

## Ephesians 4:29-30

### Introduction

(4:17) This therefore I say and testify in the Lord that you no longer walk just as the Gentiles also walk in the futility of their mind, (4:18) being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart, (4:19) who, having become callous have given themselves over to unrestrained degeneracy for the working of every impurity in greediness. (4:20) But you did not learn Christ in this way— (4:21) assuming that you have heard Him and were taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus, (4:22) to put off according to your former manner of life the old man, the one being corrupted according to the cravings of deceit, (4:23) but to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, (4:24) and to put on the new man, the one created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Now Paul goes on to give us some specifics of how we ought to be gladly living out this gospel reality of “the new man”):

**Put OFF:** having put off the lie,  
**Put ON:** speak truth—each of you—with his neighbor,  
**Gospel reason:** because we are members of one another.

**Put OFF:** Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your provocation,  
**Gospel reason:** nor give place to the devil.

**Put OFF:** The one who steals must no longer steal,  
**Put ON:** but rather he must labor, working with his own hands what is good  
**Gospel reason:** so that he might have something to share with the one who has need.

**Put OFF:** Out of your mouth *must not come* any corrupt word,  
**Put ON:** but if there is anything GOOD *let it come out of your mouth* for building up *according to* the NEED  
**Gospel reason:** so that it may give grace to those who hear.  
**Gospel reason:** And *do not grieve* the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

### I. “Out of your mouth must not come any corrupt word”

How much grief and pain in this world could be avoided if everyone obeyed this simple command! Writing about the tongue, James says:

✓ James 3:5 — How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

“Out of your mouth must not come any *corrupt* word.” Jesus uses this same Greek word for “corrupt” in Matthew chapter seven:

- ✓ Matthew 7:17–18 — “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the *bad* tree bears *bad* fruit. A good tree cannot produce *bad* fruit, nor can a *bad* tree produce good fruit.

The bad tree bears bad fruit. And so also here in Ephesians, the problem with a rotten word isn't *just* the rotten word, but the rotten *fruit* it bears. Paul's point isn't just corrupt words, but the corrupting, negative, harmful influence that these words have on the people around us.

- ✓ Proverbs 12:18 — There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts.

The Psalmist wrote:

- ✓ Psalm 57:4 — My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts—the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.

You've heard the expression: “If you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything at all”? Unfortunately, this expression is usually used when it's already too late, and probably won't be of any real value. But it's true, as far as it goes. Our words flow from our hearts, but that doesn't mean that until our hearts are changed, we shouldn't work to keep those corrupt words from coming out. This is at least a place to start: “If we don't have anything good to say, we should say nothing at all.” “Out of your mouth must not come any corrupt word.”

“As our corrupt hearts, which in the best are but renewed in part, are very ready to hatch impure, vain, and unprofitable corruptions, and to press the venting of those by the tongue, in vain and corrupt communication; so it is the renewed man's duty, and ought to be his care, to keep a watch at the door of his lips... that, [even though] his heart fram[es] such conceptions, yet, at least, he may preserve his tongue from venting of them; seeing... in that case they prove offensive and hurtful unto others.” (Fergusson)

The tongue is a small thing, and so we may not often think about it. We may not often consider the impact of our words – words that discourage, words that tear down, words that hurt (often times in very “subtle” and even “unintended” ways). But all of these words always flow from a heart that's arrogant and self-centered. The power of *your* tongue to harm and even destroy others is terrifyingly great. Listen to these terrifying words from the book of James:

- ✓ James 3:6–8 — The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell... [The tongue] is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

This explains why Paul is so emphatic: “Out of your mouth *must not* come *any* corrupt—or corrupting—word.” It's *simple* to understand, and yet it's one of the most difficult commands in all the Bible to put into practice.

- ✓ James 3:2 — For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.
- ✓ James 3:6–8 — Every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue.

In the face of these very daunting words, though, Paul never backs down – not even the tiniest little bit: “Out of your mouth **must not** come **any** corrupt—or corrupting—word.” It’s a vivid picture of things or objects constantly going forth from our mouth. “**Out of your mouth** must not **come** any corrupt—or corrupting—word.” Not one. Ever. All such words belong entirely to the “old man” – the old us, “the one being corrupted according to the cravings of deceit.” (4:22) But by God’s grace, that’s *not* who we are anymore. We’re a new creation, and so *as always* Paul calls us not just to put off the old, but to put on the new. In fact, the only sure way for us to put off the old is to be actively and diligently seeking to put on the new.

## **II. “but if there is anything GOOD let it come out of your mouth for building up according to the NEED”**

Here’s an amazing, and beautiful, and wonderful thing! Our words, which have such powerful potential for harming, and tearing down, have an *equally* powerful potential for edifying and building up.

- ✓ Proverbs 18:21 — Death **and life** are in the power of the tongue.
- ✓ Proverbs 12:18 — There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise **brings healing**.

Words are an amazing gift from God. Words do bring healing. Words can encourage, and strengthen, and comfort, and give joy. We’ve all experienced that. So it’s not enough to be content with the neutral ground of simply *not* tearing down. “Out of your mouth must not come any corrupt word,” Paul says, “but if there is anything GOOD *let it come out of your mouth for building up according to the NEED.*” Paul thinks of our words as custom designed for each individual circumstance and situation. The point isn’t to scare us into thinking we need to have a master’s degree in speaking, but to show us that we need to be active and purposeful and careful in using our words to build others up. We need to be sensitive to the needs of others so we’re able to speak words that are fitting and appropriate. Braune says, “This refers to the time when, to the place where, to the person to whom, to the method how, and to the [substance] which, we are to speak.”

- ✓ Proverbs 15:23 — To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!
- ✓ Proverbs 25:11 — A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

It’s not enough to say nothing at all, because we have nothing good to say. This whole passage is in the context of putting off the old man and putting on “the **new man**, the one **created** according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth (4:22, 24). So our constant goal should be the renewing of our hearts and minds so that we have good things to say – words that build up according to the need.

What Paul literally says is this: “Out of your mouth must not come any corrupt word, **but if there is anything GOOD for building up the NEED.**” You can see how the words “good” and “need” are so prominent because they’re practically the only main words! This reminds us of the previous verse: “The one who steals must no longer steal, but rather he must labor, working with his own hands what is GOOD so that he might have something to share with the one who has NEED.” But then this emphasis on doing good for others in need in this “new creation” context practically forces us to think again of Ephesians 2:10.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:10 (cf. 5:9) — For *we are his workmanship [a new man] created [new creation]* in Christ Jesus **for GOOD works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

What Paul wants us always to remember is that the new life we are to live is because of the new *person* we are. It’s because we have been saved by grace, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (2:8-9). Our words are now a *means* to the good works that God, before the foundation of the world, prepared for us to walk in. Our words are now to be motivated and enabled by who we are as a new creation in Christ Jesus. Our words have now been given *Gospel* meaning. And this becomes even more clear and explicit and beautiful in what Paul goes on to say next. “Out of your mouth must not come any corrupt word, but if there is anything GOOD let it come out of your mouth for building up according to the NEED...”

### **III. “so that it may give grace to those who hear.”**

How can we possibly hear this word “grace” and not think immediately of God’s grace to us, which has been such a huge theme of Ephesians?

- ✓ Ephesians 1:2 — **Grace** to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ✓ Ephesians 1:5–6 — He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious **grace**, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.
- ✓ Ephesians 1:7 — In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his **grace**.
- ✓ Ephesians 2:4–7 — But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by **grace** you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his **grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- ✓ Ephesians 2:8 — For by **grace** you have been saved through faith.
- ✓ Ephesians 3:2 — Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s **grace** that was given to me for you.
- ✓ Ephesians 3:7–8 — Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s **grace**, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this **grace** was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

- ✓ Ephesians 4:7 — But *grace* was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.
- ✓ Ephesians 6:24 — *Grace* be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eleven times Paul uses the word “grace” with reference to God’s grace to us in the Gospel. But here is the only time in Ephesians that Paul speaks of “grace” as something that we can minister to each other. What an amazing and beautiful and exciting privilege this is! Because of the grace that God has lavished upon us through Christ Jesus, *we* can now become channels of that grace to each other – and *especially* in the words that we speak.

Our ability to speak words is part of what sets us apart as those who’ve been made in God’s image – who spoke the world into existence with His word, who has spoken His word through the prophets, and who has now spoken through His Son. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Gen. 1; Heb. 1:3; John 1:1). The act of speaking words shows that we bear the image of God. How much more, then, should the words we speak? Do your words identify you as one who bears the image of God – the God who has spoken supremely through His only Son, Jesus Christ? By our words, are we ministering God’s *grace and truth* to each other?

The Gospel doesn’t just *stop* our corrupt words. The Gospel calls and enables us to use our words *with the specific goal in mind* of building each other up – giving *grace(!!!)* to those who hear. “He adds, ‘that it may impart grace to the hearers,’ meaning by the word *grace*, comfort, advice, and everything that aids the salvation of the soul.” (Calvin) “Our words should be a means blessed of God for begetting or carrying on His work of grace in others, and for that end our words should be so crafted, as they should prove most desirable, gracious, and acceptable unto those who hear.” (paraphrase of Fergusson) Here is not the burden of the law, but the *joy* of living out the law in the power of the Gospel.

- ✓ Proverbs 18:21 — Death *and LIFE* are in the power of the tongue.

May we be actively, and purposefully, and carefully using out tongues for the purpose of life – *building up* and *giving grace*. And now Paul breaks his normal pattern by adding a second “Gospel reason.”

**Put OFF:** Out of your mouth *must not come* any corrupt word,  
**Put ON:** but if there is anything GOOD *let it come out of your mouth* for building up *according to* the NEED,  
**Gospel reason:** so that it may give grace to those who hear.

**IV. “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”**

The “and” shows us that Paul still has in mind the specific subject of our *words*. And so the fact that Paul now adds this second “Gospel reason” shows the huge importance of our words. We could translate the sense like this: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by your words, the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Now some may read

this and feel that they're being motivated by guilt. But nothing could possibly be further from the truth. We've already learned in Ephesians about the special work of the Spirit in *applying* to us the *reconciliation* that Christ has accomplished on the cross, and *uniting* us together with each other in love and peace.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:18 — For through him we *both* have access in *one Spirit* to the Father.
- ✓ Ephesians 2:22 — In him you also are being *built together* into a dwelling place for God by the *Spirit*.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:3-4 — ...eager to maintain the *unity* of the *Spirit* in the bond of *peace*. There is one body and *one Spirit*.

In light of this unique and special work of the Spirit among us, we can see how easily our words have the potential for grieving the Spirit. How easy it is for our words to be at odds with, and to actually fight against the work of the Spirit in our midst, which is based in turn on the reconciling work of Christ on the cross. With what *tender and sensitive* hearts should we hear these words: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”

And once again, we know the point isn't just “*not* grieving.” Paul doesn't know anything about neutral ground. “Neutral” isn't in his vocabulary because it's not in the vocabulary of the Gospel. If we're *not* grieving the Spirit, then we *must* be bringing joy to the Spirit. I like how Calvin puts it:

“Endeavour that the Holy Spirit may dwell cheerfully with you, as in a pleasant and joyful dwelling, and give him no occasion for grief... No language can adequately express this solemn truth, that the Holy Spirit rejoices and is glad on our account, when we are obedient to him in all things, and neither think nor speak anything, but what is pure and holy.”

If our words aren't at odds with the reconciling and uniting work of the Spirit, then they must be in active harmony – always building up and giving grace to those who hear. When Paul speaks of grieving the Holy Spirit of God, he actually has in mind Isaiah 63. Isaiah 63 reminds us of how God redeemed Israel from Egypt so that He might dwell among them by His Holy Spirit, and how in return Israel rebelled, grieving the Spirit of God.

- ✓ Isaiah 63:9-14 (cf. Exod. 33:12-15) — In all their affliction he was afflicted, and *the angel of his presence* saved them; in his love and in his pity he *redeemed* them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. *But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit*; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people... *Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit*, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. Like livestock that go down into the valley, *the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest*. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.

Isaiah asked, “Where is He who put in the midst of [Israel] His Holy Spirit?” And God answered this question finally and ultimately on the Day of Pentecost. He is here, in our midst. The first redemption from slavery in Egypt was a shadow and a type pointing to a far greater redemption from slavery to sin. And so God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in the midst of Israel was also a shadow and a type pointing to His more wonderful and intimate presence and dwelling among us. Israel rebelled and grieved God’s Holy Spirit, which He had put in the midst of them to redeem them from Egypt and give them rest in the land of promise. And so now Paul takes this same language and applies it to us (the new Israel), “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; O’Brien). “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

### **Conclusion**

When it comes to our words, it’s nothing less than the power and glory of the Gospel that’s at stake. The point is not moralistic “do-gooders,” but people who are being transformed and changed *by* the saving grace of God and *for* the praise of His glorious grace. On the one hand, the law condemns every single one of us for the careless words we’ve spoken (cf. Mat. 12:36-37) – for every harmful word that has ever come out of our mouth. “All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23) But the Gospel provides forgiveness, and enables us to change by making us a new creation. We are God’s “workmanship created in Christ Jesus *for good works* [for good words], which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Therefore, in light of this Gospel truth:

“Out of your mouth must not come any corrupt word, but if there is anything **good** *let that come out of your mouth* for building up *according to* the need, so that it may give **grace** to those who hear. And do not [by your words] grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”