

## Series: “Light in the Darkness”

### “Rotten or Righteous—How’s that Speech Coming Along?”

#### Ephesians 4.29-30

A catering manager was discussing a baby-christening party with a young couple. She told the mother of the baby, “You look like you’ve lost most of your pregnancy weight.”

“Thanks,” came the clenched-teeth reply. “We adopted.” Oops!

Try as we may, we all “stick our foot in our mouths” from time-to-time. And we shouldn’t be surprised. After all, James 3:2 says, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man.” Well, we all know the only one to never stumble and therefore was indeed a perfect man was Jesus.

However, while we will never achieve perfect control over our tongues, I am convinced that if husbands and wives would consistently apply Ephesians 4:29, the divorce rate would plummet.

If parents practiced this verse toward their children, we’d see a whole lot less rebellion out of our kids.

If all believers applied the truth of Ephesians 4.29, then hardly ever would 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. –Steven Cole

**Context of our passage...** People who truly know Jesus as Savior and Lord no longer live like unbelievers (4.17). By the work of God’s grace and power, they ‘took off the old man’ and ‘put on the new man’ (22) and are now pursuing a life of righteousness and holiness (24). The evidence of this is partially seen in the fact a person lives honesty (25) and ethically (28), and they resist sinful anger (26-27).

Now, from today’s text, a growing disciple will strive to talk like Jesus talked—righteously and graciously. In order to achieve that goal two continuous actions are necessary, and they will be the focus of today’s message.

*With the help of God’s Spirit (Eph. 4.23), you must...*

**Eliminate harmful and destructive communication** (“let no corrupt word/communication proceed out of your mouth,” 29a)

*And this includes all non-audible communication: emails, texts, social media posts, etc.*

The word “*corrupt*” means rotten, useless, or unprofitable. It is used (Matt. 7:17-18) to refer to rotten fruit and rotten fish (Matt. 13:48).

Rotten fruit and fish stink. And so do any and all of your words that are inappropriate!

Rotten fruit and fish do not nourish anyone; they make people sick. And so do any and all of your “corrupt” words.

Rotten fish and fruit make for a bad atmosphere, and so do your destructive words.

Therefore, just like you would get rid of rotten fish and fruit, you need to eliminate your harmful and destructive speech, such as...

- Name-calling, put downs, and insults
- Sarcasm, ridicule and mockery
- Destructive criticism
- Cursing; profanity
- Words spoken in anger; threats, revenge
- All forms of deceit; lies, manipulation
- Gossip and slander
- Crude, off-color ‘jokes’; filthy, coarse language

**Colossians 3:8** ...you must put...away...slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

NOTE: **The tongue only speaks what the heart tells it to say!** That's right, ***your heart must be right, or your words never will be.*** This is clearly taught in Matthew 12:34b — “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

The person who harbors ill will against someone in his heart will eventually express those feelings with his mouth.

The person whose heart and mind are full of lustful thoughts will eventually say things that are crude, vile or suggestive.

The person who is persistently angry and hateful will put those feelings into words.

The person who is chronically critical will verbalize their fault-finding and complaints.

*With the help of God's Spirit, you must...*

### **Cultivate helpful and constructive communication (29b)**

**Words that are uplifting** (“edification; building up”)

This world can be a tough and unfriendly place. It's so easy to get hurt by it. It's easy to become overwhelmed with the stresses of life and discouraged by all the hardships of living in a sin-cursed world. BUT *God means for his church to be a community of mutual support!*

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** Encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

**Proverbs 12:25** Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.

A “good word” edifies. It uplifts. It can make a person's heart ‘light’ and glad and help them not be overly weighed down by the pressures of life.

Offer genuine encouragement and praise. As parents, we have to correct our children quite often at times. Be sure to offer praise when they do what's right, when they make you proud. Be sure to encourage them and point them to the Lord for their ultimate security.

Chuck Swindoll tells the story about a guy he went to seminary with. This man had a bright red birthmark that covered half his face. After Chuck got to know him a little bit, he finally got up the courage to ask him what had happened. His friend answered by telling him what his dad had told him: “Son, that birthmark is where an angel kissed your face. You have it so that I can always pick you out of the crowd.” Swindoll's friend then turned to him and said, “You know, I almost feel sorry for those who don't have a birthmark.” Friends, that dad spoke words of life to his son—and the son was still living off those words years later.

Husbands and wives, I so encourage you to encourage one another. To speak words of affirmation to one another. To write notes that lift their spirit.

Tell people that you appreciate them, that you are thankful for them.

You would think this would be unnecessary for me to say but, tell people you love them. It deeply saddens me to know that some families rarely exchange “I love you.” Some kids and teens hardly ever hear their mom or dad say, “I love you.” If that's true in your home, I urge you to change your habit.

Edifying/uplifting words will also be kind and gentle words, never harsh, demeaning, or insulting.

When someone does something that, in all honesty is rather dumb, you don't have to confirm the ‘dumbness’ of it, but you can affirm them by saying something like, “You know what, I've done the same thing before—a bunch of times, in fact. It'll be alright.”

Some other words that are uplifting and carry life:

- I'm proud of you
- I believe in you
- I choose you

- You are special
- You look beautiful/handsome
- I see potential in you
- You have what it takes

*Cultivating helpful and constructive communication includes...*

**Words that are fitting** (*“as fits the occasion,” ESV; “according to their needs,” NIV*)

The words that we say should always be fitting, appropriate to the situation at hand.

**Proverbs 25:11** A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

**Proverbs 15:23** To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!

Sometimes, what’s fitting and appropriate are “patient words.” Telling someone, “It’s okay. You’ll be just fine.” “Don’t worry about it, it’s no big deal.” “I’m proud of you even if you didn’t make the team or get the promotion or ...”

Sometimes, we do need to offer criticism—just make sure it’s *constructive* criticism. Even when a person is wrong or has sinned, that’s no excuse for being harsh or demeaning (cf. Gal. 5.1-2). That’s no reason to lash out and make them feel like eternal failures.

**2 Timothy 2:24–25** The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone...patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness....

- None of the “Lord’s servants” should be quarrelsome.
- All the Lord’s servants should be kind and patient.

*Cultivating helpful and constructive communication includes...*

**Words that are loving** (*“that it may impart grace to the hearers,” cf. Eph. 4.15*)

Grace is *undeserved* favor. Sometimes you may think, for whatever reason, *so-and-so doesn’t deserve gracious, loving words from me. They deserve some ‘corrupt fruit’!* But that exactly why you seeking to “impart GRACE.”

**1 Peter 3:9** Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling....

**Ephesians 4.15** exhorts us to be constantly “speaking the truth in love.”

**John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, *full of grace and truth*.

***Jesus is full of grace and truth!***

As disciples of Jesus and those who have “put on the new man, created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:24), you and I should make sure that our words and actions are also full of grace and truth.

Listen to this testimony about Jesus’s communication: “And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth” (Luke 4:22).

*As followers of Jesus, may other people—family and friends and co-workers and even our enemies—marvel at how consistently gracious are the words coming out of our mouths.*

**Colossians 4:6** [[in the context of sharing the gospel with unbelievers]] Let your speech always be gracious...so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (ESV)

If your overall speech is not helpful and beneficial to others, you will have one hard time sharing God’s saving grace with anyone!

*With the help of God’s Spirit, you must eliminate rotten communication and cultivate righteous communication...*

## **So that you won't grieve God's Spirit (30)**

The grieving of the Holy Spirit here in verse 30 is not limited to speech. It also grieves God's Spirit when believers lie (25), get sinfully angry (26-27), steal (28), or commit any sin. But for our specific purposes in this sermon, we will focus on words that grieve the Lord.

The word "grieve" is a heavy word, and the fact that you and I can grieve God's Spirit should be taken very seriously.

The word is variously translated in the NT as "distressed, sorrowful, pained." When you and I sin, we "break the Spirit's heart."

When I was in the early stages of dating, I distinctly remember one date—not because of the girl, but because of my mom! At the time, I was not allowed to go to movies. Well, on this particular night, I disobeyed and went somewhere I was not supposed to go, and while I honestly don't think I was out later than I was supposed to, I do remember being surprised when I walked in the house from our garage and saw mom sitting in a chair in our den. She somehow found out where I'd been but asked me anyway. With a drained demeanor, I confessed. Mom didn't punish me on the spot. She didn't take away privileges. She simply spoke words I'll never forget: "Jeff, I am so disappointed in you."

I grieved my mom. I made her sorrowful. I caused her pain. *And you and I as believers do likewise to the Holy Spirit anytime "rotten words" come out of our mouths.*

In the purest sense of the word, the Holy Spirit is a sensitive Spirit. He is always grieved by sin, discord, and falsehood. The Spirit-filled believer longs to bring Him pleasure, not pain. —John Stott, adapted

But note, it's not just cursing or filthy language or lies or demeaning words that grieve him. Think about it... the Holy Spirit is HOLY. Therefore, *any communication* that's not pure and holy will grieve him. But he's also the One who makes all believers *one in Christ*. He is the divine agent of reconciliation and unity in the body (Eph. 2:18, 22; 4:3-4). —Peter O'Brien

Therefore, the Spirit of God is especially grieved whenever the people of God commit any sin that divides and destroys the unity of the body. And one of the quickest, surest ways of doing such damage is through misuse of the tongue!

Imagine you've been working long and hard and sacrificially to build your dream house... the walls and floors and roof are all in place; the sheet rock has been hung, the cabinets built; all the HVAC work is complete, along with all the painting. The appliances have been installed, along with all the ceiling fans! All the furniture has been delivered and you plan to move in the next day. That night, you dream about life and making memories in your new home. But during one of those dreams, you're awakened by a phone call at 2:17am. It's one of your soon-to-be-neighbors calling to tell you that your new home is engulfed in flames! Someone had burned it to the ground. How upset would you be? How grieved? How distressed?

James 3:6 tells us that the "tongue is a fire" and with misuse, it can "burn up" portions of God's kingdom work. The Holy Spirit is always grieved, distressed, sorrowful when the work of the Lord—a work in which He is intimately, intensely, and tirelessly involved in—is hindered in any way.

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, I urge you to eliminate all harmful and destructive words so that you will not grieve and discourage the Holy Spirit.

*May I give us a sobering reminder...* "Every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

"Idle" refers to words that might be thought "insignificant" except for their revealing what is in the heart. *Every word you've ever spoken will be evaluated by God.*

**Psalm 19:14** offers a perfect prayer for us to pray and apply to our lives: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."

Listen to **Jeremiah 15:16** – “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart...” With regard to the written Word of God, Jeremiah digested and delighted in God’s words. While God’s words are greater than our words, let’s nonetheless speak words that, when people “eat them,” they eat not ‘corrupt,’ rotten words, but righteous words that will benefit and delight others; words that are helpful and constructive, not harmful and destructive.