

Sermon Title: Only Such A Word
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:29-31 (Ephesians #31)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-20-22

I want you to come with me to Ephesians Chapter 4; and we're going to continue where we're looking at this last portion of this chapter, and talk about your tongue—or, your words, your speech.

Your tongue serves powerfully, for either building people up or doing damage. Right from the very earliest book of the New Testament—almost certainly the first one written—we have some strong words about the power and the influence of the tongue: James Chapter 1, Verse 26—"If anyone thinks himself to be religious"—now, in the next couple of verses, he's going to talk about how you "hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1), so he's saying, basically, "If you claim to be a Christian..."—"If anyone things himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless" (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted). *Ouch!* Okay—*that's* a pretty strong word!

Skip down to Chapter 3, starting at Verse 3—"Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison."

Now, that doesn't mean, have your mouth welded shut; he doesn't leave you there. If you go on to the end of that chapter, there's a *solution* for the problem of the tongue, and James describes it very well: He calls it "the wisdom from above"—James Chapter 3, Verse 17—we need "the wisdom from above."

Now, our passage in Ephesians 4 is a practical application of God's wisdom for the use of your tongue—the way you talk. A dramatic way to demonstrate the power of God to change your life is to bring your speech under His control.

I don't know the original source of this example. Maybe you've heard of it as well. I *do* know that I read it was actually done. It was an experiment done that showed how your impressions of people are dramatically affected by how *others* talk about those people (cf. Prov. 18:8; 26:22). A group of people was invited to be interviewed by a panel; I believe it was set up as a job interview. They were interviewed one at a time. Before they entered the room for the interview, each one was prepared by being told one of two things: Half of them were told, "The group is anxious to meet you. They've been very impressed by your qualifications." The other half were told, "There are a couple of people here who are a little negative about you. I hope you can win them over." Now, in all cases, the interview questions were *exactly* the same, and those who were doing the interview did not know which individuals had been given which introduction to the panel.

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After the interview was over, those who had been given the first preparation generally described the panel as warm, intelligent, and friendly. Those who had been given the second preparation described the panel as cold, distant, and hard to get to know. The *only difference* was what somebody else used their tongue to say.

Now, with that introduction, let's look at the ministry of the tongue. We've been working through Ephesians Chapter 4; it begins with: "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" in Christ. We know we're all to be about helping each other progress toward maturity in Christ (4:16), and now we're talking about "The Walk of the New Man"—how the one who has been made "new...in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17) actually behaves (cf. Col. 3:10).

In this section, we'll see that the "new man" allows God to control his or her tongue by two things: Speaking Edification and Stopping Grief. We will just take those three verses. I know that leaves just one more verse in Chapter 4; it's a whopper, and we're going to bite into that whopper next Lord's Day, and we will consume it thoroughly.

But for today, Verses 29, 30, and 31. It starts with controlling your tongue by Speaking Edification. Look at Ephesians 4:29—"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." I grabbed our sermon title from that verse: "Only Such A Word"; there are certain words that are not good to choose.

The word that is translated "unwholesome" here means "rotten, corrupt, bad," or even, "worthless." The King James Version of this phrase captured the idea well: "Let no *corrupt communication* proceed out of your mouth..."

Now, when we think about that, you probably think about profanity. Surely, this verse is anti-profanity. Profanity is never appropriate for a "new man" or "new woman," a person who belongs to Christ (cf. Col. 3:8). And yet, it's a tough habit to break. If, like I did when I was an unsaved junior high kid, I *practiced* learning how to speak profanely in the most eloquent—I thought—and powerful ways. It's a tough habit to break.

Do you remember when Jesus had been arrested? He's getting bounced around from place to place for His trial; and Peter is hanging around, and Jesus has promised he's going to deny Him three times, and he's already done it twice. When you get to Matthew Chapter 26, Verses 73 and 74, it says: "A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.' " Now, they're not referring to the fact that he was a potty-mouth because he was a fisherman; they're talking about his Galilean accent—they could tell he was from up north (cf. Mk. 14:70; Lk. 22:59); kind of the opposite of how we can tell when somebody is from down south. "Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!' And immediately a rooster crowed." You see, Peter understood instinctively: "The quickest way that I can convince strangers that I don't belong to Christ is: 'curse and swear!'" He did that, *even* after being with Jesus for over three years.

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Listen, my friends: That *entire vocabulary* that fits under the category "unwholesome"—it's in your heart! You know those words. The responsibility is: do not let it "proceed from your mouth."

I'm going to steal a little bit of thunder from the next chapter; we will deal with this also in its context when we get there, but Ephesians Chapter 5, Verse 4, says: "And there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."

That verse gives us three categories of "unwholesome" speech that we can avoid. Yes, cursing and swearing; but he also mentions "filthiness": that means something which is "base" or "shameful."

Or "silly talk," the second category; that's a really interesting word: *mōrologia*; it literally means "the speech of a fool"; it's the word for talk or speech, and the word for a "moron"; etymologically: "Don't talk like a moron!" It means stupid talk: like boasting, telling tall tales, talking beyond your knowledge. You probably know the famous quote; it's usually falsely attributed to Mark Twain or Abraham Lincoln, but neither one of them made it up; they borrowed it, and used it effectively. The quote is: "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and to remove all doubt." What was that four-letter word that was the theme in our Scripture reading in Proverbs 26? "Fool." Don't be foolish in your talk—"silly talk," moron talk.

Then there's "coarse jesting"; that means mocking someone by using irreverent or offensive or vulgar language. That would certainly cover the category of cursing and swearing.

In other words, "the new man" should want to avoid speech that is embarrassing or disrespectful or foolish or without knowledge or demeaning or offensive or irreverent or vulgar.

Now, you don't need to be tongue-tied, either. This is not prohibiting things like humor or laughter. But the boundary of our speech needs to be love—"speaking the truth in love...each one of you with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:15, 25).

Humor can actually do good, like a medicine. It can be a good tool for communication. There's nothing wrong with being lighthearted. But you know where the line is, when you cross it.

The positive statement of what we *are* to say is in the last part of our verse, Verse 29—"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth"—look, we know it's right behind your mouth; we know it's a few inches away, in your head; you need to make the decision to have your "mind...renewed" (Eph. 4:23; cf. Rom. 12:2), and take control—"but only such a word as is good for"—the positive part—"edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."

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"Edification" means "that which builds up." We should never say things that tear down other people; like: "Well, there's a couple in there who are not quite sure about you; I hope you can win them over." No, we don't speak about people that way. You *know* what is good for building up and tearing down (cf. Prov. 12:18).

And notice, he says: "according to the need of the moment." Whether it's positive or negative, we always need to "speak the truth in love." We need to employ what James calls "wisdom from above" to discern the needs of the situation, in order to take control of the tongue.

Now, "according to the need" means: Not every situation requires you to say everything that you *could* say! You should say whatever is most needful in the moment, and look at the qualifying phrase there: "that it will *give grace*." You want your speech to be such that people will be drawn to the grace of God (Prov. 16:21, 24). You want to *practice* the grace of God by *being* gracious and *speaking* graciously, as you have been graciously forgiven in Christ (Titus 3:2-7). You speak what will benefit other people spiritually.

About the same time that he wrote Ephesians, Paul wrote Colossians; and in a very similar context, he says this in Colossians Chapter 4, Verse 6—"Let your words always be with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should answer each person" (LSB). *Speak graciously!* *Season* your words that way! You might know the paraphrase of that: "Let your words always be seasoned with salt, for you never know when you may have to *eat* them!" *Speak* gracious things.

Here's another slant on the same subject: About the same time that Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians, he also wrote Philippians; and he said this to the Philippians, in Chapter 4, Verse 8—"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, *whatever is of good repute*"—notice that phrase—"if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

That phrase "of good repute" is the translation of a Greek word that occurs only once in the New Testament, and that's it; the component parts mean "good speech." One lexicographer defined it as: "uttering words of good omen; avoiding ill-omened words; religiously silent." What does he mean about that: shut up about your religion? No, he means: "Rigorously keeping silent, when that's appropriate; therefore: fair sounding, auspicious, or well reported of."

In Verse 8 of Philippians 4, Paul says, "think on these things" (KJV); let *those* things dominate your mind so that what comes out of your mouth is gracious (cf. Matt. 12:34). And in the next verse, he would tell you—if we were studying Philippians—*practice* those things. It will help your mind to dwell on them if they are what comes from your mouth. Take control. Seek the "wisdom from above." Choose to "lay aside the old man" and "put on the new man," having had your "mind...renewed"—that's back to Chapter 4, Verses 20-24.

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So, the "new man" takes control of his or her tongue by, Number 1: Speaking Edification. Number 2: Stopping Grief. Interesting verse: Ephesians Chapter 4, Verse 30—"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (cf. Is. 63:10)

Notice: as Paul gives a series of commands here regarding excellence of Christian conduct—"walking worthy of the calling with which you have been called"—he includes *all* of the interested parties. He includes your neighbor—"speak truth each one of you with his neighbor" (vs. 25); the devil—"do not give the devil an opportunity" (vs. 27); needy ones—Be ready "to share with one who has need" (vs. 28); and, literally, all who hear what you say—"grace to those who hear" (vs. 29). But *the most interested of all* in the words that come out of your mouth is God, the Holy Spirit—"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit" (vs. 30).

If you've been around, you know by now the theme of Ephesians; the phrase that occurs 27 times in this book is "in Christ." Perhaps the *second* most common theme is the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned twelve times in these six short chapters. The Holy Spirit is the source of life (Jn. 6:63), as well as the power of the new life (Acts 1:8; cf. Zech. 4:6). "You were dead in your trespasses and sins," but you were "made alive" (Eph. 2:1, 5) by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 3:3, 5; Titus 3:5).

Whenever we pollute our lives, and the ears of the people around us, with any deceitful talk or vengeful talk or covetous or filthy talk, or even suggesting those things, we grieve the Holy Spirit. And you can't get away from that being as serious as it sounds by doing a word study, because the word "grieve" means "cause distress, pain, or grief." You can actually *grieve* the Holy Spirit. And the primary application in the context is: by your words. Now, surely there are other things you can do that would grieve the Holy Spirit, but this has to do with how we interact with each other verbally.

From what we've already studied just in this context, I looked back and I started thinking, "Now, what all could he mean by 'grieving the Holy Spirit'?" And *just in this context*, I found eight different ways that we can grieve the Holy Spirit:

Number 1 (pretty obvious)—Lie. He is the Holy "Spirit of truth" (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).

Number 2—You can *know* the truth, but not *say it*. "*Speak truth* each one of you with his neighbor" (vs. 25).

Or, Number 3—You can refuse to deal with your personal anger; you can let your anger be used hurtfully. We've seen that already, and we're going to see it again in the next verse.

Number 4—We can be dishonest. You say, "Well, how is that different than lying?" Well, you can be dishonest by just being not fully truthful; sort of play around the edge of the truth, but not quite really take a stand for the truth (cf. Prov. 30:8).

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Number 5—Don't work. "Labor, performing with his own hands" (vs. 28). Remember that one?

Number 6—Don't share with those in need. That's one of our things that we do with each other: we reach out and share with those who have a need (Rom. 12:13).

Number 7—Use abusive or filthy speech.

Or, Number 8—Tear down other people verbally (Prov. 12:18; 16:27).

You see, it's not hard to figure out what it means to "grieve the Holy Spirit." He is the *Holy Spirit*; so if you *speak* unholy things, if you *do* unholy things, you're going to grieve the *Holy Spirit*.

There is more to come in Verses 31 and 32. As I said, we're going to save Verse 32 for next time, but you're going to get more here in just a moment from Verse 31. But before we do that, let me give you a couple of footnotes about the Holy Spirit.

This verse clearly tells us that the Holy Spirit is capable of *feeling*, and that is one of the many evidences that the Holy Spirit is a *Person*. It is proper to describe the Holy Spirit as "He," not "it"; and that's grammatically very significant, because the Greek word for Spirit—*pneuma*—is grammatically neuter, and every time that the Holy Spirit is referred to, they use personal pronouns—He, Him—never "it."

So, the Holy Spirit *is* a Person (cf. Acts 5:3-4). You cause *grief* to the Third Person of the Trinity! *Wow!* How serious is it that you take control of your speech? Pretty serious!

Another Holy Spirit footnote here: The Holy Spirit is the One who has "sealed" us "for the day of redemption." He is our "seal" (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22). That testifies to several important truths about your relationship with God. We saw back in Chapter 1, Verse 13 of Ephesians that He is called "the Holy Spirit of promise": "You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." And that word "promise" there [is directly related to "pledge" in the next verse]—*arrabōn*—the Greek equivalent of what would come closest in English to be an engagement ring. The Holy Spirit is the "promise" of the fulfillment of all the aspects of your redemption, even what you don't yet have.

So, a "Seal" is the evidence of genuineness; it's the evidence of a finished transaction, the evidence of ownership, and the evidence of protection and security (cf. Rev. 7:2-3; 9:4). We have that *seal*.

Whenever I go to Russia, I'm always reminded, and I think about the seal; because in their culture, they *love* documentation—you have to have a *document* for everything. Now, they don't always put a "seal" on it, as in the little gizmo that crimps the paper and actually makes an imprint on it; but oh, they *love* to stamp things! And you have to have the stamp.

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I always warn people when they're going there: You'll come up to Passport Control. Nobody can come with you, you're on your own, it's one-on-one. These people have *mastered* the art of *never smiling*. And they'll take your passport and they'll put it on a little scanner, and they'll look at you. And then they'll look at their computer screen. And then sometimes, just to give you a chill down your spine, they'll take your passport and move it a little bit on the screen, like, "Oh, wow—did I really see what I saw?" And then you know things are starting to look up when you hear the printer begin to put something out; and it puts out this piece of paper that has two parts, and they tear the two parts in half. But you're not done until you hear [2 stamping sounds]—they have to stamp *your* side, they have to stamp *their* side.

And oh, is that seal important! One time, for me, they stamped the other side twice and didn't stamp mine, and I didn't realize it. They went to register me at my place where I was staying. "We can't register him!" "Oh, really?" "Uh, well, *there's no stamp!*" And I said, "Well, you have my passport, where they stamped that I came into the airport. How do they think I got that white piece of paper that *isn't* stamped?"

It didn't matter! My dear friend Anatoly spent a day and a half of his life, standing in lines to wait to get to the windows to try to get that silly little thing stamped. And they finally came to the conclusion: "Can't do it! He'll just have to pay a fine when he leaves!" I didn't have to pay the fine; they let me out.

But do you understand the importance? You have been *sealed!* You *belong* to the One whose name is on the seal, and His name is *God!* (see 2 Tim. 2:19; cf. Jn. 6:39) And His Holy Spirit within you is the *guarantee* that He is going to deliver you to the right address (cf. Rom. 8:11; 2 Tim. 4:18).

Now look on to Verse 31—"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Everything in that ugly list—they're all primarily *verbal* things; and he says "all" of it: all manner of these things, *any* instance of these things, "put" them "away."

"Bitterness" describes "venomous resentfulness." I love that description. A person manifests "bitterness" when he or she is ready to fly off the handle with a sting of words. I think it's been made into a Country song; I heard it before that: We often "bury the hatchet and leave the handle sticking out for ready reference." That's "bitterness"—just lying in wait to trip you up (Prov. 12:6). If you want to live a Spirit-filled life, here's a basic instruction: Exercise control over your tongue so that you refrain from saying *whatever you feel like* in any given moment (cf. Prov. 10:19). Weigh your words first, "season them with salt," *then* speak them (cf. Prov. 15:28).

The word "wrath" is the Greek word *thumos*, as opposed to the other word "anger" that we saw back in Verse 26. This word refers to "violent outbursts of anger," the idea of "boiling over." We talk about "losing your temper"; it seems like people who do that never seem to want to gather it back again, get it under control (cf. Prov. 12:16).

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"Anger" *is* the same word that was used in Verse 26. It's that word describing "settled anger." In Verse 26, he was talking about how there can be righteous indignation; but here, he's talking about holding a grudge against someone. God has a built-up righteous indignation against our sin (Ps. 7:11), and "the wrath of God" *will be poured out* against all of that (Rom. 1:18; cf. Ps. 75:8; Rom. 12:19)—for those who have not had the wrath of God satisfied for them by what Christ did (Rom. 5:9). But for *us*, it means settling into an angry disposition toward someone. God's anger is holy; our grudges are unholy—they're selfish. Maybe you've had to deal with a person who just seems to be angry with you, regardless of how much you explain or try to show your good intentions. Worse yet—maybe you've *been* that person, in some relationship.

"Clamor"—that's an ugly word that we don't use very much: it means "a passionate outcry." It's yelling at people. This was a gift that I honed early in life, and one of my weaknesses that I constantly battle is the tendency to raise my voice when I get upset or passionate about something; and it grieves the Holy Spirit every time I do it. Oh, and by the way: How many times have you ever won someone over by screaming at them? It doesn't work too well (cf. Prov. 15:1).

"Slander"—if you look up that Greek word, it's the word *blaspmēmeō*; yep, "blasphemy" comes from that. It means "insult." If you direct it toward God, we tend to call it "blasphemy." If you direct it toward man, we call it "slander."

Then, "Malice"—that's deriving joy from inflicting hurt or abuse on somebody else. "Boy, I gave *him* a what-for!" That's "malice."

And notice the command concerning all those things: "Let" these things "be put away from you." "Put away" implies "removed, lifted away." It means that, when you see these things bubbling up, they're coming from your "heart" (Matt. 15:19), where we all have a lifetime supply of them. They're coming from your thinking, from the things that you have programmed into there. When they start bubbling up, we need to "confess" them; we need to turn away from them (Prov. 28:13); we need to *refuse* to let them cross our lips. We need to change our mind about acting in these ways. There's a much loftier, better, God-glorifying way to speak.

And by the way: this is a point at which biblical counseling and worldly psychology part company. There are many such points, but psychology says you should *not* suppress your feelings; you should "get in touch" with your feelings. As a "new creature in Christ," I can say: "I've touched my feelings. *Yuck!*" (cf. Rom. 7:24) That's *not* what we want to do! The line drawn in the Bible is to *refrain* from expressing some things, or expressing some things in some ways. If you get angry at someone, it's *never* acceptable to yell at him or her. And by the way: just screaming and scaring everybody out of the room, and then saying, "Oh, I'm sorry; I get that way sometimes"—is that a good reason to do that? *You get that way all the time!* That's what you *are* on the inside! *Bottle it up!* Process it with "the wisdom from above," so that you can be "washed" with the "water" of the "word" (Eph. 5:26) so that you can actually find a more joyful way, a better way, an edifying way, a way that brings grace to other people's lives (Prov. 3:3; 12:18b).

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And if you're feeling bitter toward someone, you're still obligated to call on the Holy Spirit to enable you to be kind rather than cruel (cf. Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:16). Or, as we'll probably see next week: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18).

But there are people who, even in the name of so-called "Christian Counseling," tell people, "You need to get all those things out!" I've heard of workshops at a retreat for "Screaming"—"We're going to go in there, and we're going to *scream* until we get it all out!" In other words, "We're going to go in there and *give vent to the flesh*—for the glory of God!" How silly!

And by the way: I've seen some Christians get very foolish advice about dealing with their own resentment and their bitterness. I know of situations where someone has gone and said, "I just want to forgive you for the rotten things you have done that have caused my bad attitude over these last several years. I forgive you for my sin!" That's exactly what that's saying. No, "put away" these things! And by the way, that means: Never dredge them up! (cf. Prov. 17:9)

Now, there's a point, there's a place where it could be very helpful to confess such things, not only to God but maybe to a Christian friend who will help hold you accountable; maybe somebody in your household; I don't know—maybe somebody you're married to; maybe somebody you're the parent of. "I'm sorry, honey. I've said some things I shouldn't. Would you please help me? If I do that again, would you please say 'Hot Dogs' or something like that? And I'll know what I've done wrong."

Stop doing it. And by God's grace, fill your mind with His thoughts toward those people that you have wounded (Ps. 103:8; Titus 3:4).

And by the way: This needs to be kept in balance with other biblical commands. I've said, "Don't go and tell somebody that you forgive them for what they never asked forgiveness for." That's not how you do it. You speak edification, you speak grace. Next week, we'll talk about the more difficultly-navigated, prickly subject of forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration.

But you need to understand: When *you* are the one who has sinned with your tongue, when *you* are the one who has been snarky, and *you're* the one who has the bitterness, you *do* need to go, and you need to confess and let somebody know that you know you have wronged them. Make restitution, if necessary. But own what is *your* problem, what is *your* sin—and not the other person's. You can only do harm to relationships when you bring up rottenness. Speak for edification. Speak grace.

And by the way: The right time to do that is *as soon as possible*. Jesus, in one of His illustrations in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, put it this way, starting at Verse 21: "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not murder' and 'Whoever murders shall be guilty before the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court" (LSB).

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Do you get the point? "Anger" and "murder" are the *same sin*—it's only a matter of degree! For you to speak angry words is the same as you killing somebody, except the jail sentence is a lot less! It's the issue of your heart.

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca' "—that's basically an insulting Aramaic word—"shall be guilty before the Sanhedrin"—the Jewish high court—"and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (vss. 22-24, LSB).

And don't think that you can get God to buy it if you say, "Oh, I'm glad we don't have an altar, and I'm not 'presenting an offering!'" You understand the principle. Don't think that you can harbor "bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander" and appropriately worship God! (cf. Ps. 15:1-3; 24:3-4) Get it taken care of, speaking edification and grace.

What Jesus says there is essentially the same thing as Ephesians Chapter 4: Deal with your attitude; and if your actions or your words have harmed someone, make restitution and ask forgiveness.

Remember our example from that interview situation? If you are "in Christ," I want to challenge you to consider adopting an attitude—from today forward, if you've never done it before—the attitude is pretty simple: Determine that you will treat people, based *solely* upon your personal interactions with them, rather than what you have *heard* about them. If you have ever been the target of a gossip campaign or false accusations, you know what that leads to (Prov. 16:28).

It requires a lot of discipline to live like that. Just deal with people based upon *your* personal interactions with them, and don't let other words poison you. That might mean you'll end some conversations prematurely. If Person A is trying to poison you concerning Person B, walk away from Person A (Prov. 20:19b). Say, "You need to talk to Person B about that, not me." If you determine that you will speak only that which builds up other people in the eyes of other parties, then you're logically only going to *listen* to that which is edifying and gracious.

I want to give you a reminder of two very familiar verses in light of the ministry of the tongue, and what it means to speak "only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."

Again to the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 7:12—"Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (NASB-1977). May I apply that a little bit? "However you want people to talk about you, so talk about them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Sermon Title: Only Such A Word
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:29-31 (Ephesians #31)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-20-22

First Peter Chapter 4, Verse 8—"Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another"—that word "fervent" is a word that implies stretching and straining and reaching out; the kind of thing you do when you're going for your personal best in the weight room or the distance run. "Keep fervent"—*stretch*—"in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." It doesn't mean it "covers *up* a multitude of sins," but if there's no need to talk about somebody else's sin, *you don't* (cf. Prov. 19:11). Why would you want to do that? Speak edification. Give grace.

I can't fix things that you have done, but I sure can urge you, call you, invite you to confess if, in your heart, there is "bitterness," "wrath," "anger," "clamor," "slander," "malice". Will you choose right now to put it all away from you? Will you let me pray for you, to that end?

Let's pray:

Our Father, we hear You. Your Word is very clear. Your Spirit within us reinforces our own conscience. And we know how easy it is for us to commit the sins of the tongue. We know that all of those ugly things are in our hearts. We yearn for the final stage of our redemption. Right now, we groan as we wait for it, along with all the rest of creation. But we ask You to grant us a greater understanding of Your grace in which we stand. We pray that You will make us instruments of edification, that we would practice grace toward others as we have been forgiven graciously. And Father, we understand that we have grieved You. That grieves me to realize all of the times that I have grieved You, dear Holy Spirit. Father, thank You for making us new in Christ. Thank You for giving us the Spirit of holiness as the seal of redemption. And Father, should there be someone who doesn't understand what it means to stand in Your grace because they've never received the free gift of eternal life in Christ and the forgiveness that comes with it, oh, please, open that heart today. Have Your way in that one, and in each of us, that we might speak "only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment," that it might give grace to all who hear. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.