

Sermon: Speech that Builds Up Ephesians 4:29

We are continuing our study through Ephesians and this morning we are looking at Ephesians 4:29. This passage deals with our speech.

Now to put this passage in context, Paul is explaining to us what it means to live the new life in Christ. And the presupposition is now that we are in Christ, everything has become new for us. We have been born again and recreated in his image.

And because we are new in Christ through faith – we have to put on Christ in every way. So, we have studied how: We are to tell the truth with one another.

We are to not sin in our anger.
We are not steal but rather work hard and

share.

And as challenging as these commands have been, I believe that this morning we will encounter Paul's most difficult command in this section.

So, let's read Ephesians 4:29 and study how we might put on Christ in our speech.

Hear the word of God:

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 may give grace to those who hear.

Say: This is God's word.
The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.
Pray.

So we have a simple verse before us that breaks down neatly into three parts.

First, we have the command of what not to do:

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths

Second, we have the command of what we are to do:

but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion,

And Third, we have a reason why:

that it may give grace to those who hear.

These points will form our outline which is printed in your worship order.
The first point is...

I. Let No Corrupting Talk Come Out of Your Mouths

Now we talk a lot.

A study posted by the university of Pennsylvania Linguistics department tells us that humans speak on average 7439 words per day. This means that if you're a talker for 73 years then that works out to nearly 200 million words spoken in a lifetime.

So, let's consider that for a moment:
We speak nearly 200 million words in a lifetime and Paul's command is: **Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths...**

Obviously the sheer volume of our words opens us up to all kinds of opportunities to sin.

And by sin, I mean hurting others with our words, offending them, discouraging them and making them feel small.

We can sin by speaking words that are crude, unhelpful, selfish or proud.

We can sin by gossiping, lying, or exaggerating.

Finally, we can sin by speaking untimely words that do not reflect God's heart and mind in that moment.

When you think about it, our speech is perhaps the area in which we sin most – second only to our sins of the mind.

And why is this?

Well it's because of the conditions of our hearts of course.

Jesus told us in Luke 6:43-45

Luke 6:43 "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, **44** for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. **45** The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Our words reveal who we really are.

They reveal our hearts.

You might think you know somebody because of the way they dress or because of the job they have.

Yet you don't really get to know a person until you talk with them at length.

Our words reveal what kind of person we are on the inside.

Jesus told us this himself in one of his more animated moments with the Pharisees.

Matthew 12:34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. **35** The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Our words reveal us.

So what's in you?

I believe one of the first effects this command ought to have on us is to call us to repentance.

And as I have considered this passage, I have found myself having much to repent of.

Yet it's easier for me to talk about my repentance in front of you because other church leaders have had to do the same.

Most notably, the prophet Isaiah.

Do you recall his fateful run-in with God in Isaiah 6?

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw the Lord...

Isaiah 6:1 ...sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. **5** And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Isaiah is saying, "I have dirty mouth. And I live amongst a bunch of people who have dirty mouths as well."

Isaiah's vision of God immediately brought him to repentance- specifically for the things he has said.

And so this topic of our speech gives us a great opportunity to examine our hearts and repent afresh.

James tells us:

James 3:2 ...if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

You see, once we get our words under control so that they are consistently honest, loving, up-building and appropriate- well then we've arrived.

There's just one problem. Have you ever met anyone who would say they've arrived in this area?

If our words were scrutinized- if every word we spoke every week- was projected up on the wall to be scrutinized by the entire congregation- then we'd just hang our head in shame wouldn't we.

Everybody would see our hubris and vanity. They'd see how crass we can be. How petty. They'd see how we can be downright mean.

That scenario of having our words displayed for all to see isn't too far-fetched.

Jesus himself said:

Matthew 12:36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

And so, regarding our speech, I believe we all have a hefty amount of repenting to do.

Paul tells us to "Let no corrupting talk come out of [our] mouths"

And the word here that is translated "corrupting" provides us with a vivid analogy.

Often when we think of corruption or corrupting, we think of shady business or political practices.

We may even think of corrupted computer files.

Yet in Ephesians 4:29, the corruption being referred to is the corruption of death.

It's what happens to a tree or an animal when it dies.

And so the image is that of decay and the putrid smell that goes along with it.

This sort of corruption stinks.

Corrupting speech is speech that is the result of decay in our hearts and it leads to decay in those who hear it. It's harmful, unwholesome, foul speech.

And of course this can refer to filthy language, crude humor or salacious gossip.

But corrupting talk can also refer simply to **trifling talk and self-absorbed rambling.**

It's the sort of talk that happens when people in a conversation try to out-do one another with stories or when we try to impress people with the things we know. Corrupting speech comes out of us when we are desperate to be heard but we don't really have anything good to say.

Proverbs 10:19 When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

And the root problem of corrupting talk is that our hearts are corrupt.

Matthew 12:34 ...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

So what does your speech tell you about your heart? What words and conversations do you need to repent of?

Now, Paul does not simply give us a prohibition. He also gives us a positive command and that leads us to our next point which is...

II. Rather, Speak What is Good for Building Up, As Fits the Occasion

Simply put, Paul commands us to use our words to edify one another.

The word **edify** gives us a perfect picture of the point Paul is getting at when he says that we should build one another up.

The English word edify comes from the Latin word "**aedificare**" which means "to build."

And the Greek word that Paul uses expresses the same idea.

Now that we are in Christ, **our words are to be used to build others up.**

Literally our words should be spiritually constructive.

Our example in this is God himself.

Consider how he used speech in Genesis 1.

He spoke the worlds into existence. He used words to create.

And not just that, God also used words to express blessing in the form naming and Benediction.

A benediction is literally a good word or good speech.

In Numbers 6:22-27 we have an example of this:

Numbers 6:22 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **23**

"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

24 The LORD bless you and keep you;

25 the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Numbers 6:27 "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

God blesses us by putting his name on us and giving us a benediction.

Finally, Jesus is the word.

He is the sermon of God- all that he said and did- His being- he was and is the Word.

Jesus's task was to construct the Kingdom.

And He used words to this end.

Consider his final words to his disciples as a group in John 16:33:

33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Consider also His final word on the Cross in John's gospel- how it gives us confidence that our sin is paid for:

He said: Tetelestai, which means: It is finished.
Jesus didn't say this for his own benefit, but rather for ours.
He had completed the work that God had set out for him.
He paid for our sins.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Jesus used speech to build up Paul's spirit, when Paul was struggling with a painful trial. Jesus said:

2 Corinthians 12:9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Jesus uses words to build us up, to remind us of our salvation and who we are in him.
And because Jesus used words to build us up, we are to use our speech to build others up spiritually.

E. V. Hill Story- when he preached at his wife's funeral.
"She could have ruined me."
She could have said: "I am the daughter of Dr. Carruthers. And I could have married a man who would have provided me with everything I needed..."
But instead she just said: "I just thought we'd eat by candlelight."

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue

And in Christ, we are to speak only that which is good for building up, as fits the occasion.

Our speaking to edify others is not just a person to person, individual to individual duty.
Our goal is not simply to build others up in Christ.
Our greater goal **is to build up the whole body of Christ.**

And that is the scope of Paul's command.
Paul isn't only concerned with individuals.
His concern is for the whole church community.
Remember back to Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul said:
Ephesians 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

And then later in v. 15:
15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** [who] makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Our goal of edifying others with our speech should not be individually focused.
God wants us to think in terms of the entire church- so that the church becomes a community that reflects the heart and mind of God.

In 1 Corinthians 3:9, Paul says:
9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

So, imagine if you had it as your goal to only speak those words which would build others up?
How many less words would you speak on a given day?
And what effect would this edifying speech have on your relationships?
In your family?
At work?
In the church?

Certainly, the result of such speech would be more peace and harmony in all of our relationships.

So, after having considered Paul's prohibition and his command regarding speech, we now come to the reason why.

III. Give Grace to Those Who Hear

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 may give grace to those who hear.

The goal of Christian speech, is that it would give grace to those who hear.
Now what does Paul mean by giving grace?

Does he mean that we are just to be kind and forgiving? Well, yes, but he means much more than that.

Paul wants us to speak in such a way that leads to the **salvation** and **sanctification** of others.

And this means that our way of talking should remind others that there is a God, that He is holy and pure, that he is just, that he is compassionate and that he has provided a way of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Now of course we can communicate these truths directly to others.

But also, and this is more the sense of what I believe Paul means, our words are to reflect these truths even when they are not spoken directly.

Our words are to be so true, so loving, so rightly timed, that it is as though Jesus himself were speaking them.

This is undoubtedly a high standard- but this is precisely what should be the case for us as we are new people in Christ Jesus.

We are to put on Christ and this should show itself in how we speak.

Paul writes in Colossians 4:6
Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

We are to speak with the **timeliness** and **delicacy** of Jesus Christ.

And so this means that we will have to be very thoughtful concerning the words that come out of our mouths.

In Psalm 141:3, David Prayed:

Psalm 141:3 Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;
keep watch over the door of my lips!

To speak as Christ himself spoke, we will have to be watchful.

Again, in Psalm 19:14, David prayed:

Psalms 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

God is calling us to no longer be loose with our words but rather to be intentional, sensitive and gracious. He wants our words to be life giving. And this means that everything we say should tend either directly or indirectly toward the **salvation** and **sanctification** of others.

The people we speak with should hear Christ in our words. They should hear His love, wholesomeness, sensitivity and truthfulness.

And whether or not we have the opportunity to speak directly about the Gospel, such a manner of speaking will be different from that of the world.

Our world is very loose with words and often they are hurled with destructive intent. God would have us speak words that give life. Words that heal. Words that sanctify and save.

This means that many of us will have to learn to speak less. And all of us have to be more intentional with what we say. Because our goal in the end is to put on Christ in how we speak.

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 may give grace to those who hear.

Amen.

Closing Prayer:

Take my voice and let me sing, always only for my king.
Take my lips and let them be, filled with messages from thee.
Filled with messages from thee.