

074, Purity In Speech

Ephesians

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Ephesians 5. We'll begin reading together at verse 1. Ephesians 5:1 and we'll read down through verse 7.

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. 3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; 4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. 7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

Now as the nature of a child that he imitates and follows the example of his parents. We have observed this and we ourselves have participated in it. From his parents he learns to speak, to eat, to walk and a whole variety of other things, but he not only learns from his parents what to do, he also learns from his parents what not to do. He learns from his parents not to touch the stove, don't hit your brother, don't leave your toys on the stairs. Now this principle of children learning from their parents operates in the spiritual realm as well. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:1 that we are to be "followers of God, as dear children." That is, we are to learn from God and we are to follow his example as to what we are to be doing and as to what we are not to be doing.

So having told us that we are to be followers of God, he then begins to set before us the particulars of what is involved in being an imitator of God. We saw in our previous studies that the first way in which we are to imitate God is by following the example of Christ, that is, to walk in love. We are to show the same kind of love to others as Christ has shown to us. We are to walk in love as Christ also has loved us.

The second way in which we are to imitate God is not only by following the example of Christ but by fleeing the wickedness of the lost, and we are in the midst of considering

this particular heading for it is contained in verses 3 through 7. So we are to follow the example of Christ, that is, to walk in love, and we are to flee the wickedness of the lost, that is, we are to walk in purity.

Now we began last week to consider what this purity consisted of and we considered the issue of purity in the area of conduct. In verse 3, we saw that fornication and uncleanness and covetousness were not once to be named among us, that we are to have a zero tolerance in our lives for such things. They are not to be tolerated in any way because to engage in such things is a radical contradiction of what it means to be a saint. He says, "let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints."

Now having considered together the issue of purity in the area of conduct, now we move on this morning to consider the theme of verse 4, purity in the area of speech. Now God is concerned not only with what we do but also, of course, with what we say and there is a type of speech that is both commendable and is commanded of God's children and that's the kind of speech that we spoke of in our previous expositions, speech that is good to the use of edifying that it may minister grace to the hearer. But there is another type of speech which we saw was called corrupt communication that we must guard against and we must avoid and Paul here describes some various aspects of corrupt communication in verse 4 and we want to consider them together this morning in some detail.

So in the first place this morning, what we want to do is consider together speech that is sinful and corrupt. Speech that is sinful and corrupt. Now in verse 4, Paul lists three types or categories of speech that are to be avoided by the Christian and he lists them here by the terms "filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting," and we want to consider each of those terms in their order.

In the first place then, let's consider together filthiness. Now this form or type of speech is what we would commonly call obscene speech. In Colossians 3:8, the same type of speech is referred to where Paul says that we to put off filthy communication out of our mouths. People who engage in filthiness or filthy conversation are people who have verbal diarrhea of the mouth. Their mouth is like an open sewer pipe full of obscenity and vulgarity and filth and we have all heard it and you need not detailed descriptions of what it is. Whatever it is that excites our disgust and is revolting and indecent, falls into the category of this type of speech.

Now the people who talk like this are people who have no shame. Isaiah 3:9 says of them, "they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not." The Sodomites were not ashamed of their sin. They were willing to declare it publicly and so are those who engage in filthy obscene speech. They don't care who hears it and they don't care who they defile with their speech.

Now such speech should not once be named among Christians. It is utterly incompatible with the regenerate nature that God has given to us. Describing the blessing of the new covenant and the fact that it consists primarily in taking out our heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh and writing God's laws upon our heart, he goes on and says in Ezekiel

36:29, "And I will save you from all your uncleannesses," and of course, that includes our speech.

Obscene speech, filthy speech is not only utterly incompatible with the regenerate nature, it is utterly incompatible with the Holy Spirit that lives within us. Ephesians 4:30 which we previously studied, tells us to "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," and that statement is in the context of speech and communication that proceeds out of our mouth, and for filthiness to come out of a vessel which contains the Holy Spirit, is the grossest form of contradiction. It is utterly incompatible with the influence we should seek to have upon others. A Christian's goal is to draw people to God and to engage in wicked speech not only defiles people's minds and causes them to sin but it makes them bold to engage in the wicked action that they might hear us speaking about. So this type of filthiness or obscene speech is not once to be named among us. We are not to engage in it and when we hear others engaging in it, we are not to enter into it.

Now the second type of speech he speaks of here is foolish talking. It says, "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking." Now this is an interesting Greek word. It's the word "morologia" and it's a compound word which comes from two Greek words: the Greek word "moros," from which we get our word "moron," and the word "lego" which means "to say," and it literally means "to say like a moron or to speak like a moron." It means "to speak that which is absurd or foolish." Foolish talking is useless speech which has no purpose other than to display the foolishness of the speaker in order to entertain the listener with vain frivolity, and probably the classic example of this is the stand-up comedian, the guy who stands on the stage and just engages in inane and foolish talk for the sake of giving his audience some empty laughter. This type of frivolous and senseless talk is constantly seen on the stage and pervades the television programming of our day. You see whole programs that are called sit-coms, situation comedies, that are just given over to absolute foolishness and foolish talking; moronic situations and scenes and behaviors. What Paul is saying here is that we are not to engage in this type of foolish talking.

Proverbs 24:9 says, "The thought of foolishness is sin," and if the thought of foolishness is sin, how much more is verbal expression? Proverbs 15:14 says, "the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness." It is their diet and they long after and look for foolish conversation and foolish entertainment in order that they might feed themselves upon it.

Now much idle conversation can fall into this category. People want to fill up the silence with something so what do they do? They start clowning around or they want to draw attention to themselves and make everyone notice how clever and witty they are and so they begin to engage in foolish talking.

Now, foolish talking can take many forms, not only the forms I've described but we're also engaging in foolish talking when we speak of sacred and serious things in a jesting manner. People who joke about the Scriptures or joke about funerals, things that have great weight and seriousness, the result is to trivialize that which is sacred and that which

is holy and that which is to be revered and respected, or that in which we are to be solemn in the presence of.

We engage in foolish talking not only when we speak of sacred and serious things in a jesting manner but when we are full of loud talk and bold assertions regarding matters that we know little or nothing about. It is a sad but true statement that empty vessels make the loudest noises and those who know the least about the issue are the quickest to get up on a soapbox and propound regarding it. 1 Timothy 1:7 speaks of such individuals when it speaks of those who desire to be teachers of the law who understand neither what they say nor whereof they affirm, and though they don't know anything about it, they're sure about everything they think they know about it. So Proverbs 15:2 says, "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness." So when men use a multitude of useless words to no purpose, to act the part of the fool to entertain others, they are engaged in what Paul is describing here as foolish talking.

Now if we are not to be engaged in such talking, then certainly we ought not to be entertained by such talking. If we are not to do something, we ought not to find our joy in rejoicing and entertainment in it, so it is important for us not only to refrain ourselves from foolish talk but not to expose ourselves to it. The Bible says, "Go from the presence of a foolish man when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge because he that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed."

So it is important for us to not only not engage in this kind of speech but to not expose ourselves to it as much as we possibly can because as we hear it, we become accustomed to it and we begin to engage in it ourselves. This is the reason why I don't listen to Rush Limbaugh. This is the reason why I don't listen to Garrison Keillor. This is the reason why I don't listen to a lot of popular entertainers in our day. What they engage in by and large is foolish speaking.

Now most foolish talking appeals to worldly, vain and irreverent attitudes and character traits and if our heart is set upon the world, then such worldly talk will be desired and received and delighted in, but if one loves not the world, neither the things of the world, then such talk will be rejected as being worthless and as being undesirable. You see, foolish talking is directly contrary to God's wisdom. In Psalm 37:30 it says, "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment," and you cannot speak of wisdom and talk of judgment and engage in foolish speech. There is nothing foolish about those things and so it says that "the tongue of the just bringeth forth wisdom," in Proverbs 10:31. So speaking wisdom and speaking foolishness are mutually exclusive and if we as the people of God are to be wise people, we cannot and will not be foolish people at the same time.

Most foolish talking appeals to worldly, vain and irreverent attitudes and character traits. Foolish talking is directly contrary to wisdom. Furthermore, foolish talking destroys our ministry and our witness. One man has said and I have never forgotten it, you cannot be a clown and a prophet at the same time. The man who is the clown may be laughed at and laughed with but he's never respected. He's never held in esteem and his word is not

given a moment's thought or an ounce of weight or credibility, and when we spend our time in foolish talk we lose the opportunity for speech which edifies and which builds up the hearer because what meaningless talk does is it squeezes out edifying talk. When we are with other people, our thoughts should be, "How can I speak in order to draw this person to godly principles? How can I speak in order to build them up or to share the Gospel with them?" Not, "How can I speak in order to make them laugh and think how clever I am."

We should not fritter away the opportunities we have in the lives of other people with vain and profitless talk and burn up both the time and the opportunity with empty and vain speech. Often such talk, such foolish talk is a revelation of the spiritual poverty and emptiness we have and it demonstrates that the word of God does not dwell in us richly because if it did, we would have somewhat to share with others of our spiritual wealth, and it is a revelation of the fact of our spiritual dullness, that we have no more concern for their souls or our own, that we would not seek to engage them in conversation which would draw them to God. So it is important for us as the people of God not only to not engage in obscene talk but also not to engage in foolish talk.

The third category or type of speech to be avoided is not only in filthiness and foolish talking but he lists for us here jesting. Jest. Now the word means "that which turns easily." That which turns easily and what it means is here is a person who can turn from one subject to another with ease.

Now this word is used in a good sense at times. It is used of a person who is able to pleasantly turn from one topic to another with ease and with skill and with good humor, but it also used of those who can easily turn any statement into an occasion for hurtful or off-color speech. Here is a person who can find and express double meanings in nearly anything. For example, he'll take a person's name and turn it into an insult. We have all experienced that, especially as children growing up. Or this individual who jests will find a way to convey an evil or an obscene message in seemingly innocent words. We've all seen this in the bumper stickers that we read on cars and find polluting our minds. Or the technical definitions of the words are innocent enough in and of themselves but it's clear that a double meaning is being conveyed by them.

So this individual who engages in jesting takes that which is good and proper and normal and he turns it to a perverted and a corrupt means of communication. Innuendo, satire, cutting comebacks to ordinary statements, these are the common methods used by the jester and so with smirking and suggestive turns of a phrase to corrupt either the subject or the hearer, is what is meant by one who jests in this passage.

Now all of this is not to say that all humor and all laughter is wrong. Ecclesiastes 3:4 says there is a time to weep and a time to laugh. There is a time to laugh. An honest, pleasant and innocent humor certainly has its place in the Christian's life. Cheerfulness of mind is a very good thing to have and it is of a real profit. It can lift our spirits so that we might have greater service to God. It can lighten tension and ease anxiety. It can help restore

perspective and balance if we can laugh. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A merry heart doeth like a good medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones."

So the Bible teaches us that godly mirth and laughter have a beneficial effect on both the soul and the body and laughter is a God-given emotional reaction that is not to be rejected anymore than any other emotion God has given to us, we simply need to take our laughter and our humor and our mirth and we need to guard it like we need to guard any emotion from sinful expression or from sinful perversion. It's just like the emotion anger that God has given to us. Humor, like anger, can easily be perverted and twisted into sinful channels but it doesn't make either humor or anger sinful in and of themselves if they are directed in a godly channel and are directed towards a proper object.

What I would like to do this morning is to consider together with you some guidelines for godly speech and humor. First of all, our humor should contain nothing sinful on the one hand, and on the other hand, nothing sacred. Our humor should contain nothing sinful on the one hand, and on the other hand, nothing sacred.

Filthiness and sin should be a cause of grief and shame to us, not a matter of laughter and of humor. You see, sin is the cause of all of our misery. Every drop of misery that you have and every tear that you have ever shed has been the result of sin and when we see the result in the effect of sin, only Satan could make it a matter of laughter and only those who are ensnared by his devices will laugh at it. He who laughs at sin will find out that the joke is on him in the final analysis.

So in our humor and in our laughter, there should be nothing of sinfulness in it. On the other hand, it is an ungodly thing to abuse the precious word of God by making jokes about it because in so doing, what we do is we express disrespect for the precious word of God and in making jokes about it, the word of God becomes something frivolous and light to us instead of something serious and something which demands our reverence, our respect and our greatest and fullest attention. When we make jokes about God's word and about God's truth, what we are doing is mocking the God who gave it. We are despising the very means of life and grace that it contains and conveys and we are destroying our reverence for it and our confidence in it because, beloved, you're never going to hang your life on something that you think is a joke. And people like Mike Warnke and other "Christian comedians" who make their life's work to make jokes about God's word shall certainly suffer God's judgment for doing so.

Secondly, not only should our humor contain nothing sinful on the one hand or on the other, nothing sacred, but our humor should contain nothing injurious or hurtful to other people. It should contain nothing injurious or hurtful to other people. We ought not to make sport of another person's miseries or misfortunes. To joke about someone's mental or physical defects, to laugh at their appearance or lack of abilities is not humor. It's not humor at all, it's the worst kind of cruelty and the expression of the basest form of human depravity. And you children need to think very carefully about this, all of you, because it is characteristic of children that they will laugh at other children regarding their appearance or regarding their abilities or their lack of abilities, and they just tear each

other to shreds, and if you children profess to be Christians and profess to follow in the footsteps of your Savior, you'll not make cruel jokes that are hurtful to other children. You'll not comment on their physical defects or their mental disabilities or the fact that they can't run or jump or do something as well as you can. We need to love one another and not laugh at the appearance or clothing or behavior of someone else.

1 Corinthians 13:4 says love is kind, and what that means is that it takes into consideration the feelings of other people and here's where we adults need to think long and hard about how we behave and relate to other people. We need to ask ourselves the question: how is what I am saying and how is what I am doing affecting the feelings of that other person, because if I am kind, one of the things that I am going to seek to do is to not injure another person's feelings if I can help it. I will strive to put myself in their shoes and not engage in behavior or humor that is going to injure them or make them feel that they are rejected and unwanted and unloved.

1 Corinthians 13:5 says love does not behave itself unseemly, that is, it does not behave itself in a thoughtless manner towards other people but it takes into consideration their feelings and does not make them the butt of jokes. It is fine to make jokes about circumstances but to make them about persons is an altogether different thing.

Thirdly, our humor should be moderate. Our humor should be moderate. It says in Ecclesiastes in the verse that I read that there is a time to laugh but there is also a time to do lots of other things as well, including there being a time to weep. The perpetual jester is out of balance, to say the least. The person who is always joking and laughing and carrying on like a silly fool is a person who has not got the balance of the Christian life and to waste time and opportunity in excessive levity, to be constantly making humor so that people never take us seriously, this is a reproach both to our character as well as to our judgment as to what's appropriate and what is not. Humor needs to be kept in its proper place. It has a place, yes. God is not against humor. I am not against humor. But humor has its place just like weeping has its place and building has its place and tearing down has its place, and all of the other things that are listed there in Ecclesiastes. So the person who is perpetually jesting and making jokes even though they may not be a violation of these other things that I have mentioned, nevertheless it leads to a life that lacks seriousness and thoughtful consideration.

The fourth guideline I would give is that our humor should be appropriate. It should be appropriate. You know, when there are things like national disasters, personal calamities, serious events and illnesses, these are not the places for jokes and laughter. God's providences are to be causes for serious reflections and personal evaluations and a giddy thoughtlessness can rob us of the profit and gain to be had from such situations. Oftentimes God brings a chastisement into someone's life and others make light of it and laugh it off, so he makes light of it and laughs it off and never learns the lesson that is there.

In Haggai 1:5-6, the prophet comes to the people of God and he says, "People of God," he says, "Consider your ways." He says, "Ye have sown much, but you reap little. You

eat but you do not have enough. You drink, but you still thirst. You wear clothes but you are not warm, and your wages disappear like money put into a bag with holes." He says, "Consider your ways." You see, when we look at the providences in our life, instead of making jokes about it, we need to think reflectively, thoughtfully and biblically about them. People say, "Well, you know, there's just too much month at the end of my money. Ha, ha, ha." Well, maybe they need to think about why there's too much month at the end of their money, and maybe they need to get into God's word and repent of some of their spending patterns, and maybe a lot of things and we could multiply examples. You see, our humor should be appropriate and it is not appropriate to laugh off God's providences and his dealings in our lives, and when negative circumstances happen, it's not the time for humor, it's the time for serious reflection.

Well, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting, these things, say Paul, are not convenient in verse 4 of Ephesians 5. That is, they are not fitting for the Christian. They are out of harmony with the seriousness and holiness of the Christian life. You know, when you stop and think about what the Christian life is all about in the situation we're in, there is not just a whole big bunch of time for humor and laughter and fun and games. Ask yourself the question: what does the Christian life consist of? Well, it consists chiefly of two things: 1, it consists of dying to sin and what this involves, you see, is struggling against the depravity of our own heart. Being involved in repentance and striving against the world and the flesh and the devil, this is not funny stuff. This is serious business. The Bible says we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. It says that we are to fight the good fight of faith. and you don't see the apostles cracking jokes all the way to their epistles.

And it's interesting to note that the Bible says that Jesus was angry, and the Bible says that Jesus wept, and the Bible says that Jesus rejoiced in spirit, but it never says that he laughed. Now that's not to say he didn't laugh and that's not to say that I'm against laughter, but when you look at the predominating characteristic of our Savior, he was a man of grief and acquainted with sorrows. Why? Because he was doing serious business in a fallen world with fallen people and fighting against sin and, beloved, that's right where we're at and the first aspect of the Christian life which consists of dying to sin is serious business.

The second major aspect of the Christian life is living to God. It's living to God and this involves seeking to be like him and worshiping him and serving him and a whole host of other responsibilities in which filthiness and foolish talking and jesting have no place, rather they contradict at every point the necessity of dying to sin and living to God and, therefore, they are not fitting to have a place in the Christian's life. He says these things as filthiness and foolish talking and this jesting are not fitting.

Well, Paul never leaves us with just the negative but he gives us the positive and so quickly in the second place, then, having considered together speech that is sinful and corrupt, in the second place we need to consider together speech that is fitting and proper. Speech that is fitting and proper. Now he says here, "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather," here's the contrast, "giving of

thanks." Now what he does here is he points out the office of positive virtue and as I have stated many times before, the best way to deal with sin and to push out the bad is by replacing it with the good and what is the alternative to obscenity and of foolish talking and to double entendre type of jesting? Well, the alternative is to give thanks. It's to give thanks.

Now it's important for us to understand that the principle of delight and laughter is not eliminated but it's rather transferred and translated into a better object and instead of harmful profaneness and empty vanity and wicked double meanings, rather we have something good for the substance of our joy and our laughter and that is the blessings of God and the goodness of God. You see, we as Christians do not have to be dependent on sin for our joy but rather we have the blessings of God to rejoice in and to be the source of our laughter and our joy and our rejoicing. For example, in Psalm 126:1 and 2, it says, "When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing... The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." You see, that's the cause of laughter, righteous laughter.

You know, innocent humor, humor that is based upon God's goodness and God's truth and God's provision, that kind of humor is to be commended and encouraged, and you see, when we are tempted to filthy, foolish or jesting talk, what we need to do is say to ourselves, "Is there something I can give thanks for in this situation?" When all the guys in this shop are telling dirty jokes, what can you say while you're standing there? You can say, "Well, you know, I sure thank the Lord that I've been delivered from that kind of stuff," and laugh. And when people are engaging in filthiness and foolish talking and jesting, you know, you can stop and start reflecting on the things of God and what he has done for you and you start expressing those and it lifts your spirit and puts a laugh in your heart. We can have joy and laughter in plenty in a Christian gladness, rejoicing in the blessings of God.

So this is the opposite positive virtue that he exhorts us. He's not telling us that we are to run around with a straight face all of the time, but he's saying in the giving of thanks, that's the replacement for these things and that is the source of our blessedness and of our happiness.

Well, may God helps us to set a watch upon our lips and to realize that in the day of judgment is it not just our actions that will be judged but rather it is our words. Jesus says, "But I say unto you, every idle word that a man shall speak, you shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Why? He says, "for by thy words, though shalt be justified and by thy words, thou shalt be condemned." And you see, people who are unclean and who engage in unclean speech because of the uncleanness of their heart, the very words that they speak will betray the condition of their soul.

So what we need to do is carefully consider that our tongues belong to God. They are to be used to glorify God and what rolls off of them will be the basis upon which our state in grace or our lack thereof will be declared on the day of judgment. Our words will not

save us, our words will simply declare whether or not we are saved because out of the abundance of a man's heart, his mouth speaketh. So if there is filthiness and foolish talking and jesting coming out of the mouth, that is what is in the heart and a regenerate heart does not contain those things as its dominating characteristic as expressed in the characteristic speech that flows out of their mouth. He says, "This you know, that no unclean person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God," and when God changes a man's heart, it automatically changes his mouth.

So may God help us to flee the wickedness of the lost and to walk in purity, not only in the area of our behavior, putting away fornication and uncleanness and covetousness, but also in the area of our speech, filthiness, foolish talking and jesting which are not fitting for us but rather may we be given over to purity and holiness and the giving of thanks, for by such are the children of God identified.

Shall we pray together?

Father, we realize that the tongue can no man tame for, Father, it is a world of iniquity and sets on fire the course of nature and itself is set on fire of hell. And our Father, we pray that you would be the means of the sanctification of our tongue, that you would set a watch upon our lips, that our Father, you would put a rudder there and a bit there, that what comes forth might be that which is good to the use of edifying that it may minister grace to the hearer. Father, thank you for the joy that you have given to us, and thank you for the emotion of laughter and the merry heart which doeth like a good medicine. What a blessing those things are. But O God, how easily, how easily our remaining sin turns them into that which is foolishness and inappropriate jesting. Father, we pray that you might help us to be pure in our speech and pure and holy in our laughter and in our rejoicing and, O Father, may they be focused upon you. And Father, may our mouths be filled with laughter as we consider the blessings that you have given to us. Thank you, Father, for the kindness that you have given us and for the instruction that you have given. Father, may it be that this will not fall upon our ears as deaf. And our Father, we pray that as each of our consciences have been reproached this morning, so Father, may we be led to repentance and a further bridling of the tongue for, Father, we know that if any man bridles not his tongue, his religion is vain and he is self-deceived. Father, may it be that we have that bridled tongue which is under the authority and control of your Spirit and functions increasingly by the direction of your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Shall we turn in our hymnals, please, to 491? Jesus calls us to separate from the world and from the tumult and from the speech of that world and he calls us to give ourselves over to him in every area of our life, including our speech. Hymn #491.