
How a Christian Talks

Ephesians 4:25-32⁴

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Introduction

A few years back I came into church, I think I was home visiting from college, and I sat down behind my mom. It was one of those prayer in threes times and I didn't want to make a lot of noise so I just took the closest seat behind my parents and very quietly sat down. When prayer time was over my mom turned to me and said, "I knew you that was you". I said, "How'd you know it was me?" She responded, "I could hear you breathing". That stopped me for a moment. I said, "You could tell it was me by the way I breath?" She sort of nonchalantly replied, "Yeah". I haven't looked at my mother the same way since. Now that I have children of my own I understand, but at the time I was rather shocked at her intimate knowledge of me. She knew who I was by something I did.

Today we're going to think about how we talk. While we're doing so I want you to keep a question in the back of your mind. Could someone identify you by the way you talk? And a deeper question, could someone identify who you belong to by the way you talk?

Context

Here at the beginning of our section in verse twenty-five Paul starts out with the word "therefore" and what should you always think when you are reading and you come across the word "therefore". You should think, "What's that there for?" Well, Paul is continuing the theme he has been talking about throughout the book. He wants them to turn who they are into how they live. They are all of those things that Ephesians chapters one through three talks about and now Paul is going to show them what it looks like to go from the old unbelieving self to a new creation. Specifically here they are to, verse twenty-two and on "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Therefore, or because you have put away falsehood, (because you have put off the old self, renewed your mind, and are putting on the new) it's now time to speak the truth with your neighbor. Let's read the whole verse...

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Where a Christian Talks....v.25

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Therefore we are to put away falsehood, why? next part of the verse, "for we are members one of another". Remember, this isn't just about you. We are growing up into maturity in Christ, yes, as individuals, but also as a whole body. We are indeed members of one of another. You may be the hands or feet of this body but the fact remains that we cannot build ourselves up as we ought without all of us working together. Please remember as we think about how we're to talk, it is not only an individual exercise. It is that, but it also has meaning for us a body of believers. Look at verses twenty-six and seven...Paul goes on...

A warning about when we should talk...v.26 & 27

"26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil."

A brief pause here in twenty-six and seven. We will be getting into anger in a few weeks. We want to keep our focus on our speech today, but just think about why these verses are here. Does your anger ever have an effect on the way you? Hmm. Just something to keep with you for a week or two. We are going to fly by this next verse as well, but let's look at what's there...

Something's to talk about next week...v.28

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

One more note here on verse twenty-eight. Pastor Russ will be speaking to us on the subject of work next week so we'll skip over this one today.

Now we move on to the bulk of our time together today on how Christians talk. Verse twenty-nine reads like this...

How a Christian does not talk...v.29a

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.

Now, in our main section for today we see in verse twenty-nine how a Christian talks. Paul starts out just as he did in the verses we used to setup our context. He starts out by telling us what we need to "put-off". He says,

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths

At first glance we all think we know what this part of the verse means, but let's gaze on this verse a bit and see if our first glance is the best way to see it.

Right off the bat we have a command. This is not an option. God says, "Let no"! Whatever comes next, we're not supposed to do. There's no debate and there is no special place where this is not to happen. It's just plain not to happen.

God continues with what we are not to do, He says, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths".

I know what you're thinking, "Yeah, yeah, Pastor, I know I shouldn't use four letter words in general conversation. I get it." But is that really what this says? Remember what we saw in verse 25? Why don't we speak falsehood, because it affects all of us. Your talk is not just about your relationship with God, but about our relationship with each other, and frankly others may not always be bothered by your foul language. So this cannot be just about bad words. Though you would be forgiven for thinking so since one translation actually says. "Don't use foul or abusive language. (NLT)" And while bad words may not help our unity it doesn't carry the weight that's actually here. Look what it says, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths". What is corrupting talk? This carries more a sense of the effect your words will have. It's not only that you said a specific word; it's that what you said is "corrupting". This word means to have the effect of marring, spoiling, infecting or tainting something. In our case this morning our corrupting talk would be marring, spoiling, infecting or tainting our ability to grow into maturity as individual believers and as a body. Lowering the bar to a list of bad words is just making it easy for us to be righteous in our own eyes and we know what God thinks of that. The bar God has set here is far higher and frankly out of your human reach. We are not to let anything that would corrupt ourselves, or our family in Christ, to come out of our mouths. Now it no longer involves a list of words, but the heart of man and that well, my friends, is much deeper and more complex than any list you could come up with.

So we see that we are to putt-off corrupting talk, but what are we to put on. God tells us in the remainder of verse 29. Look there with me...

How a Christian talks...v.29b

but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

God gives us two things that should characterize our speech, and then what the result of our speech should be.

"but only such as is good for building up"

First he tells us our speech should be characterized as, "Good for building up". How many times have you read that? How many times have you stopped and said, "What would it look like if I only spoke words that were good for "building up"? It's one of those concepts that's easy to point out when you see it happen, but not so much when you try to explain what it is. So let's use a very simple template for our speech that should be quite helpful for you. I want you to ask yourself two questions about what you're about to say or what you've already said. We're going to take our two questions straight from the mouth of our Lord when he spoke of the two greatest commandments in Matthew 22:36-40. It says this, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a sec-

and is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

So, our first question to ask is this; Does what you are about to say, or have already said, clearly demonstrate that you “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Think about it. Your speech and mine, would be vastly different if this statement were true. You know why, ‘cause if you loved the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, you would sound like Him! So do you? If you’re honest you have to say, No! No I don’t, but I want to. Oh God I want to, but I constantly get in the way of what is best with what I think is most important. Well I’m with ya. But we should be transforming into the likeness of our dear Savior day by day. That is what this series is all about. Maturity. We will know we are growing into mature Christians when we start to sound like our Father. Don’t give up! You have the Spirit, and the fact that you are not pleased with the way you speak is a good sign. Keep evaluating your speech, before and after you say something, as to whether it sounds like you love God with everything in you and let this evaluation be one of the ways you renew your mind. It’s a tall order, but we have a big God who will not let you settle for less than all He has for you.

Our second question to ask is this; Does what you are about to say, or have already said, clearly demonstrate that you “love your neighbor as yourself.” Gets right down to it here doesn’t it? Would you want someone to speak to you in the same way, in the same manner that you just spoke to them? Think about it, would you want to be spoken to the way you spoke to your children this morning? Would you want to be answered in the same way you answered your spouse last night? Young person, would you want to be spoken to the way you responded to your sibling or parent the other day? Brothers and sisters, you will not answer hastily in anger, but in gentle kindness, if you love the person you are talking to as much as you already love yourself. You would not slander, but build up, if you love the person you are talking to as much as you already love yourself. You would not gossip, but fervently pray, if you love the person you are talking to as much as you already love yourself. You will not look like a tool of the Devil, but the balm of Christ, if you love the person you are talking to as much as you already love yourself.

If you can answer these two questions with a resounding, “yes” then you may have spoken in a manner that will build others up. But be prepared, we are not always heard in the same way we thought we spoke. Be open and humble to a loving critique of your speech. God will certainly use us all to grow us all.

“as fits the occasion,”

The last thing we see in verse twenty-nine is that our talk must fit the occasion. I think we are all aware that different situations call for different ways of talking. We wouldn’t speak the same way at a funeral home as we would on a playground. Would we? We wouldn’t speak to a child the same way we would speak to an adult. Would we? Of course not, and that gets to the very core of this section. In order for our speech to be the kind of speech that leads to maturity in Christ we must first be sure that it fits the occasion. So, how do we do this.

For your part in the conversation you should think about whether you are tired or well rested. How has your day gone? Are you feeling well or horrid? Are you stressed out or stress free? Have you just received some great news? Some terrible news? All of these things should affect whether or not you have a particular conversation. Whether or not you are fit for the occasion. Time and place are important, but state of mind is as well.

On the other end, make sure you are considering the other persons state of mind and situation as well. Think about it, while your friend, spouse, relative is waiting on the ticket from the nice officer may not be the best time to discuss their poor driving skills. Now we all laugh at that one, but think about the parents with whom you would like to discuss their children's behavior. Is the foyer after church while they have one on each hand and one in a car seat the right occasion to have that talk? How about flock where they are longing for adult conversation, while trying to keep an eye out for less than stellar behavior, all after a long day at work. Probably not a good time. Is the funeral home where someone is saying goodbye to a friend or relative the right time to tell them about the sovereignty of God? Or would it be better to weep with those who weep and discuss the great news of God's sovereign hand in their life over coffee in a few weeks.

You might say, well you've concentrated on the hard conversations. Surely we are getting some of the less tense conversations right? Surely you are. Thank God for those and look out for the hard ones that you didn't see as hard. Those are the ones that will capsize your brother or sister's boat in a few moments of thoughtless speech. I do not believe most of the things our brothers and sisters say that hurt us are meant that way. Christians don't usually set out to hurt one another. More often than not that harsh word or tone was just thoughtless. We haven't weighed our words and configured our speech to fit an occasion. We just blurted out, possibly the right answer, in a thoughtless manner...and that does not fit any occasion.

One last thing before we move on. We live in a country that seems to think talking is the only way to communicate. That is not true. Do you communicate love as you hold a newborn for the first time? How about when you kissed your wife for the first time. What is communicated in a firm handshake? A loving stare? A tender hug after a scraped knee. A firm hug brought on by unspeakable loss? You see, sometimes it's okay, even better, to say nothing at all. Sometimes people just need to know you are there. So just be there. Quietly, patiently, and humbly waiting for whatever God has next.

In all of this the greatest part is the result of building up as fits the occasion. Listen to what Gods word says...

"that it may give grace to those who hear."

The result is that we will give grace to those who hear. How wonderful is this! We have been saved by grace and now God has given us the ability, through our words, to bestow grace on others. WOW! Our speech can be used to give Jesus to our brothers and sisters. This should function as a reward for those who are seeking to die to, and put others above, themselves. What better gift, aside from Salvation, could God give you than the ability to share him with others through the way you talk!

Paul follows on in verse thirty...

Our talk and our relationship with God...v.30

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Just briefly, we have concentrated on how our speech affects others, but this verse shows us that our speech is not just horizontal, but vertical. You were sealed for the day of redemption by the Holy Spirit, and speech that does not build up, fitting the occasion and therefore giving grace grieves Him. This should be a strong motivator for what comes out of our mouths.

More about anger...v.31

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Again, we'll get to anger in a few weeks but just think for now as we read over it how all of these things express themselves. How do we know someone is bitter, wrathful angry and all of the others...we hear them, don't we. There are surely other ways we see these things, but speech is a big one.

Finally, in verse thirty-two God gives us the way of reconciliation when we fail to talk as we ought. Look with me at verse thirty-two...

How to be when our talk is not Christian...v.32

32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

You and I will mess this talking thing up. We will today if we haven't already this morning. Praise God for his example in Christ! We have been forgiven an insurmountable debt, one not within our means to repay. We have a great and mighty King, owner of all, with riches beyond measure whom we have sinned against and in whom we find forgiveness. He has bestowed on us His riches and invited us to His table for an everlasting dinner with the Church of God for all time. And he calls you to forgive like him. When others sin against you with their words, return those words with kind ones. Return words from a tenderheart. All while waiting with anticipation for the moment you can forgive them. Turn who you already are into how you live! More specifically, how you talk!

Reflect and Respond

I want to wrap up our time here thinking about talk with a few words of encouragement. You may feel like you can't do what I have just called you to and you would be right, if you don't know Christ, you cannot ever talk in a way that would please Him. First you must repent of your corrupt speech and believe on the only one who can save you. Jesus!

But for those of you who know Christ and feel this mountain of building up, fitting the occasion and giving grace is just too big, may I remind you of few things. We are to be like Christ, and...

When He was a boy his parent left him at the Passover Feast and didn't discover he was missing for more than a day. When they asked why he had treated them in such a way, his answered built them up, fit the occasion and gave grace. Luke 2:41-51

When He was at home and his mother and brothers came to get him because they thought he was out of his mind. His response to their inquiry built up, fit the occasion and gave grace. Mark 3:20-21, 31-35

When he stood before the council and the high priest asked him "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" His answered made him tear his robe, but it nonetheless, built up, fit the occasion and gave grace. Mark 14: 53-65

When the beat him until he was unrecognizable, stripped him naked, nailed him to a cross and hung him between two criminals, he uttered these words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Words that 2000 and some years later continue to build up, fit the occasion, and give more grace than we can comprehend. Luke 23:26-43

Your father commands that you talk like him and he has given you, by his Spirit, the power to do so. Now go and talk in way that the world will know you belong to your Father.

