimed at helping or healing, but only at venting your gripes, you are sinning. Proverbs 12:18 says, **"There**

is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health."

- Angry words, including threats and revenge, Such words are only trying to dominate or control the other person through fear and intimidation. Proverbs 15:1 says, "**A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.**"
- Deception, lies, and manipulative speech, We've already looked at this (4:25). Using manipulative speech to get your way is a form of deception.
- Gossip and slander, Often, gossip and slander spread partial truths mixed with falsehood to make the other person look bad. Sometimes gossip and slander may be true, but the one you're telling has no need to know the information. Proverbs 20:19 says, "**He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.**"

We could probably come up with more examples of rotten speech, but that list should give you enough to work on!

James says, "**The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.**" The mouth and the heart are connected. Jesus said, "**For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks**" (Matt. 12:34). Change the heart, and you change the speech.

A detailed list of corruption is in v.31. We are to "**put away... bitterness**" – the cancerous poison of the heart that comes from unforgiveness. We are not to corrupt with "**wrath**" – explosive fits of anger. We are not to corrupt with "**anger**" – deep-seated smoldering anger. We are not to corrupt with "**clamor**" – a public outburst that reflects a loss of self-control. We are not to corrupt with "**evil speaking**" – ongoing defamation that rises from an unforgiving heart. We are not to corrupt with "**malice**."

If you need to be reminded of the destructive power of the tongue, read James chapter 3. The Holy Spirit will use it to convict you and transform you.

B. Put-On: Edifying Speech (v.29a, 32).

The cure for corrupt speech is to make sure the heart is full of blessing. Christians are not only supposed to stop saying bad things, but to begin to say things that will help build others up. Verse 29 says that which comes from our mouths is to be "**good... for edification,**" To edify means to build-up. Rather than tearing others down by what we say, we are to be building others up by what we say.

Several years ago, Florence Littauer wrote *Silver Boxes: The Gift of Encouragement*, based on Ephesians 4:29. Mrs. Littauer was asked to speak to a group of children about living for Christ, and she chose to use a verse that was a very important part of her family's life. As she began her explanation of Ephesians 4:29, she asked the question, "*Is it possible that some of the good families in this church occasionally say things to each other that are not kind?*" The children answered, "Yes" and then began to discuss how they could think more about saying nice things to others. When they got to the part of the verse that said, "**good... for edification,**" Mrs. Littauer explained that edify means to build up. One young boy said, "*Our words should be like building blocks. We*

should stack-up the good ones to make tall buildings of them." Another boy added, *"And no one should knock the stack down with negative words."*

It is to **"impart grace to the hearers."** What we say should give grace to those who listen. What is grace? It is God's gift to us. It is God giving us what we do not deserve. So what does that say about the way we talk to one another?

People will not always deserve good words. They may have just insulted you, or spoken harshly to you, or been sarcastic to you. And it hurt your feelings. The natural reaction of the old-man, the person without Christ, is to retaliate, to lash out in return, to say something that will hurt them too. But we have taken off the old self and have put on Christ.

So instead, we speak grace to the hearer. We give them kind, tender, loving words even though they do not deserve it. When Florence Littauer was explaining gracious words to the children, she said that when our words come out they should be like *"little presents all wrapped up to be given away."* The idea of "presents" brightened them all up, and one precious little girl stood up, stepped into the aisle and said loudly to everyone, *"What she means is that our words should be like little silver boxes with bows on top!"* Florence said, *"What a beautiful thought! Our words should be gifts to each other, little silver boxes with bows on top."*

When people speak with us, they should feel a sense of God's love and encouragement. Paul describes it further in v.32, **"being kind to one another"** being **"tenderhearted"** and **"forgiving one another."**

Flatter me, and I may not believe you.
Criticize me, and I may not like you.
Ignore me, and I may not forgive you.
Encourage me, and I will not forget you.

- William Arthur Ward

Allen Redpath says we should THINK before we speak. He gives this acrostic:

T...Is it true?

H...Is it helpful?

I...Is it inspiring?

N...Is it necessary?

K...Is it kind?

C. Be Renewed: Do not Grieve the Holy Spirit (v. 30)

When you were saved, you were "sealed for the day of redemption" with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13 says, **"You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."** When you were saved the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead came to permanently dwell within you. He came to fill you, lead you, comfort you, teach you, convict you, intercede for you and help you become more like Jesus. Wherever you go, He goes. Whatever you do, He is with you.

Whatever you say, He hears. Whatever you think, He knows. It just makes sense that when you lie, seethe, steal, or speak corruptly that He weeps. Just as a parent grieves over a disobedient child, the Spirit grieves. **"Grieve"** comes from

the Greek word *lupeo*, which means "to distress, to sadden to cause heaviness and sorrow."

In John 3, Jesus described the Holy Spirit as being like the wind, you don't see the wind but you see the results the wind causes. I often hear people say after a service, "I could really feel the Spirit moving today." As believers, we sense the power of the Spirit. However, have you ever thought that the Holy Spirit "feels" you? He rejoices with our obedience and is grieved by our sin.

I remember that when I was still living with my parents many times I would not go out and do some of the things my friends were doing, not just because I knew them to be wrong, but because I thought, "If I do that, I will hurt Dad and Mom, and they love me so much." Sometimes their love kept me from sin.

Paul is saying, "God loves you far more than any earthly parent could. He has sent His Holy Spirit to live in you as His temple. Don't grieve Him by sinning!"

Shhh. The Holy Spirit is listening. How does He feel about what's going on in your life right now? Is He happy or grieved? Is He weeping over the things we carelessly say to each other?