

The Words That Promote Change

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Ephesians 4:29-32
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Well, Paul was in Ephesus for about two and a half years. He was in the places that you saw in the pictures and he ministered to the Ephesians, and scripture says that God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul there. So some of the most amazing miracles done in the New Testament were done through him there in Ephesus. About five years after that, around AD 60, Paul was in prison in Rome, and this was his imprisonment when he was under house arrest, so he could have friends and he could get his papers and things like that. That is where he wrote the letter to the Ephesians. He also wrote a few other letters there as well, but that's what we're going to be looking at today. Last week, though, I went over Ephesians 4:11 to 16 and today we're jumping all the way to verse 29.

So I want to fill in the gap, because the thrust here is about building up the church in love. It's about how the church functions. We might think, "Well, I'm not really that important about what goes on at the church," but Paul doesn't see it that way. If you look in chapter four verse 22, you're going to see that he gets down to the individual level here for us, and he has this to say. He says, "Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness." So in this section, there are other sections like it in scripture. This is where we put off something that isn't helpful and we put on something that is. We put off the corrupt nature, the corrupt desires, the sinful life, and we put on that which is made in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

What you're going to see here is that Paul, as well as others, we'll see this in James later, they're going to elevate our understanding beyond just what you and I do. He's going to try and connect to something bigger than just our relationships. Look what he says there. He says to put on the new self, which is created after the likeness of God. So there is the corrupt self, and then there's the self-created after the likeness of God. See, our aim is to be more like Jesus. Our aim is not just to have pleasant relationships, although we should. Not just to speak nice words, although we should. Our aim is to remember that there is a higher purpose for us in life, and as we do these things we build up the church. Now you guys want a strong church, right?

Yeah, let's try that again. You guys want a strong church, right?

Okay. Good, strong response. I love that. Now you're all on the hook too, because this passage is going to help us have a strong church. Well, this brings us to the first point in Ephesians 4:29, words that give grace. **Point #1**), is **Words That Give Grace**. Let's look at this again. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edification." Excuse me, "Only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who

hear." Now, there are other sections in scripture that talk about this concept of our words and how it impacts us and how it impacts the church. One of those sections is James chapter 3. If you really want a convicting section, that's your passage, okay? It talks about how the tongue is set on fire even by the fires of hell, and it just goes on and on and it's like, wow, this is big time.

But he makes a connection here in James 3:12, which is very helpful for us to think about. He says this. "For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body." Notice the connection there between our words and our entire person. Why is that? Well, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks, right? So you see the connection here is that this is really a heart issue. Any time we're talking about do's and don'ts in scripture, it's not really just a list of how to be good or how to be bad, it's really about who you are on the inside. What drives you? What's your motivation? Who are you? Do you have this new nature? Are you willing to live by it, and if so, how does that work?

So James connects those two things. Then in verse 9 of James chapter 3, he says this. Speaking of our mouths, he says, "With it, we bless our Lord and Father and with it, we curse people who are made in the likeness of God." See, he just elevated, didn't he? He just took it to that next level. Where we are in one sense, we are blessing God and Father who is our creator, and then we curse the very people that he's created, and these aren't just his creation. They are made after the likeness of God. So he's trying to get us to think about who it is that we're speaking to. It's not just someone who happens to be there, it's someone who's made in the image of God, and that elevates our understanding and our communication.

Well, as you know, corrupting talk is, so to speak, the elixir of the world. It's what we drink in large doses. It's all over the place. You can't get away from this kind of language, but it also infects the church as well. When we lash out at others, we have poor moments at times, and in those moments, we've taken up the old self again. What Christ, through his work on the cross, made dead to us, we go and we dig up and we carry the corpse around with us, and then we wonder, why is no one wanting to get close to us? We're keeping them at a distance with our words, and we have become one who is corrupt in our speaking. You can see how this might impact a marriage. You can see how this might impact a relationship with friends. The words we speak can be used for God's purposes or for, as the passage says, corrupt purposes.

Corrupting, that word here in verse 29, is used in the book of Matthew for a tree that is diseased. It's not a tree that you would go and pick fruit from. Sometimes we have a desire, or I do, for a nice big sandwich that's got a lot of stuff in it, and it's just ready to eat. Sometimes you get those ripe tomatoes that are just perfect. They've come from the farm down the street and you've paid like \$9 for that thing, and you're like, "This is going to taste really good." You slice into it, and you see there are little critters that have been there before you, and that is what we put off. It is not desirable. That tomato is corrupt. Same thing with the cheese. If you're making a sandwich for the little kiddos and they're mowing down the sandwich and then you get to the end of the pack and you're like, "Oh no, it's moldy," and there they are eating the moldy cheese and you try

and get what's left, and hopefully you don't just cut a corner off of the cheese and eat the rest of it, right? It's not fit for consumption.

See, corrupting talk is, it's not fit for use from believers. It's not cool, it's not macho. It's just not fit for people who are made in the image of God, speaking to those who are made in the image of God. Rather, Paul says in verse 29, we are to use words that build up. We should be the storehouse, this ocean of words that are encouraging to others, that fit the occasion, that actually give grace to people. Have you ever thought about that? You have the ability in any moment to give others a measure of grace.

We understand grace is very significant word in scripture, and so any time you see that your Bible study flag should be going off like, "I need to circle that or highlight it." We see in Hebrews 4:16 that grace is not just static, it's enabling. It helps in times of need. It does something. It's not just a concept or a theology to consider it. It is effective in our life for the purpose it's set out to do, and 2 Corinthians talks about how it's sufficient in times of weakness.

As you know, grace is this unmerited favor from God. It is given to us when we don't deserve it. It's not something that we have requested of God, or demanded of God. It's given based on the benevolence of the one who gives it, not on the merit of the one who it's given to, right? So grace is given by God because of God's love, right? Because of his love he gave. It's instructive for us as we think about the words that we used to communicate to others. Think of a grandparent who has little grandkids running around, and those little kids and their little pudgy legs and they're grabbing stuff and throwing it and, oh, isn't that cute? Grandma and Grandpa just says, "Oh, do you want some more food? Here's some candy. Have a couple Red Bulls. We're going to send you home anyway, back to your parents." It's really just based on what the grandparents want to give, even though the parents spend days getting them back in order. It's just this doling out of love towards these little kids because of how the grandparent feels towards them.

Grace is giving to those based on the benevolence of the giver. I do a lot of counseling, as the other pastors do, and I think it would be safe to say that these four verses would change any marriage. The day they are put into practice, the moment they're put into practice, it would set things on a godly trajectory. It's not just if you're married, any relationship would be impacted by this. With your neighbor whose car is always sticking out in front of your driveway a little bit, or that boss who always has a sharp word and never an encouragement, any relationship with extended family members. We have Easter coming up soon and we go, "Oh no, it's coming." That big family dinner where you have people over, and Aunt Sally's always got something negative to say about your cooking or whatever. We brace for these things because we know that words can sting.

But instead of that, Paul's saying, we need to be in this disposition of encouragement. Of representing Christ and his church well. Sometimes when we get to passages like this, we think, "Oh, here we go. It's going to be 40 minutes of, I'm not living up to what God's called me to, or I don't know how to do this on my own, but I've just got to try harder. I've got to make my quiet times twice as long and pray twice as much and start learning Greek or something." But that is

not the life that God has called us to. Yes, dive into your Bibles and learn as much as you can and apply as much as you can, but we live grace-filled lives. We live lives that are supernatural. Has God not changed you on the inside in a supernatural way? Has he not given you a new nature if you're in Christ? If you've been saved by grace through faith, that is a work of the divine God in our lives that is beyond us. It's not something that is practical. It is something that is supernatural.

So I want to talk a little bit about what grace-filled living actually is, so you know it's not just you and me trying to work harder. Paul goes over this in Ephesians 3:16, he's praying for them and he's trying to describe how it is that we live out this Christian life and how God works in our lives. He says this, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being. That is a power from God that works in and through you for his glory to enable you and me to live for Jesus Christ.

It's not just a little dose. It's according to the riches of his glory. It might sound a little nebulous to you, but when Moses wanted to understand who God was, he said, "Show me your glory," all right? Because the glory of God is a representation of who God is. It's all that he is. His goodness, his mercy, his love, his justice, his wrath, everything about him is resounding. It's like shining out like a light that shines in the darkness. When we comprehend that we understand God and this power that comes through the spirit in your inner being is, quote, "According to the riches of his glory."

So the strength we need to live for God comes from God, not from something you and I do. You say, "Well, I thought you were just talking about something we were supposed to do or not do." Well, Paul continues in Ephesians 3:20. He says this to explain it further. He says, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us," notice it's already at work. "To him be glory" in what? "In the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

The glory goes to God. Our lives are not just about living by the power that God supplies for our benefit. It's for the benefit of the whole body of Christ, and that's why this passage is encouraging, because God wants us to be kind and compassionate and loving and to build up our church in love. Paul didn't just write this concept to the Ephesians, or just explain it to the Ephesians. He explained it explicitly to the Corinthians and the Philippians as well. He wanted each church that he planted and started to know about God's powerful grace in their lives. He says this in one Corinthians 15:10. He says, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." He just said he worked harder than all of the apostles and disciples before him. That's a pretty bold statement, but he says, "It was not me but the grace of God that is with me."

When we are trying our best to live for God, we need to remember that God's always working in and through us. His grace never leaves us. His power is always directing us towards him. As we submit ourselves to him and his work in our lives, we can be confident that we live pleasing lives

to God. Paul says again in one Corinthians 15:10, he says, "It was not I, but the grace of God that was within me," right? He explains this to the Philippians as well. In 2:13, he says, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure," and you ask, "Where's your motivation?" It's in God. Where's your ability? It's in God. Where's the outcome? That's from God. Is he going to take care of all these things? Yeah, that's God too. Well, what am I supposed to do? Trust in God. Allow him to work through us, not reject his work in our lives.

Paul's not talking about some kind of super Christian self-sufficiency either. "Oh, it's just God, I do nothing." No, he says this in 2 Corinthians 3:5, not that we are sufficient in ourselves or claim anything is coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God. So he says, "I've worked harder than anyone. It's not just setting all of these laws and things to do on the side. No, I work as hard as I possibly can, but I don't trust myself. My sufficiency is from God." He's constantly drawing us in our minds back to God. You say, "Yeah, well, that's great, but sometimes I just have a bad week." In our church, in any church that's honest, there's going to be families, there's going to be relationships that are struggling, that have difficulties where there's some hurt going on, or people have said things that they shouldn't have said, and you just feel like all I have is just, it feels like just weakness at times.

Well, that's okay. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 he says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness so that the power of Christ may rest on me." You bring the weakness; he brings the power. If you feel like you're bringing the power, then you're trying to do what God is doing. We work hard, right? We don't give in. We're knocked down but not crushed, right? We strive, we excel still more, but we realize all of our efforts compared to God, it's just weakness. We have no ability to please him on our own, right? It's only by the power of God that these things happen. So he says, "My grace is sufficient."

Do you believe that? Do you believe God's grace is truly sufficient for your life? If so, then when we get to Ephesians 4:29 and we think about all the words we speak, and pastors talk a lot, right? It's a lot of recorded messages, right? That I'm sure AI is going to conglomerate and say, "Oh, he really thinks this." It's all there, but we realize that it's only by the grace of God that we do anything to bring him glory. So point number one is words that give grace. **Point #2**), are about **Words That Should Not Be Spoken**. You thought we were off the hook already? Well, we're going to dive in a little bit more here.

Look in Ephesians 4:30. It says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you are sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Notice he elevates again to not just peaceful relationships? That's not just merely the goal. That's not merely our motivation. Practically, sometimes it is. "Well, I want so-and-so to like me. I want to have good, healthy relationships." But Paul here brings it back to the Holy Spirit of God, that why would we grieve the Holy Spirit of God?

We've been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. According to Ephesians 1:13. We've been sealed for the day of redemption according to Ephesians 4:30. The very one that is going to be the promise of our guarantee is the one we grieve when we speak with corrupting talk. Think of it this way, just think about, you're about to inherit a large inheritance from your uncle, he says, "You know, I'm not just going to give you that inheritance. I think I'm going to go ahead and dole it out now." Maybe you want an uncle like that, so just think that way. This is the uncle who says, "Hey, I'm going to go ahead and buy you a house. I'm going to pay it off. You're going to have no mortgage payment. You just pick the neighborhood, pick the design, pick everything you want and we'll put it in there. Make sure there's a giant pool and we'll get it all taken care of for you. Don't worry, we're getting a car for everyone in your family, and we're going to pay the insurance, because Arizona insurance is crazy expensive. So we're going to pay for that for you."

Then he says, "Hey, here's my credit card. Now, this is one of those credit cards that has no limit. Just go buy yourself some nice clothes. Spend whatever you want. Go to the grocery store, buy whatever you want. Eat out. Go to the expensive grocery store, the organic one. Even if it isn't really organic, just buy all organic, okay? Because it says it is just buy whatever you want." It would be unwise to be slanderous of your uncle as he gives you everything you need, day after day after day.

The Holy Spirit has done much for us. We're going to learn in John 15, when we get there in about 10 years, that the Holy Spirit is our helper. The Holy Spirit is our guide to the truth. In one Corinthians 3:16, we learn about the Holy Spirit. It says this, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?" We realize that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. But what does this say? It says your God's temple. The Father, you are the Father's temple, and in you is the Holy Spirit. How then could we live as though we're just our own? In American terms we would say, "Don't bite the hand that feeds you."

So we see that we're sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. We put off the crude jokes and the filthy language and all of these things, and we try and discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Paul gets a little specific here, in verse 31. Remember Paul's writing to the church, to saved, redeemed people. He says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." I would say, in counseling, bitterness is one of the biggest things people deal with. It's things I've had to deal with, maybe something you've had to deal with. But holding on to hurt and animosity and resentment of others, it doesn't help you one bit. In fact, it probably gives you anxiety, makes you nervous. What benefit is it to remain bitter about the sin that someone else has done to us? We allow them to own that head space in our minds and in our hearts and over time that bitterness, it just gets harder and harder to deal with.

Instead, we need to train ourselves to release that bitterness to God, to allow him to take care of it. To say, "I am no longer going to be bitter about this thing or that thing. I'm going to fully give it over to God who judges justly, who judges righteously, who's also going to judge me." When you do that, it just takes this huge burden off of your shoulders. Sometimes the weight of bitterness is just crushing, but that's not how we are to live. Instead, we should pray for that

person. Pray that God blesses them. Pray that God blesses them more than he blesses you. Pray that God gives them things that you want. Pray that God lifts them up and uses them for his glory. Did he not do that to Paul? Paul was a persecutor and a blasphemer. Paul was the one who was going around throwing people in jail and they would die. Just leave them there to rot. Men, women and children. That was Paul. Then God said, "No, I'm going to use you for my glory. Paul, I'm going to take you, I'm going to change your heart. I'm going to put you over here and you're going to write 13 books of the New Testament. You're going to impact the whole area for Christ, all the way to Ephesians, all the way to Ephesus. All of these places, you're going to make my name known, Paul."

Then he talks about wrath, which is unbridled anger. Anger which is being upset at someone else's actions against us. James 1:20 says, "For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." He talks about clamor, which is shouting. Slander, tearing someone down. Malice, which is hostility with a desire to harm. He's saying, a home filled with this kind of thing, it's pretty tense, but this isn't the plan of God. This isn't what builds up the church. It's encouraging, because we want to be around people who don't put these things into practice. In other words, they don't have bitterness, they don't have wrath and anger and so on. They don't live that way, and they become people that we are drawn to.

So point number two was that words that should not be spoken, and point number three, Paul has a better way for us. **Point #3**, is **Words That Heal**, in verse 32. This is rather where Paul would like us to reside. This is where he would like us to stay. It says this: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God and Christ forgave you." These words bring healing. One John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Anything you have ever said and done, a hundred percent forgiven by God, no retribution at all. He is going to, when you stand before him one day and you give an account of your life, he's going to say, "All of that has been paid for by my son. You have the full righteousness of Jesus Christ accredited to your account. You are free and clear. You are clean, you have been cleansed from all of your sin." That's the kind of forgiveness that we have in Christ, and forgiveness is what brings us close to God.

Proverbs 17:9 talks about forgiveness that brings us close to others. It says this: "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends." The people who go around and they just repeat, "Oh, do you know all the bad things that that person did? If you knew what they did, you wouldn't like them. I don't like them. You wouldn't like them either." That is so ungodly. Forgiveness is what brings us close to others as well. Paul is, again, drawing on theology that he's already developed in Ephesians chapter 2. Chapter 2:1-10 are an amazing summary of the salvation we have in Christ. It talks in verses 1-3, about who we were when we were just dead in sin before salvation, that we had no way to come to God. Every single one of us were following the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air.

We were hopeless and without God in this world. That is the moment that God reached down and rescued us. It's in that moment that the mercy of God broke through and called us to be his child.

It is in the moment when we were most disgraceful towards God that he gave us the most abundant amount of grace. See, when someone else has sinned against you greatly, that's your greatest opportunity to show them immeasurable grace. When they need it, the most is the opportunity that we take advantage of to give them the grace that they need and that they desire, that we extend forgiveness to them.

In Ephesians 2:4, when God breaks in, it says, "But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you have been saved." He's saying, "Look, this forgiveness that you have in Christ that we talked about in chapter 2, this is what we need to give to others. It comes along with kindness and tenderheartedness." Here's the point: Paul is elevating our motivation beyond ourselves to the very forgiveness that we have in Christ. So to the extent that you are grateful for God's kindness in your life, is the extent that you will give other people kindness. To the extent that you are grateful for his compassion and his tenderheartedness with you, that is the extent that you will dole out to others. To the extent that you're grateful for his forgiveness in your life, complete and free and clean, and with no strings attached. That's the extent that we should forgive others.

It's like the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18 who owed his master 10,000 talents. One talent was worth about 20 years' wages. This guy went on a spending spree like no other. He was just spending money like crazy. I don't know what he was doing, but the idea is that he owed his master hundreds of lifetimes worth of wages, and he begs his master for forgiveness, and his master forgives him. Full and clear, like he didn't owe him a penny. And then that servant goes out and he starts choking a guy who owes him about four months' worth of wages.

The relational damage that we have between people, between us and others, that's the four months' wages. One sin against a holy, righteous, perfect God. That's the 10,000 talents. That's the depth that God has forgiven us. It's marvelous to consider. A kind, compassionate, forgiving church is a very strong and a very healthy church. It's the kind of church you and I want to be part of, and it's the kind of church we need to continue making happen here. May we put our hope fully in Christ for these things, because he truly has given us his grace. Let's pray.

Father God, we thank you for the forgiveness that you've shown us in Christ. I pray, Lord God, if someone doesn't know you today, that they would turn from their sin and receive the forgiveness that we find in Jesus. Lord God, I pray that you continue to use each and every one of us to build up your church for your glory. Help us to be those who forgive and love one another so we might build up your church, Lord, for your glory in your precious, holy name. Amen.