

No Unwholesome Word

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Romans 6:1-4 demonstrates baptism is a symbolic act of burial with Christ. And yet, a very real change takes place in that moment of immersion. In the moment our faith is perfected in obedience (**James 2:22**), we enter Christ and His death; the old man of sin is put away. As we come up out of the water, we are new creatures. Our sins are forgiven and now, we are dead to sin but alive in Christ Jesus, raised to walk in newness of life (**Romans 6:11**). Not only has God made a change in us, washing our sins away (**Acts 22:16**), God expects a change in us (**Romans 6:15ff**). In the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, Paul spoke regarding the new creatures that we are (**Ephesians 2:10; 4:20-24; Colossians 3:5-11**). Interestingly enough, when Paul spoke of this, the aspect of our lives he most focused on was our words, our language (**Ephesians 4:25-32**). The teaching of **James 3:4-12** explained the importance of controlling our tongues. The way we speak is an indication of who we are. If our language does not demonstrate our service to Christ, then we are not Christ's servants. We will not at the same time serve Christ and yet speak like the devil. Examine **Ephesians 4:25-32** and learn how we ought to speak. Keep in mind, these verses apply here, at home, at school, at work, with our friends, with our family, with our neighbors. There is no place or person in our lives for which there are exceptions to these guidelines.

Discussion:

- I. **Ephesians 4:29** – “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth ...”
 - A. The term translated “unwholesome” (“corrupt” in the KJV), “saprois” in the Greek”, is the same term used to describe a rotten and putrefied piece of fruit. The terms “unwholesome” and “corrupt” accurately portray opposite sides of the same coin. We must not speak anything that is corrupt, with rottenness in it. When rottenness begins to grip the fruit, it eats away at it and destroys its purity. So, we must not speak anything that isn't whole, that is pure and undefiled by corruption. Recall Christ's word picture in **Matthew 12:33-37**, the fruit that proceeds from our mouths must be pure. And when it is, that demonstrates we are pure. But when the fruit is not pure, we must not deceive ourselves, thinking we are pure. Understand, clearly, the issue of language is one of Christian purity and we must be pure (**1 John 3:3**).
 - B. However, just saying that leaves us up in the air regarding exactly what speech is tainted by corruption. Paul, in **Ephesians**, left us with little room for speculation, demonstrating throughout his letter what kind of speech must never be a part of our vocabulary.
 1. **Ephesians 4:31** – Paul uses six terms in this verse to describe unwholesome speech. These terms all revolve around the same issue of biting and devouring one another (**Galatians 5:15**). Bitterness refers to biting sarcasm that cuts at someone. The terms translated wrath and anger are quite similar. Wrath refers to a passionate, emotional response that boils up quickly and then quickly subsides. Don't be governed by the heat of the moment. Anger refers to a natural disposition. In other words, defending hateful, bitter speech by saying, “That's just the way I am” is condemned. Clamoring is the idea of a useless cry, illustrated by the cries of the mob shouting against Christianity in **Acts 19:32**. Slander and malice are different sides of the same coin. They are speech designed to harm someone, either behind their back (slander) or to their face (malice).
 2. **Ephesians 4:25** – We are not to lie. We must not play cloak and dagger games forcing others to guess our hidden meaning. Additionally, and specifically in reference to the gospel, we must lay aside any pretense that a person is right with God when we know full well they are not obeying Him. Their soul is in the balance and we must lay aside any falsehood.
 3. **Ephesians 5:4** – In this verse, Paul condemns three kinds of unwholesome speech. Filthy things, that is, obscenity must not be spoken. There is to be no foolish talking. By this, Paul means we are not to speak as fools do. This brings to mind what the Psalmist said, “The fool has said in his heart there is no God” (**Psalms 14:1**). Strong's points out that is exactly the point of Paul's statement. This kind of speech is godless, impious speech. We must not speak anything that is impious toward God. And Paul condemns coarse jesting. Regrettably, the KJV says only “jesting”. But Paul does not limit all jest, the term here refers to ribaldry, that is, vulgar, indecent and abusive humor.

- II. **Ephesians 4:29** – “... but only such a word as is good for edification ...”
- A. We are to have laid aside the old self with all its corrupt language and now we are to speak what is wholesome. Yet we may question, what is wholesome?
1. We must speak those things good for edification. To edify means to build up. We might refer to this as home improvement or remodeling. Thus, our speech should produce improvement, emotionally, spiritually, morally, physically, practically, mentally or in any other way, in the lives of those who hear us. We are not a demolition crew, but rather remodelers.
 2. Our speech is to be governed by the need of the moment. If we are going to be remodelers, we must first be able to listen and accurately assess what problems exist and what needs are there. Too often, we don't listen long enough when others speak to know what is appropriate. Take time to listen to others and to know others. Then your communication to them will fit the need. This passage demonstrates I am not allowed to say just anything I want, in any way I want. I must consider the one to whom I am speaking. While the hearer has responsibility to strive to understand me, I have a great responsibility to speak in a way to be easily understood from their perceptions.
 3. Our words must give grace to those who hear. That is, our words are to be a blessing. Our words should provide delight, joy and pleasure. Of course, the idea of grace demonstrates that the person may not deserve this type of speech. But this is not about what others deserve. It is about what we are to bestow. Keep in mind, however, the delight, joy and pleasure may not be immediate. Sometimes, edifying words are painful in the moment. But, when followed they produce joy. Consider the example of **Hebrews 12:11**.
- B. As with unwholesome, Paul highlights areas of wholesome speech.
1. **Ephesians 4:32** – In contrast to the bitter, hateful and harmful speech, which was condemned, Paul claims we are to be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving. In **Colossians 3:12**, he points out we should also speak with humility, gentleness and patience. In other words, our words are not designed to lord over others, to put others in their place or to take vengeance on others. Rather, they are designed to humble ourselves before others; patiently helping them get to heaven, as we want them to do for us. Keep in mind, the letter to the Ephesians was written for the greater purpose of producing unity between Jews and Gentiles. This is the kind of speech we must have if we will promote unity here.
 2. **Ephesians 4:15, 25** – As opposed to the falsehood we must lay aside, Paul claims we must speak the truth. We must not lie. Our yes must mean yes and our no mean no. We do not have to shore up our speech with great oaths, but when we speak, our brethren must know they can trust us. This also speaks to those difficult times in which we must truthfully expose error in others (**Ephesians 5:11-13**). But doing so must be governed by love. That is, we are not speaking this truth to them in order to demonstrate our greatness or our perfection. Rather, it is out of love to help them go to heaven
 3. **Ephesians 6:19-20** – Of course, it is always right to proclaim the gospel, to our brethren or to the lost. Again, it must be governed by love. But Paul's example also demonstrates it must be with boldness. Recognize this, speaking in love does not mean speaking timidly.
 4. **Ephesians 6:19-20** – Finally, instead of speaking words that harm others, we should speak words that lift others up and the greatest place we can do that is in prayer. We must speak in prayer on behalf of others. And we need to speak in prayer with others. A practice that will help us is to pray with one another, outside of our congregational worship and at times other than before a meal.

Conclusion:

Read **Matthew 12:33-38** again to understand the seriousness of Paul's teaching. If our speech is corrupt, then we ourselves are corrupt. For out of our hearts our words flow. I want to bring to your attention Jesus' parable of judgment in **Matthew 13:47-50**. The fact that we have entered the kingdom of heaven through baptism does not insure we will not face judgment. In the end, Jesus will send forth his angels to separate from the kingdom those who have not lived in purity but continued in or returned to corruption. Based upon your speech at home, at school, at work, if that judgment were to take place right now, where would you be?