

How Then Shall We Speak?

2026-05-17 - Ephesians 4:14 - 5:7

“But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head — Christ.” Ephesians 4:15 (CSB)

I'd like to invite our guest preacher for today, a dear friend, brother, and pastor of mine, former executive pastor of Moody Church, Dr. Hutz Hertzberg—as they say in Germany, Dr. Hertzberg—pastor and head of Turning Point Education. Thank you very much for being with us. He's going to lead us in prayer now.

As we continue in the spirit of prayer this morning, I do want to lead us in prayer. Thank you, worship team, for that powerful, powerful time of singing this morning. Today's a very special day. I don't know if all of you are aware of this, and so I'm going to read this short proclamation about, we dedicate 250, rededicating our nation to the Lord, which is happening today. I'll just read a couple paragraphs. This is from the Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson, which will be a lead-in to our prayer this morning.

He says, “Dear Americans of faith, this is a unique moment for believers. For the first time in modern history, a U.S. president has called our nation to prayer, to humble ourselves, and to rededicate America to God. This is a call for unity, repentance, and hope, and one that truly just transcends politics.” And then he says, “I invite you all, invite all of you on Sunday, May 17th,” which is today, “on the National Mall, for which I believe is a civilizational moment in the history of our country. This will be the first time that Americans will gather together to rededicate the United States as one nation under God.”

Listen to this: On May 17th, 1776, the Second Continental Congress held a day of prayer, fasting, and humiliation just weeks before America declared its independence on July 4th. Now, exactly 250 years to the day, tens of thousands of Americans will stand together as one in our nation's capital to give thanks to God for his blessings over the last 250 years and to ask for his forgiveness, mercy, and guidance as we embark on the next 250 years.

Well, friends, we don't have the opportunity to be on the National Mall today—although I saw early this morning people were already gathering—but I do believe that we'd be remiss if we didn't spend a few moments in our prayer time this morning following the admonition of our president, who's calling us to prayer as a nation. And so, with the full support and permission of the elders and the pastors of Cornerstone, I'd like to just briefly lead us in a very truncated time of prayer as we do the very things that we've been asked to do by the president.

So what I'm going to do is we're just going to have two brief segments. The first is just repentance, calling us back to repentance, and I'll lead us through that, and then a time of rededication as we rededicate ourselves, our church, and our nation to the Lord. A couple of our elders will be praying as a part of this

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time as well, so we're not going to spend as much time as any of us would like, but just a few moments to be able to do what we just talked about.

To begin with, I want to read Second Chronicles 7:14, a familiar passage I think to many of us:
“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land.”

We need that healing by God's mercy and grace. And so in the quietness of where you're sitting right now, I invite you to call upon the Lord first personally. Ask God to search you and see if there'd be any wicked way within us, within you. And then I'm going to lead us for a brief time to pray for our church and then also for our nation. And then Elder Ninos is going to close this first segment.

But let's just go to prayer—again, just you and the Lord—and ask Him to show you anything in your life that is not honoring, pleasing, or glorifying to Him. And then I invite you to repent and return to the Lord.

{prayer time}

As we continue in a spirit of prayer, asking God for repentance, I want to encourage all of us now to pray for the Big “C” Church but also this church: that church leaders and the congregation, that God would give a spirit of humility, that we would think of others better than ourselves. And again, where repentance is necessary and needed, that God would grant the gift of repentance and the turning back to Him in the church across our nation and in this church, I pray.

{prayer time}

And then lastly, as we continue in the spirit of repentance, let's pray for our nation. Let's pray for our leaders and also our fellow countrymen, that they would humble themselves before Almighty God, that we would seek His face and turn from our wicked ways, and that our Lord may forgive our sin and bring healing to our nation. Let's now lift up and pray for that spirit of repentance across our nation for our leaders.

{prayer time}

Elder Ninos is going to close this first segment in prayer.

“Father, as we bring this part to a close, we submit our lives, our families, our entire being to you, knowing this, that you're perfect and we're foolish or unwise. We bring chaotic messes. Father, according to your mercy and according to your wonderful counsel, bring healing to this church, bring healing to the people in the pews, bring healing to the leadership, bring healing to our nation. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.”

And then, folks, as we continue in the spirit of prayer, we want to move now from repentance to rededication—to rededicate ourselves to the Lord. And so again we're going to do that in three different segments here: for ourselves, our church, and our nation.

But let me begin by reading this powerful passage out of the book of Joel.

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The prophet Joel says, Chapter 2 verse 12-14: ***“Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all of your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?”***

Great words of promise. So let's think now in terms of rededicating ourselves to the Lord, that we will return, rededicate ourselves, that our whole hearts would be wholly His. And so let's do that in the next few moments, and I'll lead us through just like I did before.

{prayer time}

As we continue in the spirit of prayer, let's now pray for our church, this church, that we would rededicate our church and its leaders to God, that we would draw near to Him—this church would draw near to Him—praying for wisdom, discernment, understanding, and all of the things that are before us. That we return to the Lord our God with our whole hearts as a church family.

{prayer time}

And lastly, let's pray, let's rededicate our nation and its leaders to the Lord. Let's pray for our president, the vice president, their families, the cabinet, the administration, that they would seek to honor the Lord in all things and in all ways.

{prayer time}

Elder Rich is now going to conclude our time of prayer this morning.

Father, as we sat here, we dedicated ourselves to you. We dedicated this church to you, and we dedicate this nation to you, Father God. I pray that your spirit will work within us, Lord God, and that we'll continue on walking faithfully to bring your honor and glory. 250 years in this nation it was founded under you Lord and by your mercy and grace Lord we dedicate it to you and the people will turn and look at you Father and serve you faithfully to bring you honor and glory. May we do the same with this church and every church out there Lord God that every church you walk by that we see it will show the honor and glory goes to your name, Father, in your name alone, and amen. For we are all foolish apart from you, Lord God. For all wisdom comes from you. All faith comes from you. So Lord, let our dedication be true, and let us walk in faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen, amen.

Thank you all so very much. And I would encourage you, at the dedication time of prayer that's happening in Washington throughout the day, there's many ways you can tune in as a family, participate, and/or just spend time together as a family praying for our nation, rededicating our nation to the Lord.

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Well, it's wonderful to be with you this morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity. I know that you've had some outstanding preachers and some excellent messages. We're going to take a little break from that this morning—see, you guys are good, you're awake and alert, and we have one of those outstanding preachers right in front here—but hopefully not too much of a break.

I've been praying that I want to make what we talked about this morning so practical, so timely, so applicable, so actionable, and most of all Christ-honoring and life-transforming. And I believe the Lord has shown me something that hopefully will be helpful and God-glorifying and life-transforming and something that I think every one of us in this room can relate to, not just in general, not just occasionally, but every day and already today. And I'm speaking about our words and how we talk to one another.

You know, everyone in this room has experienced and has been the recipient of ill-spoken and even sinful words, disingenuous words, deceitful words, hurtful words, broken promises, and so much more. And sadly, it's not only at the hands of non-Christians that we've experienced this, but so often it's from the mouths of Christians as well. But as sad as that is, even more sadly, every one of us in this room has been guilty of speaking those type of words towards others, and unfortunately, and distressingly, against other Christians as well.

So that's what we want to be looking at this morning. I think God will help us by His Spirit to look at this a little bit differently and to think in terms of how we might so honor the Lord with our words and our speech. You know, God calls us to a standard, a standard that is both wholly and holy—W-H-O-L-L-Y and H-O-L-Y—that is different than that of the world. He calls us to reflect his very character to a watching world in every way, including in our words.

God's very character, among other things, is truth, it's consistency, it's integrity, it's righteousness, it's constancy, it's immutability, among many, many other attributes. He's a covenant-making and a covenant-keeping God. And he calls us to the same righteous standard, believe it or not. And I'm 100% convinced, and I'm actually convicted, that God takes our word and our words very, very seriously, far more than we tend to do ourselves.

You know, it's interesting to me that there is no shortage of passages in the Old Testament and the New Testament that poignantly and pointedly speak about our words, our speech, our tongue. And if you want to do an excellent study and an interesting study, just go through the books of the Bible—and I'm going to at the end share with you particularly the book of Proverbs—how God says so much about our words and our speech and the way that we talk to one another.

But let me just give you a couple of examples just as we get started this morning. ***“Whatever your lips utter, you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth.”*** (Deuteronomy 23:23)

“Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts. Do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all these things, declares the Lord.” (Zechariah 8:16–17)

“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3)

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And in the New Testament, Jesus is very clear that how we respond to his words, his word, the gospel, is the ultimate dividing line concerning salvation and eternity. Listen to some of these sobering words of Jesus—and these are perhaps some of the most sobering words in the Bible: (Matthew 12:36–37): ***“On the day of judgment we will give an account for every careless word spoken. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”***

Think about that. On the day of judgment we stand before the Lord, we're going to need to give an account for every careless word spoken. This is not my word; this is the very word of God. It's amazing. It's sobering. It's overwhelming, the meaning that our words can literally damn us or justify us. And again, as I say, these are the very words of the Lord Jesus.

You know, the book of James also echoes the words of Jesus by warning—and we're familiar with these verses but maybe not the second part—***“Let your yes be yes and your no be no,”*** we've all heard that, but the second part says, ***“or you will be condemned.”*** Very strong words. James 5:12. So what's at stake here is nothing less than eternal life and eternal death.

So the goal for me, for us this morning, is to become men and women who ***speak the truth in love***, as we read in Ephesians 4:15. That's the goal. You know, John Stott, the theologian, great theologian who died not too long ago, said, “We are to be truthers in love.” I like that expression, “truthers in love”, in the way that we speak to one another.

And so, to do that, I want us to get a better sense of that. I want us to look in the book of Ephesians, and particularly chapters four and five, and particularly a verse or so in the book of Ephesians chapter 4. But let me just quickly give you a little background on the book of Ephesians. People often break it down kind of down the middle in half: that the first part of Ephesians, first three chapters, are more theological, and that is more theological, doctrinal; practical instructions. And the last three chapters of the book of Ephesians are more practical, and that is how we are to live, our responsibilities before Christ, how we are to walk out our faith.

But this morning I want to focus, as I just said, on the very serious admonitions of Paul in chapters 4 and chapter 5. And I'd like to invite you to turn to Ephesians chapter 4 with me. And now I know at Cornerstone everybody has their Bible here at the Cornerstone Evangelical Free Church. And are there Bibles in the pews or in the chairs? I think there are. But it would be very helpful if you wouldn't mind turning to chapter four of the book of Ephesians. In my Bible, it's on page 967, if that's any help to you at all, which it probably is not.

But let me just give you a quick overview of some of the very practical and powerful commands that I'm referring to in chapters four and five. I'm just going to quickly read these:

“Speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15),

“Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25),

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths” (Ephesians 4:29),

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you” (Ephesians 4:31),

“Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place” (Ephesians 5:4),

“Let no one deceive you with empty words” (Ephesians 5:6),

and on it goes.

So in light of these powerful admonitions, to paraphrase the great theologian Francis Schaeffer, “**How then shall we speak?**” And to answer that question, we have time just to look at one verse this morning, verse 4:29. So that's one of the verses that I've referenced already. It's right in the middle of all these verses that talk about our speech and how we talk to one another. But this is a very, very powerful verse. And in this verse, there's one negative admonition and three positive admonitions that I want us to look at this morning that I think can be really helpful, encouraging, and perhaps convicting, actually.

So, first he says, “*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths.*” This is the Apostle Paul speaking. Now, some translations use the word “unwholesome” instead. I like the translation “no corrupting talk,” but what does that mean? It literally means anything rotten, putrid, or filthy. Those are pretty strong words. So that would include such things as foul or vulgar language or profanity. And just as a quick aside, you know, I don't know about you, but I'm just amazed how frequent now people just use profanity. It's like common parlance. And, you know, it used to be bad enough when the guys did that. I was an athlete, and in the locker room—a fair amount of locker rooms—I was in the military, I've heard all my share of language. It seems like the women are just as bad as the men now, but it's just common parlance. Foul or vulgar language or profanity, dishonest words, gossip, slanderous words, unkind talk.

The emphasis here, and this is important, is on decay-spreading conversations which run others down and delight in their weaknesses. Let me say that again. The emphasis here is on decay-spreading conversations, which run others down and delight in their weaknesses.

Has anybody here heard of the name Ewing Kaufman? I would be surprised if anybody did. Ewing Kaufman was a very successful businessman, and he became the first owner of the Kansas City Royals baseball team, I think back in 1969, so long before most of you were born. But then he had a principle in his business that he extended to the Kansas City Royals baseball team front office, and that was this: that if anyone was caught talking badly or slanderously or inappropriately about another colleague, another employee, they were warned once, and then the second time if it happened, they were fired.

And you think, what a terrible workplace that is. But people loved working there, because they knew that when they left the room, that people are not gonna talk about them, that when they were not a part of a conversation, the conversation was not gonna be a part of them. I remember reading that several years ago, and every place that I've led since then, that's one of the principles I share with my team, with my staff: that if there's any—if I hear either directly or indirectly of anyone speaking ill of another employee, another staff member—you're warned once and the second time you're fired. And that gives not a sense of enslavement or whatever you want to call it, but really freedom. And that's the way it should be for us as Christians all the time, that no one should ever think that when I'm not in the room or if I walk out of the room that the conversation is going to be about me or that there's slanderous talk that is taking place about me.

So how then shall we speak if that's what we're not supposed to do? How then shall we speak? And Paul answers that question in this very same verse in Ephesians 4:29 that we're looking at. He tells us what we are not to do, but let's take a look at three positive exhortations or commands that I believe, if honored, will transform our conversations, transform our families, transform this church, transform our workplaces, if we are honestly, earnestly seeking to do that. And that, again, the goal is that we want to be men and

women who speak the truth in love. That's the higher principle that God is calling us to—men and women who speak the truth in love—and so by honoring our Lord with our words.

But here's the first positive principle we can get from this passage here in Ephesians 4:29. And you might want to take some notes here at this point if you haven't already. The first transforming truth is this: **we are called to speak edifying words one to another**. Look again at verse 29: *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only that which is good for building up.”* (Ephesians 4:29)

Paul tells us very clearly that we must speak in such a way that builds others up, not tears them down. We are called to speak words that are encouraging, helpful, edifying, instructing, and positive. So let me ask a question, each of us a question here this morning. When is the last time that you encouraged somebody? That's about as simple a question that I can possibly ask this morning. When is the last time you encouraged somebody here at church? When's the last time you encouraged somebody in the workplace? When's the last time you encouraged somebody in your own family?

And you say—and hopefully that's an easy answer because you're saying, “Well, Hutz, that's today. I did that today already.” But, you know, unfortunately, that's probably not the case for many of us. And regardless of our personalities, God calls us and commands us to speak edifying, encouraging words one to another. It's not a suggestion. God is not giving us a suggestion here. Paul's not giving us a suggestion; it's a command.

Now, it's been said that there are two kinds of people in the world. All the world can be divided up into two kinds of people. And you probably have heard some of these categories. I'm not talking about Republicans or Democrats. I'm not talking about dog lovers or cat lovers. I'm not talking about White Sox fans or Cub fans, even though the City Series is going on and the White Sox did win last night. But no, I'm talking about something even more profound, and that is this: basement people and ceiling people.

All the world can be divided into basement people and ceiling people. Basement people are people that are always pulling others down. They're speaking words that pull others down. We all know people like that. But then there's people that I'm calling ceiling people that are speaking edifying words and always pulling other people up. And they're so wonderful to be around because they're so encouraging and positive. And you just want to be around folks like that—basement people and ceiling people. Who are you? Would people describe you as a basement person or as a ceiling person?

And you know, you say, “Well, you know, I'm not sure.” Well, ask your spouse. Ask your employer. Ask your best friend, because they would probably be able to give you a pretty good indication.

Now I do want to make it clear that there's a big difference just between giving flattery, which is not what I'm talking about here, but giving true biblical encouragement. True encouragement is not about building egos. I'm not talking about building self-esteem here; that's not what I'm talking about. Paul's talking about building faith and hope in Jesus Christ and in others for their greater Christ-likeness, means giving confidence in the promises of God.

We say, “How do I do that?” We do that by encouraging people with Scripture. You say, “I see the joy of the Lord in Pastor Trevor. I see the fruit of the Spirit in your countenance, in your person. Your passion for

the Lord is a tremendous example and encouragement to me.” And use a Scripture to share with them that you see that fruit or that character quality being lived out in their lives. That’s tremendously encouraging. That’s what we’re talking about here—not just false flattery, which doesn’t really help anybody. So encourage people with Scripture is a great way to make this happen in your lives.

And if you want a great role model—and I love this, and many of you know this story—in the book of Acts, we have Barnabas. Good old Barnabas. You know, Barnabas was really not his name. His name was Joseph, but because he was always encouraging others so much around him, the apostles convened a meeting and they said, “We are changing your name to Barnabas,” because that means “son of encouragement.”

And I’m thinking, wouldn’t it be wonderful if the elders had a special meeting here and they convened the meeting and because one of you, or maybe more than one of you, were such a great encouragement that they decided to change your name to Barney or to Barnabas because you’ve been such a great encouragement to the congregation here? Wouldn’t that be wonderful? Barnabas was a real ceiling person, always drawing other people up and encouraging them. And you know what? We can be that kind of person too.

Look at Ephesians 4:29 again, we are called to speak edifying words to one another. But there’s a second life-transforming truth that I want us to see here this morning, and that is we are called to speak appropriate words to each other, appropriate words. Look again at the next phrase in verse 29: **“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion.”** (Ephesians 4:29)

As fits the occasion. We are called to speak appropriate words that are fitting for the occasion. Now think about that. What do we mean? So to do that, first of all, requires a keen sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, great listening and patience and understanding and wisdom. Those are prerequisites for us to be able to do this.

But isn’t it not true in most of our conversations that when somebody’s talking to us, we’re thinking about such things like, “What am I gonna say in response?” Or, “What is the person thinking about me?” Or, “I’m so distracted that, you know, I barely can hear that they’re talking to me.” I mean, we’ve all experienced that as well, both in doing it but also on the receiving end.

Stephen Covey was an author of a well-known book many years ago. Some of you will remember this title, “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”. Maybe you’ve heard of it, maybe you haven’t. But one of his principles was—and I love this—“Seek to understand before being understood.” Seek to understand before being understood. Now most of us, we’re so focused on making sure we’re understood that we don’t understand what the other person’s saying. But he says it’s just the opposite: seek to make sure you understand what the other person is saying before you try to make yourself understood.

And shouldn’t that characterize us as Christians? Shouldn’t that just be our normal modus operandi—that we’re more concerned about others, so we’re thinking of others more highly than ourselves, including what they’re saying to us?

So the book of Proverbs gives great help here as to what it means to speak appropriate words to one another. And I just want to give you a couple examples just to try to make this as concrete and as helpful

as I possibly can. So listen to this in Proverbs 25:11: ***“A word aptly spoken,”*** that is an appropriate word, ***“is like apples of gold in settings of silver,”*** meaning that it's very, very valuable. It's very, very precious. ***“A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!”*** (Proverbs 25:11; 15:23)

Proverbs 24:26: ***“Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.”*** A word appropriately spoken is a wonderful blessing to others. A word appropriately spoken can be a wonderful blessing to others. And we all realize that sometimes the most appropriate thing to say is nothing at all. The famous theologian, Carolyn Hertzberg, who's my mother, said, “If you can't say something good about somebody, don't say it at all.” And I think your mothers have told you the same thing.

So God commands us to speak edifying words. He calls us to speak appropriate words that fit the occasion. But he gives us one more principle here that I want us to see, and this is so important. And that is in the next part of verse 29: ***“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it might give grace to those who hear.”*** (Ephesians 4:29)

That it might give grace to those who hear. The highest goal of our speaking should be that we might be conduits of grace to whoever we're speaking to. That should be the highest goal, that we are conduits of grace.

Let me give you a couple of unbelievable examples from Scripture of what this grace-filled speech looks like. This is the prayer of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:1–3: ***“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. May my teaching drop as rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb. For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God.”***

Now, isn't that beautiful? But think, this is Moses. He had a major speech impediment, and yet, you know, his heart's desire was to be able to speak words of grace, words that were life-giving to others that would hear him.

And then the prophet Isaiah foretold of the gracious words of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 50:4, Isaiah says, ***“The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.”*** ***“The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.”***

Isn't that powerful? And then, of course, we know that Isaiah's prophecy became a reality in Christ's life and ministry because Luke records it for us in Luke 4:22. He says, ***“And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.”*** That's speaking about Jesus.

And by the way, this is a quick aside here: do you know that there's 351 Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled by the Lord Jesus? This is just one of 351 prophecies.

Well, and Paul likewise commands us in Colossians 4:6: ***“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.”*** Our graciousness towards others reflects the grace of God in our own lives, and God uses our graciousness to draw others to his grace.

And I just have to say that, you know, you say, “Well that's, you know, this seems a big thing or big task here,” but it was God's grace that brought us to himself. How in turn can we not be gracious to others when God has lavished such grace upon us? And don't you love to be around gracious people? It always spurs me on to be more gracious myself. I mean, I can think of people—I know that you can too—people that you just are just full of grace. I'm thinking of one of my colleagues right now, and Heather is just a woman that is always filled with grace. It's so wonderful to talk to her. She has the character qualities in her life that really are reflected in her speech, and you just want to be around a person like that.

Well, in summary, let me just read this verse again, this powerful verse in Ephesians 4:29: ***“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it might give grace to those who hear.”***

One negative admonition, three positive admonitions. But why is this so important? I mean, you know, we've talked at one level, but why is this so important? I think it's very important both for us personally, but also for us corporately as a body here at Cornerstone.

Personally, God makes it very clear that if we break the law of God, we will ultimately be broken by the law of God. These are not suggestions that God is giving. Well, you know, if you can, you know, try to speak like this. These are commands that God is giving us. And if we break the law of God, ultimately we will be broken by the law of God. James 4:11. Secondly, we forfeit God's blessing, favor, and grace in our own lives. Look at Psalm 101. I mean, if we are not obediently following the word of God, we are going to forfeit blessing, grace, and God's favor in our lives. Who wants to miss out on that?

And then thirdly, our words will condemn us or justify us—that powerful passage that I read in Matthew 12. Again, I say that's a passage you take very, very seriously. You say, “How can that be?” But listen, eternity is a long time. There's plenty of time that we'll have to give an account for our lives and our words. And so our words will either condemn us or justify us.

But corporately it has implications for us as a body of Christ. You know, wounded brothers and sisters—to not do this we risk the consequence of wounding brothers and sisters in Christ. And those wounds often remain for a long time. You know, I'm thinking of an illustration here where you can pound nails into a board. You can take those nails out, but the holes remain. And you think of the hurt, the pain, the consequence that your words, my words, can have on other brothers and sisters in Christ. You think, really? Why would I want to be a part of that?

Secondly, and relatedly, it tears at the unity in the body of Christ, tears in the unity of the body here in this local congregation. Ephesians 4:25. And thirdly, we grieve the Spirit of God both in my life personally, but also in the body of Christ, again, as I just said, Ephesians 4:30.

Well, some final thoughts as we conclude here this morning. I just want to say that it's hard for me to believe that we'll change very much in our speaking one to another unless we call on the Holy Spirit. But the good news is, because of the Spirit, everything that I've said is possible.

First, call on the Holy Spirit to convict us of any patterns of unholy speech and repent. Repent and experience the forgiveness of God. Be convicted, repent, and experience the forgiveness of God.

And secondly, ask God's help that we would be a person that speaks the truth in love—truthers in love. Well, you say, “Well, Hutz, you know, I think I'm pretty good here. You know, this is—you're talking about peccadillos here, really, and you know this is not that big a deal for me,” or you're making a bigger deal. But well, you know what? Ask those people around you what they think, because they'll give you a pretty good indication that maybe this is a little bit bigger deal than what you and I think it might be.

And again I say, would those around you call you a ceiling person, bringing others up, or are you a basement person always drawing others down? And ask them to hold you accountable in your speech.

And then for those in this room, which I would believe would be many of you that are really, really serious about growing in this area, I strongly encourage you to do a study of Scripture on speech, on speaking, on words, on vows, on tongue, on your tongue. There are so many verses. I've actually thought about writing a book about this. There's so many verses that speak about speech and speaking and tongue and—not tongues, but your tongue and vows and words.

But let me just suggest one and close with this. The book of Proverbs is a great book to start, a great book to start, because the book of Proverbs talks so much about our speech. It gives pithy statements about what godly and ungodly speech look like. And you can do this very simply. Just draw three columns on a piece of paper, write down the number of the proverb, write down the second column “godly words,” and then the third column “ungodly words.” I'll give you an example: ****Proverbs 10:32****. Godly words: ***“The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable.”*** Ungodly words: ***“The mouth of the wicked knows what is perverse.”***

And I'm not going to take the time here, but I got several verses of Proverbs that I went through and did that very thing: godly words, ungodly words. The book of James and Ephesians are also great books to glean biblical wisdom and insights about our speech.

You know, it's very interesting, the Bible tells us what a perfect man is. Did you know that? The Bible tells us what a perfect man is. And interesting, it's not a man who gives a lot of money, or worships a lot, or prays a lot—all those things are very important. In James 3:2, the Bible defines a perfect man as this: that if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. Isn't that interesting? That that's how a perfect man is defined—as someone who's to not stumble in his speech.

And I've yet to find in me a perfect man or woman, and my guess is you probably haven't either, because we've all sinned in our speech many times. And as I said before, the sobering news is God holds us accountable. But the incredibly wonderful news is that there is grace and mercy to those who come to him in repentance and asking for forgiveness.

This side of eternity we'll all fall short of God's holy standard, but again, because of the gospel, the good news of the gospel, God in Christ has fulfilled what we have failed to do, to use our tongue for his glory and the good of others. And so we want to look to him as Jesus, who is our living Word, who redeemed us for our sinful words with nothing less than his life. And this is the great news of the Gospel: that Jesus Christ came that we might be redeemed even from our sinful speech and patterns of speech that are not honoring or glorifying to Him.

So join me as we conclude and pray together for God's help.

“Father, we are eternally grateful for your living Word, that is Jesus Christ, who became flesh and dwelt among us, who bought us and redeemed us, including all of our ill-spoken and sinful words, by your blood. Father, thank you for putting a new song in our mouths, and we know that for all eternity we will praise you and thank you for what you have done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. May it never be said of any of us here, or of Cornerstone Church, that with our tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. God, may it never be. O Lord, please help us. We humbly pray, Father, for your great glory and for the good of all, that we may speak in a way that honors and glorifies you. We ask and pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Thank you so much, worship team, and thank you all so much for being here. There may be some visitors here. I'm kind of a visitor myself, so I don't really know who's visiting and who isn't, but thank you for being here. And people have asked me about the future of Cornerstone Church. This is what I say: the future is as bright as the promises of God. That's a very, very bright future, folks, and I'm very excited for what God may have in the next chapter for this church and so glad to just have a very little part in what God is doing here. I'd like to pray God's blessing as we dismiss.

Father, thank you so much for the opportunity to gather in your name. And Lord, on this special Sunday—every Sunday is special—but on this special Sunday of Rededicate 250, Lord, we pray that we will be faithful in praying for our nation, our leaders, even this day, Lord, but beyond this day. And then, Lord, for our church leaders, Lord, and for this church, Lord, help us to be faithful prayer intercessors for our leaders, this congregation, and the people here. And Lord, for our own families, for those that we work with, we pray, O God, that we would show forth the love and light of Christ, Lord, beginning with our speech and how we speak to one another. May we truly be men and women who speak the truth in love, and may Christ be so glorified in our lives. Thank you, Lord, for this time. I pray now your blessing and benediction on each and every person and on their families. And together we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

****Scripture References (in order mentioned):****

- 2 Chronicles 7:14
- Joel 2:12–14
- Deuteronomy 23:23
- Zechariah 8:16–17
- Psalm 141:3
- Matthew 12:36–37
- James 5:12
- Ephesians 4:15
- Ephesians 4:25
- Ephesians 4:29
- Ephesians 4:31
- Ephesians 5:4
- Ephesians 5:6
- Proverbs 25:11
- Proverbs 15:23
- Proverbs 24:26
- Deuteronomy 32:1–3
- Isaiah 50:4
- Luke 4:22
- Colossians 4:6
- James 4:11
- Psalm 101
- Ephesians 4:25
- Ephesians 4:30
- Proverbs 10:32

1. Opening: National Day of Prayer and Rededication

Dr. Hertzberg began by reading a proclamation from Speaker of the House Mike Johnson calling the nation to a historic day of prayer and rededication to God on May 17, 2026—the 250th anniversary of the 1776 Continental Congress day of prayer and fasting.

He led the congregation in a focused time of prayer in two parts:

- **Repentance**: Personal, for the local church (“Big C” Church), and for the nation, based on **Chronicles 7:14**. Elder Ninos closed this segment.
- **Rededication**: Personal, for the church, and for the nation (including leaders), based on **Joel 2:12–14**. Elder Rich closed this segment with a prayer of dedication.

The emphasis was on humility, turning from wicked ways, seeking God’s face, and asking for healing, mercy, and guidance for the church and nation.

2. Main Sermon: The Power and Responsibility of Our Words

Dr. Hertzberg shifted to the main message, noting that every person has both received and given harmful, deceitful, or sinful words—even within the church. God calls believers to a **wholly and holy** standard that reflects His own character (truth, integrity, consistency, covenant-keeping).

He stressed that Scripture takes our speech extremely seriously. Key supporting verses included:

- **Deuteronomy 23:23** (keep your vows)
- **Zechariah 8:16–17** (speak truth, no false oaths)
- **Psalm 141:3** (guard your mouth)
- **Matthew 12:36–37** (we will give account for every careless word; by our words we will be justified or condemned)
- **James 5:12** (let your yes be yes, or you will be condemned)

The goal is to become people who **“speak the truth in love”** (**Ephesians 4:15**) — “truthers in love,” as John Stott phrased it.

3. Focus Verse: Ephesians 4:29

The sermon centered on **Ephesians 4:29**:

> “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it might give grace to those who hear.”

Negative command: No corrupting (rotten, putrid, filthy, decay-spreading) talk — including profanity, gossip, slander, dishonest words, or speech that runs others down.

Three Positive Commands (transforming truths):

1. **Speak Edifying Words** (build others up)

Words should encourage, instruct, and strengthen faith and Christ-likeness.

- Illustration: Basement people (pull others down) vs. Ceiling people (lift others up).
- True encouragement uses Scripture and builds hope in God’s promises, not mere flattery.
- Example: Barnabas (“Son of Encouragement”) in Acts.

2. **Speak Appropriate Words** (as fits the occasion)

Requires sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, listening, wisdom, and patience.

- Seek to understand before being understood (Stephen Covey).
- Supported by Proverbs: timely words are like “apples of gold in settings of silver” (**Proverbs 25:11**); an honest answer is like a kiss on the lips (**Proverbs 24:26**).
- Sometimes the best response is silence.

3. **Speak Grace-Giving Words** (that give grace to those who hear)

Our highest goal is to be conduits of God’s grace.

- Moses’ desire (**Deuteronomy 32:1–3**) — gentle, life-giving speech despite a speech impediment.
- Isaiah’s prophecy of Jesus (**Isaiah 50:4**); fulfilled in **Luke 4:22**).
- Paul’s command: “Let your speech always be gracious” (**Colossians 4:6**).

4. Why This Matters

Personally:

- Disobedience brings brokenness (**James 4:11**).
- We forfeit God’s blessing and favor.
- Our words can condemn or justify us on Judgment Day.

Corporately (in the church):

- Wounding words create lasting damage (like holes in a board after nails are removed).
- They tear unity (**Ephesians 4:25**).
- They grieve the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 4:30**).

5. Practical Application and Closing Challenge

- Ask the Holy Spirit for conviction and help.
- Repent of sinful speech patterns and receive forgiveness.
- Seek accountability from others (spouse, friends).
- Study Scripture on speech (especially Proverbs — chart godly vs. ungodly words; also James and Ephesians).
- Remember: A “perfect” person is defined by not stumbling in speech (James 3).

Dr. Hertzberg closed by pointing to the Gospel: Jesus, the Living Word, redeems us from our sinful words through His life, death, and resurrection. We fall short, but God’s grace empowers us to grow in gracious, edifying speech.

The sermon ended in prayer, giving thanks for Christ’s redemption.

Overall Theme: Our daily speech is a serious spiritual matter that reveals our character, affects others profoundly, and carries eternal weight. By the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are called to replace corrupting words with edifying, appropriate, and grace-filled words that honor God and build up the body of Christ.