Opening Words

Our words can cut in one of two ways. They can cut and bring death – like a sword thrust through our heart, or they can pierce deep within a person and bring healing like a surgeon's knife.

173 Eph Six Ways to Live as a New Man 4 – Unwholesome/Edifying Words

There is a small object that each of us possesses that can wield power beyond our wildest dreams. This small object can destroy people, families, and even nations. Or, it can strengthen and bring healing, life, and comfort. You probably know what I am talking about. I am talking about our tongue, our speech.

Today, as we continue looking at Paul's instruction to the church at Ephesus we will focus on his words about our speech. Getting our speech, our words, and our tone of voice under control is a tall order. We have all slipped in this area and caused damage to others and to ourselves. Paul identifies our words as one of the areas where we must lay aside the old way of doing things and he shows us a new way to use our words that will reflect the new identity we have in Christ. Let's look at Paul's words in Ephesians 4:29-30.

> Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Dogs bark, cats meow, birds chirp, sheep bleat, and cows moo, but only humans have the gift of speech. I suppose the noises coming from animals is a form of communication, but it is primitive and cannot even come close to what we take for granted. Speech is a gift from God and is one of primary ways we reflect the image of God. Our God is a communicating God and he has given us the ability to communicate with him and one another. Yet sin has permeated this wonderful gift and brought untold damage to the world.

The book of Proverbs is filled with wise sayings about the potential of our speech to do good and to do harm. For many years I read the book of Proverbs, a chapter a day corresponding to the day of the month, and I noted and sought to practice the many verses on the area of speech. As an example, listen to these words from Proverbs 10 and 11 that describe the destructive power of speech.

> The mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
>
> A babbling fool will be ruined.
>
> When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable.
>
> With his mouth, the godless man destroys his neighbor.

By the mouth of the wicked, a city is torn down.

This is what Paul is getting at in Ephesians. Paul shows us that one of the ways we are to show our new life in Christ is by the way we communicate. And so, he starts with the negative command – let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth and then gives the positive side to it – give words that build up.

Paul says, "let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth." The word unwholesome is *sapros* in the Greek and means rotten. This is the word in Matthew 7:17-18 where Jesus spoke of bad trees that produce bad fruit and in Matthew 13:48 where he spoke of bad fish collected in a net that were thrown back into the sea. I scooped myself a dish of ice cream the other day and remembered we had some strawberries in the fridge. I was excited about that until I saw the strawberries. They were too old and had become moldy. Obviously, I did not add them to the ice cream! Imagine if our words could somehow be visualized and they came out as nice, precious, edible fruit or as old moldy food. Perhaps that would make a change in our speech.

Paul says, "Don't let rotten speech come out of your mouth. Speech that ridicules. Speech that discourages. Speech that entices the lusts of the mind. Speech that makes people bitter. Speech that promotes unbelief." Instead, give words that build up and notice how Paul puts it in this verse, *according to the need of the moment*. Paul is talking about being discerning of the situation you are in and learning to say words that are appropriate to the needs of the moment. Is someone, for example, experiencing sorrow? Then, stay away from cutting remarks and seek to be a comfort.

Does someone have a question, or is puzzled about life and needs counsel? Don't ridicule the person or chide them for their lack of wisdom. Listen to them and then share words of guidance or sympathy for their lack of clarity. Is someone rejoicing because of some great accomplishment or achievement? Don't express words of jealousy but words of congratulations. So, be discerning of the need of the moment and fit your words to the moment in a building way.

I really love the last phrase in this exhortation. Paul says, use your speech in this discerning godly way so that it may give grace to those who hear. As you know, the grace of God is one of my favorite topics. I hope it is one of yours also because in addition to being saved by grace through faith, the Word of God shows us that we grow by grace through faith. In my little book, The Grace of God, I have a chapter that shows how we are to be grace givers. We have freely received the grace of God, now we are to give freely the grace of God to others. I have identified several ways to give grace to others; by the way we live, by the way we give, by the way we forgive, by the way we serve, and by the way we speak to others as Paul says in our verse, Ephesians 4:29. Paul wants us to be a vehicle by which his healing, cleansing, empowering grace comes through us to others.

There is nothing more satisfying than knowing that people are being helped and changed by the words we say to them. I'm sure you experience that and I pray you will experience it more. Let me share one more verse from the book of Proverbs with you on this topic. Proverbs 12:18 says, "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing."

I love the contrast; our words can cut in one of two ways. They can cut and bring death – like a sword thrust through our heart, or they can pierce deep within a person and bring healing like a surgeon's knife. May God give us healing words.

Paul then speaks of the Holy Spirit. He has told us not to lie, not to steal, and not to use our speech in a degrading way because when we do, we grieve the Holy Spirit. This tells us something important about the Spirit of God. He is a person. The Holy Spirit is not a force, like electricity or gravity. Impersonal forces do not grieve. But the Holy Spirit grieves when our behavior does not match our new standing before God. Remember, in verse 23 Paul tells us that we are being renewed in the spirit of our mind and although he does not mention the Holy Spirit in that verse, surely, he had the Spirit of God in mind because He has come to change us at the very core of our human nature and to remake us in the image of God. But when the Spirit of God sees behavior that does not match our standing that we have received by the grace of Jesus Christ, he grieves over us.

None of us likes to grieve. But we all grieve when we lose something or someone that is precious to us. The Holy Spirit grieves when he loses our hearts, when we turn from him and engage in thinking, talking, or acting in ways that do not match his character and do not advance the cause of Christ-likeness in our hearts. He grieves over us. I know in my life, at times, I have thought on the sadness I have brought to the Spirit of God because of my sin or foolishness. No one likes to bring disappointment to others. We should have the same heart toward God. We should not want to bring disappointment to him.

Let's think about the Holy Spirit for a moment. He is called the *Holy* Spirit. We should seek to live holy lives because unholy living brings grief to him. He is the Holy *Spirit* and is a contrast to the spirit that Paul mentioned in Ephesians 2:2. Remember that verse? Before Christ, we all walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is at work in the sons of disobedience. But now we walk according to the Spirit of God. He is the Spirit who brings unity. Paul referred to him in Ephesians 4:4 when he said there is one body and one Spirit, and it grieves his heart when we are not united. Jesus referred to him as the Spirit of truth. He testifies to the truth of Jesus in contrast to the lie of paganism and the darkness of the world. But when we engage in lies and manifest the lie of the world, it grieves his heart.

Paul also reminds us that the Holy Spirit has sealed us. Throughout history, people would seal their letters by dropping wax on the document and then stamping their ring onto the wax. The seal was a symbol of identification. It was a symbol of ownership, and it was a symbol of security.

When Paul says we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise he wants us to understand that we belong to Him, we are under His authority and we are under His protection. But it grieves him when we engage in behavior that shows that we want something other than what he provides.

Paul also says we are sealed for the day of redemption. This is the return of Christ when he makes all things new including our bodies. Our sanctification will be completed. We will enter glorification and our full inheritance. We will reign with Christ and become the men and women he intended us to be all along. The Holy Spirit is constantly working to move us in the direction of our inheritance for which he has sealed us. The Holy Spirit is constantly working on us to live according to our new

status, the new Man in Christ which will result in us becoming like the glorified man in heaven, Jesus Christ. With such a future, such a destiny, such an inheritance, let us stop grieving the Spirit by our thoughts, our words, and actions. Let's bring joy to the Spirit of God. It will bring joy to him, it will bring joy to us, and it will be a bright light shining in the world for the glory of God.