

EPHESIANS - Ephesians 4:29

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INTRO: If one were to put the practical sections of Paul's books under a theological title, it would be the doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification is the process of becoming holy. In the original language, the words saint, holy, and sanctification all come from the root word having to do with holiness. Holiness has to do with separation from sin.

Now why does Paul have to tell Christians not to lie, and not sin when they get angry, and to not steal? Don't Christians know that. Jones points out that the world gets this idea that because you claim to be a Christian that means you will not do wrong any more. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says it anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.

Well, the world does not receive spiritual things. They do not understand that there is a difference between the Christians standing and his state. They do not understand the process of sanctification. When a person is born again, he or she is a babe in Christ. The process of becoming holy has just begun.

It is amazing to observe new Christians. Sometimes when a person who is a cigarette smoker or an alcoholic becomes a Christian, just like that they are over that addiction and they have no interest in those things any more. Others struggle for years with those old desires. LEM tells of a lady who said, "I never had a temper until I became a Christian." Some may of a sudden battle battles they didn't have before.

But there is one common denominator in all who truly become believers. It is this: The process of sanctification will take a life-time for all. One will struggle more with one thing than another. Some will fight the automatic instinct of lying. Some will fight anger. Some will fight the desire to steal. But one thing is clear, through faith we can overcome any sin there is.

d. Regarding communication

Well, we now come to another area in which the process of sanctification will need to go to work. So we go to verse 29:

29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Now consider for a moment the topic before us. It is the words that come out of our mouth; words, communication. I asked Mr. Google how many words a person speaks in a day on average. They used to say that men spoke about 7,000 and women 15,000 - 20,000. New studies cannot verify that claim. There was a joke at one time about the loon on Canada's loonie coin. The question was: How do you know the loon on the coin is not a female. And the answer was, "Because it's mouth is closed."

Well, today's studies there is little difference between the amount of words men and women speak in a day. I expect the first study was done by a man and the last by a woman. I am joking, of course. Words. Now note our text is not concerned with the number of words that come out of our mouth, but rather with the quality.

Today, what we eat has become a very big thing to many. Oh we are so concerned about what goes in the mouth. But check to see how much concern is put on what comes out of the mouth.

Now speech is necessary and we would not want to give the idea we should try to do without it. It is good to sit and relax and visit.

Speech, communication, words, how big is the subject before us. I remind us that the Ephesians had been pagans not too long before this letter came to them.

What do pagan societies speak like? Today's unreached people groups, how do they speak? Well, read what Paul said in verses 17-19 about the Ephesians pre-conversion life and you will get a very good idea of what they spoke like.

Listen to James 3:6. He says:

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

-What not to do

So we come then to our verse. Once again we have a verse that first tells us what not to do. Then it tells us what we are to do, and then why we are to do it. So we begin with the negative, what we are not to do. It says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth..." The mouth, the tongue, what instruments these are. Stop and consider sometime what all we need the mouth for. We use it to drink and to eat and we use it to speak and to sing and other things as well.

Well, our text has to do with the use of the mouth for communicating words. Now there are all kinds of words; good words, bad words, nice words, kind words, sweet words, ugly words and more. And Paul tells us now first what kind of words we should not allow to proceed out of our mouth. He tells us to let no corrupt word go out of our mouth.

I mentioned earlier the doctrine of sanctification. After having gone through verses 22-24 and the three infinitives of these verses I am amazed again and again at the instruction of the middle infinitive. I have studied the doctrine of

sanctification for many years. How to gain victory over sin is a huge subject. But I know of no more clear verse of Scripture to explain how sanctification takes place than verse 23, a verse, the understanding of which escaped me for many years. Verse 22 instructs us to put off the old man. Verse 24 instructs us to put on the new man. But verse 23 tells us how to do that. It is to be renewed by the Holy Spirit with reference to the mind. The most crucial part of the soul is the mind. And if we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds by putting our minds under the influence of the Word of God, one of the areas it will affect is the way we speak.

Now Paul says we are to let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth. So, of course, we ask: Just what are corrupt words? The original word for corrupt is *sapros*. The Onlinebible says regarding this word that it means, rotten or putrefied. Second it says, corrupted by one and no longer fit for use, worn out; of poor quality, bad, unfit for use, worthless. Well now, what is a rotten word? A word that is putrefying?

Many years ago I watched a Western movie. I am not recommending that here. But it was called, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." I have used that title to do a message on three kinds of people and I called them the good, the bad, and the ugly. Then I did a message on words, and I called them the good, the bad, and the ugly. And we are asking, just what are corrupt words?

Paul was speaking to the Ephesians who had just recently come out of heathendom. Those who have been missionaries in heathen lands testify just how corrupt the language is among these people. I find many of our Mennonite people use language

that is far too plain, sometimes bordering on vulgar and crude.

There are bad words. I mean they are evil. There is speech not fit for a pig barn. There is speech that corrupts at high speed. But there are also a lot of ugly words. They contaminate the mind. It is said of some people, "Well, you know so and so. They say it the way it is." Well, that is not necessarily a virtue.

Well, among professing Christians, the usual problem is using what I call ugly words. We do not generally use very evil words, but we use corrupting language. Words that do not belong in the Christian vocabulary.

Let me quote from the message I did a good number of years ago on words I called ugly:

- Words Bordering on Swearing ***

So, of these ugly words, let us begin with words that border on swearing. When I was at Prairie Bible Institute I took a course that was then taught for the last time called *Law and Grace*. Paul Maxwell was the teacher. He was teaching on the commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Then he pointed out that words like *gosh*, *golly*, *gee whiz* are taking the name of the Lord in vain cautiously. (Let me just add here that this is profanity. It is to speak in irreverent ways about godly things.)

One of the regrets I carry of my pre Christian days is when I first entered the work force in a large sawmill. Oh what ungodly people worked there. I was extremely intimidated by these ungodly cursing men and I was in no way prepared to stand spiritually. I recall how I could not

bring myself to use the Lord's name in vain the way they did but I used words that sounded like I was swearing. Oh the shame it brings to me as I think about that. If only I had been a strong believer and had stood spiritually firm, but I was not. Gosh, golly and darn didn't even come near enough to sounding like good swear words. They sounded too timid.

Now some words can carry very many different meanings. But one of the words used back in those days as a slang word for the marital relationship was the word 'screw'. It was used just like another very ugly four letter word when I worked in these ungodly places. When I became a Christian, I found to my utter astonishment, it had been Christianized. That is course language! It is ugly and many don't even know the meaning behind it. What do people mean by it? Well, check it in a good dictionary and see which of its variety of uses fits best.

- Vulgar words

Well there is another class of ugly words, words that are not actually curse words. I call these vulgar words. Vulgar language is course language or crude language. It lacks refinement and has a definite affect on character. Sometimes these are used as a form of swearing. I hate to use examples here but I am speaking of using vulgar terms for excrement or such like. I hope that is clear enough without further explanation. Let me use an expression not quite so crude so you might see how this sounds coming in a message from the pulpit, "Oh that sucks." I ask you, is that acceptable speech? Maybe you say, "You shouldn't say that from the pulpit." Then let us lay that expression aside in our every day life.

- Slang words

Then there are slang words. These are ugly too. Slang is the unconventional use of words of standard vocabulary. We talk about the innards of man or animal as 'guts'. But we might say, "I hate his guts." Isn't that crude? I would encourage us all this morning to look at our own language. Let us remove all forms of blasphemy, cursing, swearing, vulgar terms, slang words and any kind of unnecessary words that are simply useless. If these are a part of our lives, let us acknowledge that it is not an innocent habit but a revelation of character. Let us come before the Lord and confess and repent. Let us say to Him, "Lord, my words reveal a wicked heart. Forgive me Lord for my light use of language. Cleanse me from thinking in slang terms and vulgar terms because my mouth reveals that in my heart I think like this." And from that time on, let us consider ever so carefully the language we use.

And to quote him again, he says, "Scarcely anything can be conceived more corrupt or corrupting than that which often prevails among young men – and even young men in the academies and colleges of this land." This is true among the unsaved and it is sometimes true among the saved. We have professing Christians sit among those who tell off-color jokes and some even laugh, whether they find it funny or whether they don't have the courage to let others know they don't approve one might not know.

Dirty jokes, off color jokes; sayings with double meanings have a rotting effect on the soul. These thoughts run through the mind and bring rotten things that were known before back into the mind and the effect is further decay and the mind becomes contaminated with a stink.

Now I would propose that music can corrupt otherwise good words.

People say, "There is nothing wrong with music. A musical note cannot be wrong. It is the words that make music right or wrong. You can have Christian rock. All you need is the right words." But music can corrupt words! Music has the good, the bad and the ugly as well.

Listen to Christian radio. They play music that old people like and then they play music that the young people like. That way they get both to listen to their station. What the affect of the music is on the words is argued away. And we wonder why things are the way they are. This holds true for many churches. Music has become a big factor in leading to the Laodicean Church age. Music has the power to corrupt words. The actions on stage, the lights, all the hype of a lot of so called Christian music has the power to corrupt the words, or at least render them powerless, no matter how good the words might be.

And someone will say, "Just a minute. You prove to me that notes can be wrong, that notes can corrupt words. Christian radio is run by Christians. They would not play songs with bad words." No, they play music that has a rotting influence on the words.

A good many years ago we went through a series on music by Frank Garlock, who was taught at Bob Jones University and more recently at Pensecola Christian College. He gave this example of what just one part of music, tone, can do to words. Let us say somebody gives you a gift and you say, "Thanks a lot." If you read those words they would be perfectly in order. But as soon as you add the tone, it corrupts the meaning of the words. So you can have someone belch out the words "Messiah" with the guitar on high

distortion, but the effects of that wonderful word on the soul of those who listen is anything but godly.

Is there nothing wrong with a musical note? If you leave it at one note, that is correct. You could say the same thing about the letters of the alphabet. Can a letter of the alphabet be wrong? Leave it at one letter and it is OK, generally. Even a letter can be given a corrupt meaning. But generally one letter is OK. Add two or three letters and soon you can have something that will leave a corrupting trail in the mind. So it is with music. Add a few notes to that one note, and it can change it all.

1 Corinthians 15:33 says: "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" That holds true literally, it holds true of the letters of the alphabet or musical notes. Now when you have that which is pure and lovely, those do not carry this corrupting influence with them.

I do not know if I am overly sensitive but I find many pastors, and I would say, especially those south of the border, use language that is far to plain. They speak of things related to physical morality far too explicitly for me. I do not like to use a certain word referring to gender because of what it conjures up in many minds. They are words that want to have a corrupting or rotting affect in the minds of at least some. I find speech referring to the regenerative process far too loosely and lightly used and it wants to begin to corrupt.

Now where do corrupt words that proceed out of the mouth come from? Well, it is no mystery. Listen to Jesus on this. Matthew 12:34-34:

34 *"Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good*

things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

35 *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.*

They come out of the heart, which is the mind. So Jesus says in Matthew 15:18-19:

18 *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.*

19 *"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*

So we see that corrupt communications proceed out of the heart, or the mind. When we hear corrupt speech, it is the mind that is affected or infected. Now the way to fix the heart, I think, is in two ways. First, it is to have the mind renewed by the Holy Spirit. If we put the right things into our mind, the Holy Spirit will use that to bring us to repentance.

But the facts remain, that no matter how much truth of the Word of God we feed into our minds, we have a sin nature. So unwittingly we may see things we should not see. Or we are in the company of people and they say things we do not want to hear. But there it is. Now the second step to cutting this whole process of having things placed in the mind without further communicating them is to not let them proceed out of our mouth. Once we further communicate those, the corruption just grows.

Now let me say something that I have learned that has helped me a great deal. When I was in business I would go into machine shops or parts shops and so on.

And some of these are very filthy places with lewd pictures and very crude language. And I found that when I inadvertently came into contact with something I did not want to see, if I immediately turned away and refused to revisit the place with my eyes, later those things did not recall and I could get rid of them. When we hear things, if we never repeat them they will lose their power as well.

So there are two important things. Put the right things into the mind, and second, don't feed the mind.

-What to do - pure words

But the apostle has not only told us what words not to use. That is putting off from the old man. But he tells us what words to use in verse 6. He says: but let that proceed out of your mouth which is good to the use of edifying.

There is a progression to words. Words are thought up in the thinking part of the mind, called the *phreen* in the Greek of the NT. That is the data processor of the mind. Now the decision whether to say those words or not is made by the self, the person. The self is the president of the entire being we call a human being. When Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ..." it is the self that he is talking about. The president of the whole of the individual dies with Christ when a person is born again. And then the self comes under new ownership. So he says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live I live in the flesh I by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

The pronouns *I* and *me* refer to the person, the self. Eight times in that verse, the self is referred to in

Galatians 2:20. The mind, the heart, the computer of man, is an extremely complex unit. It is influenced by many things, not the least of which is the sin nature. The five senses heavily influence the mind, but the self ultimately decides what to do. The self is responsible for every word that proceeds out of the mouth.

Speech is a revelation of the self, the real person. Jones says, "The second obvious thing about Christian speech is that it is no longer selfish or self-centered. The believer should never set out just to be admired or to be important or to be thought wonderful in conversation. Never! That is the old man. Put it off! Stop it! says Paul. Have nothing to do with it, you have been brought out of that; never put yourself forward or seek an opportunity for self-display..." (V:258).

So in our verses, here is the task of the self:

He is to decide to put away lying. He is to decide to speak truth with everyone. He is to decide he will not sin when he gets angry and if deep-seated anger sets in he is to decide to take care of it before he sleeps in that night. He is to decide not to make room for the devil. He is to decide to not steal anymore. He is to decide to work and he is to decide to give to others when he has earned money. He is to decide to let no corrupt communications proceed out of his mouth. He is to decide to speak that which is good. He is to decide to speak those things that edify. He is to decide to minister grace to others.

When temptations assail this person through the sin nature, when others put things into his or her mind by speech or any other communication, the self is

to not let the desires of the heart rule what he does. He is to make the decision what is right because he has that information stored in his mind as well. He decides. He is responsible. The self will go to hell if he or she gives in to the wrong desires. Self is responsible for every decision.

So we note now that the believer is to let only that proceed out of his mouth which is good. Let me say here that I found this verse very difficult to translate from the original. But as I see it, a word crucial to understanding this passage is the word the NKJV translates as "necessary." In the original, the word translated necessary here is not an adjective. It is a noun. So it is that which the need is. What is meant by the word *good* is then that which edifies for whatever the need may be. The word to edify is that which builds people up.

Let me give you a very literal translation which supplies the elliptical words as well:

Do not let any corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but if (there is) a need, let that which is good for edification proceed out of your mouth that it may give grace to the hearer.

It is difficult to interpret this word need. Jones says it refers that we speak that which fits the occasion. Sometimes witnessing does not fit the occasion, sometimes it does. It is not always easy to determine what should or should not be said, or what is appropriate and what is not.

Let me give you an example of how this becomes difficult. In our home town was a Dutchman who was a barber. He was an incredible whistler. He could make almost every kind of bird sound, but he was not a believer. And then one day he got saved and

he was on fire for the Lord. But all of a sudden his barber job became a very difficult task. Somehow he thought he had to witness to every person who came for a haircut. And to use Jones' words, John the Barber had to learn to use speech that fit the occasion.

There are some people in whose presence it is not good to speak about spiritual things. Jesus said, "Don't cast your pearls before swine." He said that in the same context where He said, "Judge not." But He did not mean we must not judge. In the context He taught that we must not judge hypocritically. To determine who is a dog, one must make a judgment. And Jesus said, "When you are in the presence of dogs, don't speak good things that they will turn into dirty things." I have been, and no doubt many of you have been in just such a situation. It is not an occasion to say some precious things about the Lord.

But if in the course of the conversation an opportunity presented itself for edification then one should speak according to the need. Let us say church problems have occurred and you are speaking with someone familiar with the churches involved but this person is not a believer. It becomes very important what one does and what one does not say.

And again, one may be an older believer and speak things with younger believers that they are not ready for. Paul said he had to feed some with milk because they were not ready for meat (Hebrews 5). When I think back I have failed in many things in speech, even in spiritual things.

Then, in speech, there are times when just talking about the weather and pleasantries are appropriate. But there are other times when we need to speak up on things that are anything but pleasant.

Sometimes to not say that which is right and that fits the need, is cowardice, and untrue to the Lord.

-Why to do it

Well, we go on in our text. Not only has Paul told us what words we should not use and which ones we should use, but he tells us why. Let me read once more a literal translation, supplying the elliptical words once more:

Do not let any corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but if (there is) a need, let that which is good for edification proceed out of your mouth that it may give grace to the hearer.

Consider now the words, "...that it may give grace to the hearer." Surely we must ask, what does this mean, giving grace to the hearer? How many of you have heard someone say, "I gave so and so some grace"? Just what does that mean? Just how do you give someone grace? Well, here we have those very words and we need to spend some time here.

What it means to give someone grace depends entirely on how you define grace. Normally, I think, when someone says they gave another grace they mean they overlooked some weakness or maybe even some sin. It might go something like this, "I know what he did was not right but I gave him grace." What do we mean by a statement like that?

Our text is helpful in clearing up the question, as to what it means to give grace. Once again the word *need* in our text is important. If there is a need that should be addressed, we are to speak words that edify, or build up. Why such words? In order that our words might impart or give grace to the hearer. So how can our words give grace

to the hearer?

Before we look at that, let me first define grace as I understand it. Negatively, grace is not overlooking weaknesses or sin. That would be forbearance, but it is not giving grace. Then positively, in the NT grace is the means by which we get the things we need to live a godly life. And how do we get them? Freely! They are given to us. That is why it is grace. So Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,*

9 *not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Now notice salvation is by grace. What is received is received by grace, not by working for it. And second, it is a gift. It is not something we work for. So grace is the means by which we get salvation. We don't get grace. We get salvation, and by grace is how we get it.

But second, grace may stand by metonymy for that which is received freely. The very word *metonymy* means after or altered name. For example, when someone is in desperate need of something, and another provides that which is needed freely, we say that is grace. Let me use yet another example. Someone has bought a nice speed drill for a friend for Christmas. And he says, "This is a gift." But it isn't. It is a speed drill. But because it is given as a present, it is called a gift. The word "gift" here stands by metonymy for a speed drill that will be given away as a present. So you can say that that speed drill is a gift. The name 'speed drill' has been altered to the name 'gift'.

Turn to Hebrews 4:15-16. It says:

15 *For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

16 *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Here is how I define grace. It is help in time of need, but it is grace because it is received freely. Now the word translated 'need' in verse 16 is not the same as the word 'need' in our text. The word here means it is timely help. It is help at an opportune time. So I define grace as being whatever you need whenever you need it in order to become a Christian or to live the victorious Christian life. And that which you get when you need it comes without requiring you to work for it. It is a gift. So Scripture says, "For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Now note this again about this verse. Grace is not the gift, salvation is. Grace is the means of getting this salvation, and that means it comes freely.

Now let me read our verse once more:

29 *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*

So the words that are to proceed out of our mouth when someone is in need are words that may give grace. Notice that the words that come out of the mouth are viewed as good and they are words that edify the other, and through these edifying words the other may be given grace. Here, grace stands by metonymy for that which is given. But that may be any one of a myriad

of things so it is simply referred to as grace.

Now let me give you an example. You go to someone for advice. You have a spiritual situation and you do not know what to do. You are stuck. And so you have gone for advice. Now the words you hear are good words, and you are edified. You now understand what to do. And then you say: "Thank you so much. Now I know exactly what to do." And then you go to your problem and now, because of what you have been told, you have the ability to do that which you could not do before. The grace that was given in that case was the knowledge of how to do what you were stuck on before.

Let me give you a further example. Let us say I grew up learning to steal. My dad was my teacher, and I am troubled with stealing. Whenever the opportunity comes, I just have the greatest desire to steal. I steal money from the government by cheating on my taxes. I steal from my boss by marking down more time than I should. And then one day I get saved. And now I have a great desire to live right. And then comes this opportunity to steal and it is especially tempting. But I don't want to. But somehow I don't have the ability, the dunamis, to overcome the desire. So I steal and oh, how defeated I am. I have tried so hard. But I have done it again.

And so I go to a pastor and I finally open up this dark part of my life. And I confess that I was just in Canadian Tire and I took an expensive tool. And I seriously want to be freed from this thing. And he says, "Oh, dear brother, let me show you something wonderful. When you become a Christian, Jesus Christ paid your price and when God looks at you, He looks at you through Christ. Christ has paid your sins. God now sees

you through Christ and through Christ you have been proclaimed righteous. You need to learn to rejoice in what you are in Christ. You see, you are saved by grace. You cannot earn your salvation."

Well, that is good news. Yes, Christ did take my place, and that is wonderful news. And then comes another temptation but I have not been given anything to help me overcome that temptation.

But let me give you another example. I have stolen this tool from Canadian Tire and I go for advice from a Christian friend. And he says, "You say you stole this tool?" "Yes." "Well now, that is wrong, isn't it?" "Yes, it is, and I don't want to do it any more." "OK. Well, the Bible says if I confess my sin He is faithful and just to forgive my sin and cleanse me from all unrighteousness." And he says, "Yes. I did that already. I did it a number of times but I it still bothers me." Then the counsel goes like this, "But you didn't confess what you did at the right place. You have to confess to those from whom you stole. So I recommend that you bring that tool back to Canadian Tire and confess to the manager what you did and offer to pay whatever he would like you to pay."

Well, that is a very hard thing to do. But you do it. And when it is over you feel so free and clean. And then comes the next time. And before you give in to the desire to steal again, visiting the manager at Canadian Tire comes to mind, and you decide that it is easier to say no to your desires than it is to repent later. You see, the law of counteraction didn't remove the desire to steal, it gave a desire greater than the desire to steal. Repenting last time was able to counteract this sinful desire.

Now let me put that in the context of our verse.

Do not let any corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but if (there is) a need, let that which is good for edification proceed out of your mouth that it may give grace to the hearer.

How can you give grace to another by words? By giving them good words, words that will build up, which, if they heed them, words that will empower them to live right.

CONCL: So we conclude. Words, what powerful things words are. Do not let any corrupt word proceed out of your mouth. But if there is a need, let that which is good for edification proceed out of your mouth. Let the kinds of words proceed out of your mouth that will give grace to the hearer.

Let me ask you, how many of you are Christians? How would you like to know what quality of Christian you are? Then let me ask you, when you sit and visit, what is the majority of your talk about? Is it sports? Is it the weather? Is it politics? Is it fishing? Horses? Motorbikes? Cars? Is it sewing? Is it quilting? Did you know that all of those things are perfectly in order to talk about? Then let me ask all of us, how many words do we use to talk about the most important subject of all?

I have told you about my brother. By this time, according to the doctor, he has about 2 months to live. Now I ask you, what is the most important thing in life? If we love the Lord with all our heart, soul mind and strength, and we know what is most important, do the words we speak indicate that we truly believe that?

