



First Baptist Church Selmer

JESUS VS CULTURE: BUILDING A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW • WATCH YOUR MOUTH! •
EPHESIANS 4:25-29; GALATIANS 5:14-15 • 1/21/2024

MAIN POINT

Criticism of others never reflects God's glory no matter the circumstance. In Christ, God calls us to build each other up.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

As we celebrate "Sanctity of Human Life" today, let's take a look at other ways we de-value human life not just those that are in the womb but also in the way we speak and treat one another.

Where do you see or experience people being the most critical of others (work, school, church, home, with friends, TV, social media, etc.)?

What are some of the character traits or internal struggles that can lead people to have a critical attitude?

| CONSIDER THESE TWO QUOTES AND SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS:

"Criticism is generally a reflection of the critic's own weaknesses and often an attempt to justify his own shortcomings."

"It is much easier to be critical than correct." - former United Kingdom Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli

To criticize means "to act as a critic," pointing out what you perceive to be the strengths and flaws of someone or something. Yet in our fallen world, it often seems much easier to

focus on the flaws of others but neglect our own. Pride, jealousy, insecurity, favoritism, racism, and hate are just some of the negative human traits that contribute to a culture of tearing each other down. But in Christ, God calls believers to a higher standard. In this study, we will look at some of Paul's teachings to see how God calls believers to build one another up.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 4:25-29.

"25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that is may give grace to those who hear." (ESV)

Paul used the words "unwholesome," "foul," or "corrupt" in various translations to convey worthless speech.

How does worthless speech toward others show us we don't always value them the way that we should?

According to this passage, what is the only kind of talk that should come out of our mouths? What is the goal of such talk?

We learned last week the process of putting off, renewing our minds, and putting on. The thought of positive replacement of negative thoughts/actions now comes to the application:

Put OFF: Lying, Anger, Stealing, Corrupting Talk

Renewed Mind: *"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." - Galatians 5:17*

Put ON: Truth, Righteousness, Honest Work, Edifying Speech

If we are to act rightly, we must think rightly. Therefore, we must guard our hearts and minds for our actions to change. As Paul told the church in Philippians 4:8, "*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*"

Some Bible translations say that our speech should "*benefit those who listen,*" while more literal translations say some version of "*that it may give grace to those who hear.*" Grace is a gift, an undeserved favor, and in the case of Ephesians 4, Paul used grace in the sense of Christ's spiritual gifts that allow us to minister to others and do His will. Thus, our speech should be characterized by love, encouragement, and helping others grow in maturity to serve the Lord.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:14-15.

"14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another." (ESV)

What did Paul mean by "bite and devour"? How do you see this happen among Christians?

What did Paul say would be the final outcome of this biting and devouring?

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all of your heart, soul, and mind and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). How can loving your neighbor as yourself fulfill the command to love God as well?

Paul was not contradicting Jesus for at least two reasons. First, if we do not love our neighbor as ourselves, we are certainly not loving God since He created our neighbor "*in his Image*" and commanded us to love them. Second, Paul made it clear in this passage that we cannot love our neighbors without the help of God's Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18), which is only received through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Does love mean we never hold people accountable or say anything hard to hear?

How do you differentiate between “constructive” feedback and “destructive” criticism?

It seems loving someone is sometimes reduced either to just a feeling or to a relationship where we never say anything hard for the other person to hear. But the Bible teaches that loving others means actively seeking their good, and this sometimes involves holding others accountable.

The New Testament repeatedly commands followers of Christ to submit to the Spirit’s work in us and to live lives characterized by love, encouragement, unity, and peace. In this way, not only is each individual built up to maturity in Christ, but also the church itself is strengthened and becomes a more effective witness for the power of the gospel. This all starts with allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and help hold our tongues.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Where or with whom do you need to replace criticism with encouragement?

Think of some specific people who can use your encouragement right now.

What are some practical ways you can encourage them?

How often do you find yourself rejoicing (praising God, intentionally thanking God and others, expressing joy)? How can you incorporate more rejoicing in your life?

How would a lifestyle of rejoicing give more credibility in sharing the gospel with others?

PRAYER

Ask the Father to grant you the grace, humility, and courage to replace your critical attitudes with rejoicing and encouragement, so that you may help another believer grow to maturity in Christ.

COMMENTARY

| EPHESIANS 4:25-29

All Christians have responsibility for group unity and group maturity. In this passage, Paul pointed out a series of individual behavioral changes each believer should adopt to better facilitate group unity and maturity.

We, believers, are to put away lying as a filthy garment and replace it with truthful speech. Paul's biblical source was Zechariah 8:16, "*Speak truth to one another.*" How can we love our neighbors if we deceive them? Furthermore, truth-telling is especially important in the life of the church— because we are members of one another. We should be able to trust one another. Falsehood discovered is a guaranteed way to destroy Christian fellowship.

The fabric of unity within the body of Christ is woven with mutual love, trust, and respect. Lies destroy trust and respect and erode love. Believers should be forthright and honest in what they say at home, at church, at work, and play. Remember, Satan is the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

The wording that Paul took from Psalm 4:4 (Be angry and do not sin) should be understood to mean "Do not sin when you are angry." Although anger is not in itself wrong, how we respond to anger can be. Anger may lead us to positive, constructive actions. For example, anger can lead us to work toward honest reconciliation or to correct an injustice. Anger also may lead us to take negative, destructive actions, that is, to sin, such as striking back in vengeance. When we nurse anger into a seething bitterness, we give the devil a foothold to invade and corrupt our lives. For our good, we are to resolve anger quickly (before the end of the day).

To steal is to violate the Eighth Commandment. It is not enough for believers just to avoid the negative. Rather, a Christian is to do honest work with his own hands so that stealing isn't necessary. Believers are to support themselves and their families if this is at all possible. Sometimes people need a helping hand, so the right thing to do is to work hard so that we can be generous to anyone in need.

Paul did not challenge believers to work hard to become wealthy and enjoy a life of luxury but to earn enough to share with anyone in need. The Christian life is focused on relationships and helping others, not on material gain and all that is associated with affluence.

Foul language translates a word meaning "rotten, unfit for use." Paul meant what is vulgar, crude, or abusive—the kind of speech becoming more and more tolerated these days. But this is a characteristic of the non-Christian lifestyle that believers have renounced. What is to replace it? Speech that is intentionally good for the building up of

others (see Prov. 15:23). As believers, we can seek to help by our speech rather than to hurt. When this happens, we are giving evidence that God's grace has succeeded in our own lives and that we are actively extending grace to those who hear us speak. Our words reveal our hearts. Loving hearts speak loving words. What we say and how we say it matters. Jesus said we would have to give an account for *"every careless word"* (Matt. 12:36).

| GALATIANS 5:14-15

5:13-14. In verse 1, Paul states that Christian freedom is the right and privilege of every believer. Then he points out six negative consequences of falling back into slavery. Now he warns them not to use this freedom as a license to sin. Rather than liberty being used for selfishness, the true objective of their newfound freedom is love. Quoting Leviticus 19:18, Paul summarizes the law as *"love your neighbor as yourself."* Always remember that we are slaves commissioned to love one another (Matt. 22:39).

5:15. As a result of the legalists, this church was divided. They were biting and devouring each other. Their church and community of faith were on the verge of destruction. Legalism treats people harshly and often leads to divisions.