

Ephesians 4:29 Commentary

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EPHESIANS - CHRIST AND THE CHURCH
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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**. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [pas logos sapos ek tou stomatos humon me ekporeuestho, \(3SPMM\) alla ei tis agathon pros oikodomen tes chreias, hina do \(3SAAS\) charin tois akouousin. \(PAPMPD\)](#)

BGT π ς λ γος σαπρ ς κ το σ τ ματος μ ν μ κ πορευ σθω, λ λ ε τις γαθ ς πρ ς ο κοδομ ν τ ς χρε ας, να δ χ ρι ν το ς κο ουσι ν.

Amplified: Let no foul or polluting language, nor evil word nor unwholesome or worthless talk [ever] come out of your mouth, but only such [speech] as is good and beneficial to the spiritual progress of others, as is fitting to the need and the occasion, that it may be a blessing and give grace (God's favor) to those who hear it. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

Barclay Do not allow any foul word to issue from your mouth; but let your words be good, designed for necessary edification, that they may bring benefit to those who hear them.

BBE Let no evil talk come out of your mouth, but only what is good for giving necessary teaching, and for grace to those who give ear.

CSB No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.

ESV 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.

GWN Don't say anything that would hurt another person. Instead, speak only what is good so that you can give help wherever it is needed. That way, what you say will help those who hear you.

Gundry No unwholesome word [statement] is to be coming out of your mouth; rather, if [there's] any good [word] having the effect of a needed building up, [that word is to be coming out of your mouth] in order that it may give grace to those hearing [it].

Hoehner "Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouths, but whatever is beneficial for the building up of that which is lacking, in order that it might give grace to those who hear

KJV Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

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

NET You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear.

NIV Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

NRS Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

NAB No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear.

NJB No foul word should ever cross your lips; let your words be for the improvement of others, as occasion offers, and do good to your listeners;

NLT Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

NLT: Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: Let there be no more foul language, but good words instead - words suitable for the occasion, which God can use to help other people. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: Every word that is rotten and unfit for use, out of your mouth let it not be proceeding, but whatever is good, suitable for edification with respect to the need, in order that it may impart grace to the hearers. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

Young's Literal: Let no unwholesome words ever pass your lips, but let all your words be good for benefiting others according to the need of the moment, so that they may be a means of blessing to the hearers.

LET NO UNWHOLESOME WORD PROCEED FROM YOUR MOUTH: pas logos sapos ek tou stomatos humon me ekporeuestho, (3SPMM):

- **Let no unwholesome word** - Ep 5:3,4; Ps 5:9; 52:2; 73:7-9; Mt 12:34-37; Ro 3:13,14; 1Co 15:32,33; Col 3:8,9; 4:6; Jas 3:2-8; 2Pe 2:18; Jude 1:13-16; Re 13:5,6
- [Ephesians 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 4:17-32 Solving Conflicts](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 4:28-32](#) - Wayne Barber
- [Ephesians 4:28-29: A Brand New Way of Life - 4](#) - Wayne Barber
- [Ephesians 4:17-5:14 Study Guide \(see dropdown menu\)](#) - John MacArthur

Related Passages:

Proverbs 10:19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 29:20 Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Romans 3:13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";

Ephesians 5:3-4+ (INCLUDES FOUL LANGUAGE) But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even **be named** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Colossians 4:5,6+ In a parallel passage Paul writes "Conduct ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of (redeeming = exagorazo) the opportunity (kairos = a defined period of time which when it is past is gone forever). Let your speech always be with grace (winsomeness, a quality that adds delight or pleasure, graciousness, attractiveness, charm, kindness, helpfulness), as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

James 3:2-8+ For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 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. 5 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! 6 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. 7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

WATCH OUT FOR

STINKING WORDS!

[Halitosis](#) is the condition of chronic bad breath. That's obviously off putting for most people. But Paul describes a worse "smell" coming from an open mouth that releases stinking, rotten words! This is the frequent practice of the man living with the old garment of Adam (Eph 4:17-19, Eph 5:3-4). While not all unregenerate men will speak as if they lived in a sewer, all unsaved men are depraved and have the potential to stoop to that level if sufficiently provoked. Of course, sadly believers can also let fly with some inflaming [invectives](#), vicious [vituperations](#), but, praise God, because of the new garment of Christ, and by His Spirit, such rotten garments can be flung far away from us! Remember that God's commandments always include God's enablements!

Steven Cole adds "Try as we may, we all have erred with our tongues! Jas 3:2+ says, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." While we may never achieve perfect control over our tongues, I'm convinced that if husbands and wives would consistently apply Ephesians 4:29, we would rarely see divorce. If parents practiced this verse toward their children, we would see few children from Christian homes rebel against their parents. If we applied it towards one another in the church, we would see few churches split over personality conflicts or minor doctrinal issues. In short, Ephesians 4:29 is a verse that would bring radical change in all of our relationships if we would apply it conscientiously. ([Transformed Talk](#))

And so Paul issues a command to all followers of Christ - **Let no unwholesome ([sapro](#)) word ([logos](#)) proceed ([ekporeuomai](#)) from your mouth ([stoma](#))** ("ever pass your lips") - The Greek order is "every word corrupt (WHICH MAKES THIS PAUL'S EMPHASIS), out of your mouth let it not proceed." So first the negative command ([present imperative with a negative](#)), one that can only be kept by [depending on the Holy Spirit to obey](#). Born again believers need to reflect their new nature and reclaim the original virtue God intended for speech between men and God and men (especially husbands and wives! fathers and children!) Above all live in God's Word and you will always have a word from God. Your "spiritual blood" will be "Bibline" as Spurgeon said of Bunyan and his writings...remember what comes out is related to what goes in -- G.I.G.O. ~ garbage in, garbage out OR "God's word IN, God's word OUT". Paul presents a picture of the repugnant (and non-edifying) nature of our "old garment" of rotten speech, which like rotten fruit or fish (now that's a smell you really want to avoid), will not nourish anyone. Instead the rotten fare contaminates, sickens, smells foul and creates an unpleasant atmosphere for all who come near. Using this vivid metaphor Paul commands believers to put off speech like one would toss out rotten fruit or fish!

Corrupt speech comes from a corrupt heart,
and pure speech comes from a pure heart.

-- [KJV Bible Commentary](#)

The English dictionary defines [unwholesome](#) as that which is detrimental to physical health, mental health or moral well-being. Can you see how potentially destructive our "rotten speech" can be on those who are on the "receiving end?" It is not a stretch to say that our rotten speech can be deleterious to the recipient's health or physical or moral well-being! If that does not grab your attention, you are not paying attention! Loose words flying out of our mouth can be like cannon balls wreaking havoc and causing destruction when they land on the intended target. This is serious business and requires a serious solution. The only way we can control our restless tongue is by surrendering it to power of the Spirit and letting Him enable us to control it. Stated another way, we are 100% dependent on Him and at the same time 100% responsible to act even though we can do so only by His power. His provision. My responsibility! It is not "let go and let God!" That's bad theology (unsound doctrine) but more like "let God and let's go," the latter phrase more accurately depicting the "100/100" (His provision/My responsibility) principle. As an aside you may ask "How can I be continually filled with the Spirit?" Good question and the short answer is you can be filled with the Word of God, reading it, submitting to it, yielding to it, and as you do so you are in effect yielding to the control (filling) of the Holy Spirit! Make sense? For a more in depth explanation of the critical relationship between the indwelling Holy Spirit and the indwelling Holy Word see [this chart and the related explanation](#).

From the context of Eph 4:29, a [sapro](#) word is any word that is not good for edifying where that edification is needed. In that sense a "[sapro](#) word" is an unprofitable word (cf "idle gossip" - it seldom stays "idle!"). Our words do not have to be dirty to be worthless! Rotten or corrupt speech can even contaminate the thoughts of others, which is surely one reason Paul says "and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks." (Eph 5:4+)

Most of a man's sins are in his words.

-- Thomas Manton

Peter O'Brien - What is prohibited, then, is harmful speech of any kind (cf. Col. 3:8; Eph. 5:4), whether it be abusive language, vulgar speech, or slander and contemptuous talk. Lips given to this kind of utterance not only defile the speaker (Matt. 15:11) but are also destructive of communal life. Our Lord had already warned that people would have to render account on the final day for every careless word they speak (Matt. 12:36). (See [The Letter to the Ephesians](#))

Words are like bullets—once fired, we cannot take them back!

-- Anonymous

John MacArthur on **no unwholesome word** - Corrupt speech generally means conversation that is filthy and suggestive; this would include off-color jokes, profanity, and dirty stories. But here it probably has the wider sense of any form of conversation that is frivolous, empty, idle, and worthless. Paul deals with obscene and vile language in Eph 5:4; here he is telling us to abandon profitless speech and substitute constructive conversation. ([Quoted by Gregory Brown](#))

John Piper - The image in Paul's mind is probably one of rotteness and decay, something that is spoiled. This kind of rotten language must be taken off like the old garment. It is part of the old self of Ep 4:22 that needs to be stripped away when a person becomes a Christian. The garment of a rotten mouth must be taken off and thrown into the fire, just like the Ephesians had burned their old books on magic in Acts 19:19+....The end the battle for purity in the mouth is fought **in the heart**, because "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Mt 12:34+) If you don't like what comes out of your mouth, listen carefully this morning, because the apostle Paul is at pains in this text to clean up your mouth **from the inside out**. ([Make Your Mouth a Means of Grace](#))

William MacDonald writes that Paul is commanding us to "abandon profitless speech and substitute constructive conversation. The Christian's speech should be: **Edifying**. It should result in building up the hearers. **Appropriate**. It should be suitable to the occasion. **Gracious**. It should impart grace to the hearers. ([Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

The fastest horse cannot catch a word spoken in anger.

-- Chinese Proverb

Maxie D Dunnam - There may be such a thing as "[small talk](#)," but even small talk is powerful in the result it may have in some lives. Persons who are hurting, crying out for hope, famishing for some word of affirmation and encouragement, may go from us still crying in their pain and starving in their hunger because we have given them "small talk" when we could have imparted grace by our words. Talk is not cheap; words are powerful. (See [The Preacher's Commentary](#))

[Sam Gordon](#) - A person who engages in this is like the fabled slave who took poison into her system a little at a time, and then more and more, until at last her whole being was so full of poison that her very breath would wither the flowers.

Warren Wiersbe - We expect a change in speech when a person becomes a Christian. It is interesting to trace the word mouth through Romans and see how Christ makes a difference in a man's speech. The sinner's mouth is "full of cursing and bitterness" (Ro 3:14+); but when he trusts Christ, he gladly confesses with his mouth "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Ro 10:9-10+). As a condemned sinner, his mouth is stopped before the throne of God (Ro 3:19+); but as a believer, his mouth is opened to praise God (Ro 15:6+). Change the heart and you change the speech. Paul certainly knew the difference, for when he was an unsaved rabbi, he was "breathing threats and murder" (Acts 9:1+). But when he trusted Christ, a change took place: "Behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11+). From "**preying**" to "**praying**" in one step of faith! (See [The Wiersbe Bible Commentary](#))

As noted above Paul uses the [present imperative with a negative](#) saying in essence "Stop letting these rotten words project, fly out of your mouth" (or do not let this practice begin!) Note the associated admonition in the next verse to not grieve the Holy Spirit. Clearly grieving the Spirit is related to rotten language ejecting from our mouths and ultimately reflecting what is in our hearts (see Lu 6:45+, Mt 12:34-35+) because the mouth and heart are connected.

Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;

Keep watch over the door of my lips.

-- Psalm 141:3 = A good prayer

Unwholesome ([4550](#)) (**sapros** from **sepo** = cause to decay, to putrefy, to rot away, be corrupted) describes that which is rotten, putrefying, corrupt, disgusting, perishing, rank, foul, putrid, worthless (e.g., in Mt 7:17,18 = a tree that produces no good fruit, in Mt 13:48 = fish). In secular writings **sapros** was used to describe spoiled fish, **rotten** grapes on the ground, **crumbling** stones. The basic meaning relates to the process of decay. **Sapros** is used of things unusable, unfit, bad. It describes that which is harmful due to the fact that it is corrupt and corrupting or defiling. **Charles Hodge** says **sapros** "literally means "**putrid**," (in an advanced state of [decomposition](#) and having a foul odor) and then figuratively "offensive and injurious." ([Ephesians 4 Commentary](#))

THOUGHT - MAY I SUGGEST A LITTLE EXERCISE? Our English word [saprophyte](#) is derived from **sapros** and describes an organism, especially a fungus or bacterium, that grows on and derives its nourishment from dead or decaying organic matter (a picture of something decomposing). Now as apply this thought to our speech it presents a pretty sad picture of "saprophytic speech!" We use mouth wash so our breath will smell good (not rotten). We need to daily wash our hearts with the Holy Word and the Holy Spirit as "preventive maintenance" against "foul smelling" words coming out of our mouth without any warning! If God's Word is already in our heart (from morning devotionals or frequent [memorization](#) and [meditation](#)), the chances of

wholesome words proceeding from our mouth are greatly increased! So if you have never done so, you might consider memorizing Ephesians 4:29, Ephesians 4:30 (grieving the Spirit - "short circuiting" your Power Source) and Ephesians 5:18+ (Your "Everyready Energizer," the Spirit). Write them on a card. Memorize them. Chew on them during the day, asking the Spirit to illuminate the meaning and to apply them to your heart and mind, trusting Him over time to transform your mind, renew your thinking patterns, so that you may prove (by your practice) what is the will of God which is good and acceptable and perfect and which when practiced is pleasing to Him. All that begins with a decision of your will to memorize and internalize the eternal Word! Don't delay. Do it today. The words that come from your lips will "smell" much sweeter. God's Word is your guarantee and warranty that you will not be disappointed. One caution! Do not expect instant results. Practice, practice, practice. Over time God's Word and God's Spirit will bear a bountiful harvest.

Sapros - 8x in 6v - Matt 7:17, 18; 12:33; 13:48; Luke 6:43; Eph 4:29

Matthew 7:17+ "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the **bad (sapros)** tree bears bad (poneros) fruit. 18 (note) "A good tree cannot produce **bad (poneros)** fruit, nor can a **bad (sapros)** tree produce good fruit.

Matthew 12:33+ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree **bad** and its fruit **bad**; for the tree is known by its fruit.

Matthew 13:48+ and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the **bad** they threw away.

Luke 6:43+ "For there is no good tree which produces **bad** fruit, nor, on the other hand, a **bad** tree which produces good fruit.

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.

Graham in the **Exegetical Summary of Ephesians** - Paul is condemning any use of the faculty of speech that is morally unhealthy [Candlish, Lloyd-Jones], that suggests impure thoughts [Calvin, Candlish, Lloyd-Jones], light views of sin, irreverence towards God, or trifles with serious things [Candlish]. Profanity and obscenity, as well as careless or light speech, profane religious and sacred concepts which results in a nullification of sacred ideas conveyed by language, which is man's most powerful weapon for influencing the thoughts and lives of his fellows [WBC]. (Graham, G.. An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians. Dallas, TX: SIL International)

John Eadie - The general meaning of sapros is foul, rotten, useless, though sometimes, from the idea of decay—old, obsolete, ugly, or worthless. In Mt. 7:17, 18, 12:33, and in Lk 6:43, the epithet characterizes trees and their fruit, and in the Vulgate is rendered simply *malus*. In Matt. 13:48, it is applied to fishes. In all these places the contrasted adjective is **isagathos**. Locke in his paraphrase has, "no misbecoming word."...It signifies what is noxious, offensive, or useless, and refers to language which, so far from yielding "grace" or benefit, has a tendency to corrupt the hearer. 1Co 15:33; Col 4:6-note...May there not be reference to sins already condemned? All falsehoods and equivocations; all spiteful epithets and vituperation; all envious and vengeful detraction; all phrases which form a cover for fraud and chicanery—are filthy speech, and with such language a Christian's mouth ought never to be defiled. ([Ephesians 4 Commentary](#))

TDNT - Relating to the process of decay, **sepo** means "to cause to decay," or, in the passive, "to decay," "to rot," and figuratively "to perish." **Sapros** means "rotting," either literally or figuratively, and the sense of "unpleasant" (even to the ears) is also possible. A person is **sapros** when old, and the same applies to food and drink, which may be better when **sapros** (e.g., ripe cheese). In general, what is **sapros** is "unserviceable" rather than "offensive," but the word may also mean "harmful" or "notorious" (someone's name). ([Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans](#))

Word (3056) (**logos**) means something said and in context refers to a saying, speech, or utterance.

Mouth (4750) (**stoma**) mouth or opening, chiefly as an instrument of speech. It has been well said that nothing is so opened more by mistake than the mouth!

Let...proceed (1607) (**ekporeuomai** from **ek** = out + **poreuomai** = go) means to depart, be discharged, proceed out of, project, come forth, come out of, go forth. This is a very picturesque verb, giving the sense that once the word (with the thought) has taken wing from our tongues, we cannot capture it. It's too late. We need to shut the cage door before the word flies out like a deadly projectile!

Someone once said (but I'm not sure how scientific it is) that 90% of the friction of daily life is caused by the wrong tone of voice.

Someone else has written "Of all deeds, **words** are the most revealing, the most instantly available, the most freighted with personal significance."

BUT ONLY SUCH A WORD AS IS GOOD FOR EDIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE NEED OF THE MOMENT: *alla ei tis agathon pros oikodomen tes chreias*:

- **but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment**, Dt 6:6, 7, 8, 9; Ps 37:30,31; 45:2; 71:17,18,24; 78:4,5; Pr 10:31,32; 12:13; 15:2, 3, 4,7,23; 16:21; 25:11,12; Is 50:4; Mal 3:16, 17, 18; Lk 4:22; 1Co 14:19; Col 3:16,17; 4:6; 1Th 5:11
- **for edification** Ep 4:12,16
- [Ephesians 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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Related Passages:

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat its fruit (either "rotten" or "good"!

Comment - Take your choice. Your "harvest" will depend on which seed you sow with your speech! Choose wisely. Redeem every moment, every word, every conversation.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 15:23 (RIGHT WORDS AT RIGHT TIME) A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word!

Proverbs 16:24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 17:27 He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

Proverbs 25:11 Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

Proverbs 25:12 Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprove to a listening ear.

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

Ecclesiastes 10:12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him;

SEEK TO SPEAK SALUTARY SAYINGS

Salutary (interesting etymology = from Latin *salutaris* = wholesome, from *salus* = safety! WHOLESOME WORDS ARE "SAFE" WORDS!) means designed to effect an improvement, healthful, remedial, favorable to health, wholesome, promoting or intended to promote health, promoting or conducive to some beneficial purpose; wholesome.

But only such a word as is good (*agathos*) for edification (*oikodome*) according to the need (*chreia*) of the moment - But (*alla*) highlights a dramatic contrasting thought. The words that should proceed from my mouth should edify, build up, encourage, not tear down, not discourage, not denigrate, not disparage, not destroy! **According to the need** - ESV = "as fits the occasion."

Lord, make my words gracious and tender, for tomorrow I may have to eat them!

-- Anonymous

THOUGHT - The section continues Paul's practical application of laying aside the old garment of the old self (unwholesome speech) and (by contrast) putting on the new garment of the new self (gracious, edifying speech that is sensitive to the needs of others, not focused solely on self - cf Php 2:3, 4+). This is simply another way of saying that now we as believers are to let Jesus live His supernatural life through us (think "rivers of living water" Jn 7:38+, or "Christ, your life" = Col 3:4+, cp Gal 2:20+, Jn 20:31, 2Co 4:10, 11, 1Jn 4:9+, 1Jn 5:11, 12+, 2Ti 1:1+ - Our new life is not only "with" Christ, it "is" Christ!). Remember that we cannot imitate Jesus (by simply relying on our natural strength), but we can daily (Ro 12:1+) and moment by moment present ourselves to Him, surrendering our whole being to Him as living sacrifices and allowing Him live His life in and through us (Gal 5:16+). (See fuller discussion of this vitally important truth [The Holy Spirit-Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#)). This is simply another description of the our new life of progressive sanctification, of learning

to walk in holiness, of daily becoming more like Jesus. As we practice (which we will need to do the remainder of our short stay on earth) these things (Php 4:9+), we will be taking off the old garment of self and putting on the new garment of Christ and as we do the God of peace will be with us.

To make Paul's point more emphatic, observe how our Lord defines "careless words" declaring "And I say to you, that every **careless** (**argos** from a = negative + ergon = work -- literally "not working words") word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment." (Mt 12:36+) According to 2Cor 5:10+ we each will be repaid for our edifying words but not for our careless (in 2Co 5:10 bad = [phaulos](#)) words. Lord, so teach us to number our days that we learn more and more how to speak Your words. Set a guard O Lord over our mouth. Keep watch over the door of our lips. (cf Ps 141:3+)

Spurgeon - What sweet talking there would be if we all spoke in this way, to "minister grace unto the hearers"! Ah! then, my dear friends, it would not matter how much we talked, if every word was salted with salt. I have heard unthinking people say, "Well, if it is in your heart, you may as well speak it; it is better out than in." I do not agree with them! If you had a barrel of whiskey in your house, that would certainly be a bad thing to be in your possession; but it would not do any hurt so long as you kept it unopened, so that nobody could get at it, for the mischief arises when people begin to drink it. Undoubtedly, it is an evil thing for you to have anything that is corrupt in your heart, but it will not be mischievous to other people until it begins to come out; so, "let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth".

One of the first things that happens when a man is really filled with the Spirit is not that he speaks with tongues, but that he learns to hold the one tongue he already has.

-- J. Sidlow Baxter

A T Robertson - "For the build-up of the need," "for supplying help when there is need." Let no other words come out.

Richard Hooker - There will come a time when three words, uttered with charity and meekness, shall receive a far more blessed reward than three thousand volumes written with disdainful sharpness of wit.

Charles Hodge - the edification which necessity calls for or which is suited to the occasion. ([Ephesians 4 Commentary](#))

Martyn Lloyd-Jones on "need" - 'As fits the occasion' means that I must consider the people to whom I am speaking; I must make an assessment of them, and my speech and conversation must be appropriate for them. But many Christian people do not do this; what they do is to deliver a sermon; they address an individual as if he or she were a public meeting; they sermonise; they give a little address or sermonette; they make very good statements about the gospel and the way of salvation, but sometimes it is not at all appropriate and does not fit the occasion. They act in this way because they are thinking about themselves only, and are not estimating the other. They say to themselves, Now that I am a Christian and must engage in good and godly conversation, I must always be giving my testimony or preaching the gospel or getting in a little word somewhere or other. No, says the Apostle, that is a wrong approach. If you approach it in that way, you are more concerned about yourself and about doing your duty than you are about manifesting the true Christian attitude in this matter. The Christian's word of edification should always fit the occasion! So we are not to repeat phrases in parrot fashion and feel that we have done well and performed our duty. Not at all! Instead, we are to discover, first of all, what is the exact position of other people. My business is to speak to them in such a way as to help them exactly where they are; 'cast not your pearls before swine', says our Lord. Do not hurl chunks, as it were, of good red meat at a babe who can only take milk! These are the Scriptural terms, are they not? 'I could not speak unto you', says Paul to the Corinthians, 'as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes.' 'I have fed you with milk and not with meat.' The fact was that they 'were not yet able to bear it!' ([Mp3 of sermon on Eph 4:29 - How to Communicate with our Fellows](#))

As noted in the next verse (Ephesians 4:30) one of the ways that we may **grieve the Holy Spirit** is by frivolous, worthless, rotten conversation. Life is too short and valuable to be wasted. It needs to be spent in giving out edifying words and living out edifying works. (Ep 5:16+, Col 4:5, 6+).

John Eadie agrees adding that - The precious hour should never be polluted with corrupt speech, nor should it be wasted in idle and frivolous dialogue. We are not indeed to "give that which is holy to dogs"—a due and delicate appreciation of time and circumstance must govern the tongue. Conversation should always exercise a salutary influence, regulated by the special need. Words so spoken may fall like winged seeds upon a neglected soil, and there may be future germination and fruit. ([Ephesians 4 Commentary](#))

Barclay - As James Moffatt's translation has it, Eliphaz the Temanite paid Job a tremendous compliment. 'Your words', he said, 'have kept men on their feet' (Job 4:4). Such are the words that every Christian ought to speak. ([Ephesians 4 Commentary](#))

[Sam Gordon](#) - We are to be like Alexander Whyte, of whom it was said: 'All of his geese became swans.' I believe that holds true in every situation—it ranges from the factory floor, to the office telephone, it stretches from the kitchen sink through to the dinner table, it goes from the email that we send to where we sit in church on a Sunday—it is our talk!

ILLUSTRATION OF EDIFYING WORDS - John Bunyan, one of the greatest Christians who ever lived, who wrote Pilgrim's Progress, was converted by listening to the conversation of several women. I wonder if someone were to eavesdrop on your conversation, would they be saved, as a result? Would they hear words of grace falling from your lips?

Winston Churchill once said that "During a long life I have had to eat my own words many times and I have found it a very nourishing diet."

Careless Word- In 1980, Lee Atwater, a political campaign manager, inflicted terrible pain with his words. His staff learned that an opposing congressional candidate from South Carolina had once experienced severe depression and undergone electric shock therapy. When Atwater released the information to the press, it humiliated the candidate and cast doubt on his ability. In anguish, the man questioned Atwater's campaign ethics. Atwater responded by saying that he had no intention of responding to a man "hooked up to a jumper cable." Ten years later, Atwater was afflicted with an incurable brain tumor. He was confined to bed, attached to machines and tubes and wires. Before he died, he wrote the candidate a letter and asked to be forgiven (Ep 4:32-note) He saw how cruel and heartless his words had been.

(THOUGHT - It strikes me that so many [too many] people wait until they are about to die to seek forgiveness for wrongs they have carried around their entire life and which have "gnawed" away at their conscience and their very soul. Dear reader I must ask you - Is there someone from whom you need to seek forgiveness? Or is there someone to whom you need to grant forgiveness, "canceling their debt" against you and thereby releasing yourself from the unyielding prison of resentment and bitterness, feelings that you have willfully chosen to keep "bottled" up inside your heart and mind for days, months or perhaps even years? If the Spirit prompts you, I pray you do not delay, for your sake and the sake of His Name. Amen.)

Our words can be just as devastating. And it seem as that it's our children or family or fellow believers whom we hurt the most. As believers in Christ, we have an obligation before God to evaluate the impact of our words. Idle, angry, hateful words can inflict great harm, for which we will be held accountable (Mt 12:36, 37).

Ask God for help. Before hurtful words come pouring out of your mouth, think first—then leave them unsaid. —D C Egnor [Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Use words of kindness, filled with love,
That heal and nourish life
Instead of hurling angry words
That wound and stir up strife. —Sper

**Think before you act.
Think twice before you speak.**

Good (18) (**agathos**) means suitable, rather serviceable, profitable, benefiting others, whereas the related word **kalos** means constitutionally good, but not necessarily benefiting others. Agathos words would include those adapted to instruct, counsel, and comfort. These words are based on one's assessment of the hearer's need and are spoken accordingly so as to meet that need, building them up rather than tearing them down.

THOUGHT- How do we cultivate a heart yields the fruit of beneficial, gracious, edifying speech? It is interesting that the first "fruit" (or effect) Paul mentions in his command to be filled the Spirit has to do with the **words that proceed from our mouth!**

And **do not get drunk** (present imperative - With the negative = a command calling for them to cease this activity) with wine, for that is dissipation, but **be filled** (present imperative = Command to allow [passive voice = effect exerted from extrinsic Source, but we must still choose to yield to Him] one's self to be filled not with a "liquid" but with the "life" of the Spirit of Christ, and to do so as one's continual practice [and it does take "practice" surrendering - He will give us manifold opportunities to practice!]) with the Spirit, (And what is the first "fruit" of His supernatural life flowing through us?) **speaking to one another (!)** (Ep 5:18+, Ep 5:19a+)

We see a similar pattern in the parallel passage in Colossians (which helps us understand what being filled with the Spirit entails - fill yourself with His Word, respond to the revelation, and His Spirit will revive your spirit, cp Ps 119:25+)...

Let the word of Christ richly **dwell** (present imperative = let the Word continually "take up residence"

within the "temple of God" [you, your body, 1Co 6:19+], making itself at home in your mind and heart, and being manifested in an obedient walk and edifying talk) within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another (Col 3:16+) (Teaching implies that we are speaking as does admonishing).

Edification (3619) (**oikodome** from **oikos** = dwelling, house + **doma** = building or **demo** = to build) is **literally** the building of a house and came to refer to any building process. **Oikodome** can refer to the actual process of building or construction. Another literal meaning is as a reference to a building or edifice which is the result of a construction process (Mt 24:1, Mk 13:1, 2 are the only literal uses of **oikodome** in the NT). (See sermon by Alexander Maclaren entitled "[Edification](#)")

Paul uses oikodome 4x (out of a total of 18 uses in NT) in Ephesians (so clearly it is a key word for the unity of the Body of Christ)...

Ephesians 2:21 (THE **HOLY SPIRIT** "SUPERVISES" THE FITTING TOGETHER AND THE GROWTH INTO A **HOLY TEMPLE**) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

Ephesians 4:12 (SPIRIT FILLED MEN SPEAK THE WORD OF TRUTH) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

Ephesians 4:16 (AGAIN WE SEE THE SPIRIT WORKING IN THE WHOLE BODY) from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself (BASED UPON THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN FITTING AND HOLDING THE BODY TOGETHER, THE BODY IN DEPENDENCE ON THE SAME SPIRIT IS ABLE TO BUILD ITSELF UP) in love (WHICH ALSO IS FRUIT THAT BLOOMS WHEN THE SPIRIT IS WORKING)..

Most of the NT uses of **oikodome** are **metaphorical or figurative**, obviously an architectural metaphor. As used here in Eph 2:21, **oikodome** refers to the **church** as the building for God's indwelling (cp 1Co 3:9). Figuratively the idea is the process of edification or building up spiritually or spiritual strengthening.

Figuratively, as used in this verse, **oikodome** refers to the process in which one speaks words that build up, instruct or improve spiritually.

Note that **Webster** says that "**edify**" is from Latin word meaning to erect a house. Believers are to speak good to others to instruct, improve, inform, enlighten and uplift them, especially in the moral and ethical sphere. Sapro's words have the opposite effect.

Other figurative meanings include our physical bodies (2Co 5:1), as a reference to the process of spiritual growth, edification or building up (some contexts speak primarily to the individual, some to the corporate body of Christ) (Ro 14:19, 15:2, 1Co 3:9, 14:3, 5, 12, 26, 2Co 10:8),

Vine summarizes **the word group of oikodome (noun) and oikodomeo (verb)** noting that these is used...

both in a **literal sense**, Mt 7:24; Lk 4:29, and in a figurative, Ac 20:32; Ga 2:18. The corresponding noun, **oikodome**, building, edification, is used in a similar way, literally, Matthew 24:1 (noun - oikodome), **figuratively**, Ro 14:19 (noun - oikodome).

The word expresses the **strengthening effect of teaching**, 1Co 14:3 (noun - oikodome), and example, 1Co 10:23, upon oneself and upon others, 1Co 14:4, whether for good, 2Co 10:8, or for evil, 1Co 8:10, "emboldened." From the familiar spectacle of building operations **it transfers to the spiritual realm** the idea of assured progress as the result of patient labor. The word is used of national life, Mt 21:42, and of church life, Ac 9:31, as well as of the individual, Ro 15:2 (noun - oikodome). It is **used of the "Church which is His Body"** in Mt 16:18; Ep 4:12 (noun - oikodome), cp. 1Pe 2:5, and of the local church in 1Co 3:9; 14:5, 12; Ep 2:21 (noun - oikodome). Once it describes the resurrection body, 2Co 5:1. **God is said to be the Builder**, in 1Co 3:9 (noun - oikodome); Christ in Mt 16:18; Paul in Ro 15:20, cp. 1Co 3:10; 2Co 10:8; 13:10 (both use the noun - oikodome); the "gifts" of the ascended Lord are the builders in Ep 4:12 (noun - oikodome), cp. 1Co 14:12; individual believers, here; and in Ep 4:16 (noun - oikodome) the church is said to build itself up in love. Building up is effected by: (1) love, 1Co 8:1, cp. Ep 4:16 (noun - oikodome); (2) prophesying, 1Co 14:3, 4 (noun in 14:3 oikodome) (3) exhortation, 1Th 5:11, cp. He 10:25. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

Need of the moment (5532) (**chreia** from **chréos** = debt) refers to that which is needed or is a necessity. Note that **chreia** is also used in the previous passage (Eph 4:28) calling for saints to meet others material needs, and in Eph 4:29 to meet their spiritual needs - the "**holistic**" effect of Spirit enabled putting on of the new garment of Christ (Gal 3:27).

- **so that it will give grace to those who hear.** Matthew 5:16; 1 Pe 2:12; 3:1
- [Ephesians 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 4:17-32 Solving Conflicts](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 4:28-32](#) - Wayne Barber
- [Ephesians 4:28-29: A Brand New Way of Life - 4](#) - Wayne Barber
- [Ephesians 4:17-5:14 Study Guide \(see dropdown menu\)](#) - John MacArthur

Related Passages:

Proverbs 12:18NKJV There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health [Hebrew for health or healing = **marpe** and in the Lxx translated with the verb **iaomai** = literally speaks of deliverance from physical diseases or afflictions, figuratively of deliverance from sin and its evil consequences, to make whole, to renew. In passive sense = to be restored, to recover.)

Comment (NET Note on Pr 12:18NET) - Healing words are the opposite of the cutting, irresponsible words. What the wise say is faithful and true, gentle and kind, uplifting and encouraging; so their words bring healing.

AS A SPIRIT FILLED BELIEVER BE A GRACE GIVER!

So that it will give grace ([charis](#)) **to those who hear** - Purposeful speech should be what we always strive for as believers. And so Paul begins with a **so that** ([hina](#) - see terms of purpose) which expresses the purpose of wholesome, good, edifying words. **Will give** is a verb that means to give something usually implying what is given has value, as is true in this context. Speech in the well dressed garment of Christ should be edifying (building up not tearing down), appropriate (suited to the occasion) and gracious (imparting grace to the hearer's ear and heart).

Gregory Brown - "**Grace**" means "unmerited favor." This means that it doesn't matter how mean or undeserving a person is; our words should bless him. Christ teaches that even our enemies should be blessed by our speech. In fact, we are called to bless those who curse us and pray for them (Luke 6:28+).

The dying words of one ancient saint were, "**Grace** is the only thing that can make us like God. I might be dragged through heaven, earth, and hell and I would still be the same sinful, polluted wretch unless God Himself should cleanse me by His **grace**." And I would add the only way we can speak gracious words is by continually basking in the glow of and continual reliance upon God's transforming grace dispensed by His Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29+).

R Kent Hughes - We are to converse in such a way that our words become a vehicle and demonstration of the grace of God. We are to be like Alexander Whyte, of whom it was said, "All of his geese became swans." We should speak **constructive talk**, talk that **builds others up**. As Eliphaz said of Job, "Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees" (Job 4:4). (See [Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ](#))

Steven Cole notes that "If you are at odds with anyone, perhaps because he or she has wronged you, you'll be inclined to think, *"But this person doesn't deserve words that build him up! He deserves to be put down!"* But, grace is undeserved favor! **Grace extends to others what God has extended to you. It also extends to others what you need in return from others, because you often fall short or fail them.** So, although it may be true that the other person does not deserve kind words that build him up, give him such words anyway (Enabled by the Spirit Who gives you the Desire and the Power! Php 2:13)! ([Transformed Talk](#))

Augustine in recognition of the principle that speech must give grace, hung this motto on his dining room wall "He who speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table."

Gregory Brown How can a believer be more effective at speaking godly words instead of ungodly words?

1. Our words must be both filled with and guided by Scripture.

Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). If our speech is going to be helpful, we must know and use Scripture.

2. Our words must be guided by the Holy Spirit.

We should pray over our words. We should ask the Lord what to say, when to say it, and how to say it. In Ephesians 6:19, Paul said, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel." Lord, give us the words that will honor you and bless your people.

Wayne Barber explains our **Brand New Way of Life** in the context of "**Rotten Speech**" writing...

Ephesians 4:29, we become a person who builds up rather than tears down. This is so explicit I don't even have to say a lot about it. Let me just read it. "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth." That is interesting. He has talked about what we say twice. Once not lying, but now this is any general speech that comes out of our mouth. It changes gear a little bit. The word "unwholesome" there is the word *sapros*. It means rotten, something that is rotten, something that decays.

A principle comes to my mind. If you take a barrel of good apples and put one bad apple in that barrel, do you think the good apples are going to crowd out the bad apple and therefore all the apples are going to become good? No, it works exactly the opposite. **One rotten, putrid apple will begin to contaminate every single good apple that is in that barrel. That is the way our speech is.** The word "rotten" is that which decays, that which putrefies. The way you talk to people is incredibly different when you have the new garment on compared to when you have the old garment on.

Paul goes on to explain "but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear."

In other words, this is so relative that you can't really apply it in an adequate way. It fits whatever situation you are in. The Holy Spirit will give you words that can build up. That doesn't mean that you are never to confront. That doesn't mean you don't address problems, but it does mean that whatever you do, you do it with an attitude of building up and not tearing down.

SEVERAL THINGS YOU CAN DO TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

When he says, "Do not grieve," the word "**grieve**," **lupeo**, is a love word. In other words, there are several things you can do with the Holy Spirit. I want you to know that the Holy Spirit is not an "it." He is not the force as Star Wars tells us. He is a person who lives within us. He is the person, the Spirit of Christ who lives within us, the third person of the trinity.

1) He can be resisted.

Acts 7:51 talks about the religious Jew where it says "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always **resisting** (present tense = their habitual practice; Greek = *antipto* = literally to fall against, to rush upon in a hostile manner, to resist by force) the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

He can be resisted by the lost (unbelievers, unregenerate)

2) He can be quenched by the church.

In 1Th 5:19 (note) he Paul instructs us "**Do not quench** the Spirit." (present imperative + negative = stop doing this! Or don't begin doing this!)

Quench is plural indicating Paul is addressing the entire church. You can put the fire out. You can quench the Holy Spirit.

3) He can be grieved.

Here in Ep 4:30 (note) the individual believer can grieve the Holy Spirit and so Paul says, "**Do not grieve** (present imperative + negative = stop doing this! Or don't begin doing this!) the Holy Spirit of God."

Well, what does it mean? Well, in context, it means don't become **ataker** or you have just grieved the Spirit of God who is a giver. Don't let any **unwholesome word** proceed out of your mouth, or you have just grieved the Spirit of God who is the builder of the church. Don't **grieve** the Spirit of God.

Do you ever grieve somebody you love? There have been times that I have said things that have pierced my wife's heart, not really knowing how much damage it could actually do. This was true especially years ago when I was just learning how to walk and live the Christian life. It's not as much now, thank God, as it was then. But when you grieve somebody you love and you can't take back what you have said and you know now

how they feel, that is exactly what happens to the Holy Spirit every time we refuse to put on the new garment of Jesus Christ. It grieves Him. It distresses Him. The word means to distress someone.

Paul says, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

That refers to the day Jesus comes for the church. He is there in your life for a reason and He wants to control your life.

I think Ep 4:27 (note) and Ep 4:30 parallel each other. In other words, I think he brings both spirits into play, the **Holy Spirit** and the **unholy spirit** who is just an angel, certainly not equal to God. Which one are you going to please?

If I grieve the Holy Spirit, I have just given the unholy spirit an opportunity. If I bless and please the Holy Spirit, then I have just frustrated the unholy spirit.

I've got a choice to make. The devil is not somebody we reckon with, folks. He can only be in one place at a time. He is not omnipresent. His system is in this world. He is wherever God is working in such a way that he had to get his attention to stop it. I pray that some day we will be the kind of church that would attract that kind of attention. Folks, let me tell you something. His spirit is in this world. The mark he left on humanity is our flesh. When he gets us to put on the old garment, he doesn't have to get in us. That old garment does the damage. We have given him an opportunity, and he takes it from there in the downward spiral of self.

Well, maybe you feel convicted. I am. Do you know what you do when you realize you've sinned? Let me tell you what to do. There is such grace in this. Come right back to where you departed. You **confess**, which means you agree with God, "God, I have missed the mark. I am doing more damage to the body of Christ than I am building it up and God, I want to stop it."

Secondly, you **repent**. Now the forgiveness will be there when you confess. You can appropriate that at that point. Now you must repent. If you've done wrong, if you have been wearing the wrong garment this past week, if you've offended other people and you know by what you have said that you have hurt them, first of all confess it and make sure you make it right with them and then repent of it.

A young fellow was in the house with his dad and his family. It was warm inside. Outside it was below zero, the wind blowing, snow stacking up. It was awful outside. Inside it was a warm house, insulated, fire in the fireplace. You can just get the picture. A ball game on television. Carpet on the floor. You could smell the bread cooking in the kitchen. Supper was about ready. It was just where you want to be. The boy was sitting there enjoying it, and the father looked over at him and said, "Hey listen, son, put another log on the fire."

The son jumped up and said, "I am 18 years old and I'm sick and tired of being told what to do when I am in this house. I am leaving, and you can have it. You do it yourself. If you want a log on the fire, put it on yourself."

He went upstairs, got a duffle bag, put his clothes in it and walked out of that house. He walked about a block. The wind was picking up. The chill factor now below zero. The wind was burning his face it was blowing so hard. He was cold and thinking to himself, "You know, I was just inside that house and it was warm. I was about ready to eat, and it was wonderful fellowship. This is sort of stupid."

He finally decides to go back. So he walks back to the house kind of sheepishly and knocked on the door. The father opened the door and said, "Hey, son. Good to see you. Been gone 30 minutes. I thought you were leaving for a while. Good to see you. Come on in. Take your stuff upstairs, unpack and come on down and watch the ball game with me."

He went downstairs and sat in the chair. Boy, he was glad to be home! This is where he belongs. While he was sitting there, the father looked over at him and said, "Oh, by the way, put another log on the fire."

Folks, you can confess until you fall over in the floor and you will never have that new garment on until you put another log on the fire and go back and repent of what you didn't do before. If you are not going to obey, forget what you've heard. You are going to wear that old garment and you are going to be miserable. We will have to put a tag on you because Paul says mark those who cause division. The people who cause division are people who won't wear the new garment. People who wear the new garment preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. (Ephesians 4:22-27: A Brand New Way of Life - 3)

Grace (5485) (**charis**) in context is quality that adds delight or pleasure or a winning quality or attractiveness that invites a favorable reaction (graciousness, attractiveness, charm, winsomeness). In short, our **gracious** words spoken to others can be used by God's Spirit to transform trial into triumph and sorrow into joy. God of course is the ultimate source of all grace (God of all grace 1Pe

5:10-note) but Paul is implying that we as His ambassadors, can function as channels of His grace even in our everyday conversation. To repeat an aphorism may God give us grace gives the desire and power to think before we act and to think twice before we speak!

Hear ([191](#)) (**akouo**) means to hear with attention, with the ear of the mind or effectually so as to respond appropriately to what has been spoken or taught.

Steve Farrar, Finishing Strong - It was Ring Lardner who said, "The family you come from is not as important as the family you are going to have." He's right. The truth is, I can't do anything about the home which I was born into. In my case, it was a good one. But now that I'm the dad, it's on my shoulders to make a good home. What's going to be the atmosphere of my home? More than anything else, it will be my words that spell the difference between construction and destruction. What kind of words will echo off the walls of my home and sink into the souls of those impressionable folks under my roof? Unjust words like, "You'll never amount to anything." Unjust statements like, "Here, give me the wrench! You look so darned awkward with that thing."

A Few Speech quotes -

- Actions don't always speak louder than words—your tongue can undo everything you do. Anon.
 - His heart cannot be pure whose tongue is not clean. Anon.
 - In company, guard your tongue—in solitude, your thoughts. Anon.
 - Lord, make my words gracious and tender, for tomorrow I may have to eat them! Anon.
 - No physician can heal the wounds inflicted by the tongue. Anon.
 - Nothing is so opened more by mistake than the mouth. Anon.
 - One thing you can give and still keep is your word. Anon.
 - The Christian should learn two things about his tongue: how to hold it and how to use it. Anon.
 - The tongue is but three inches long, yet it can kill a man six feet high. Anon.
 - There are two sciences which every person ought to learn: the science of speech and the more difficult one of silence. Anon.
 - What is in the well of your heart will show up in the bucket of your speech. Anon.
 - When you speak, remember God is one of your listeners. Anon.
 - Words are leaves—deeds are fruit. Anon.
 - It is a sad fact that the tongues of professing Christians are often all too busy doing the devil's work. Donald Grey Barnhouse
 - Gentle words fall lightly, but they have great weight. Derick Bingham
 - A sanctified heart is better than a silver tongue. Thomas Brooks
 - Of all the members in the body, there is none so serviceable to Satan as the tongue. Thomas Brooks
 - The vice of the tongue spreads and prevails over every part of life. It is as active and potent for evil in old age as ever it was in the days of our youth. John Calvin
-

Lawrence Peter "Yogi" Berra, Montclair State University, East Rutherford, NJ, said the following to the class of '96 upon their graduation: "I am happy to speak my words at the university graduation. A lot of people have been quoting me ever since I came to play for the Yankees in 1946. But, as I once said, I really didn't say everything I said. So now it's my turn. I want to give some of my famous advice to the graduates. First, never give up because it ain't over 'til it's over. Second, during the years ahead, when you come to the fork in the road, take it. Third, don't always follow the crowd, because nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded. Fourth, stay alert. You can observe a lot by watching. Fifth, and last, remember that whatever you do in life, 90% of it is half mental. In closing, I want to quote myself again: Thank you, Montclair State University, for making this day necessary.-- USA Today, 5-24-96, p. 15A.

Illustration -To appreciate the power of the tongue, we need only picture the people of Great Britain in the early days of World War II, gathered in their living rooms listening to Prime Minister Winston Churchill deliver one of the most stirring speeches of the war: "*The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us.... Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say: 'This was their finest hour.'*" The heroism so evident in Britain's battle against Nazi Germany may have lain dormant in the British people had not Churchill's words helped galvanize their will. Our words have the ability to "edify" others.

Illustration - A catering manager was discussing a baby-christening party with a young couple. She told the mother of the baby, "You look like you've lost most of your pregnancy weight." "Thanks," came the clenched-teeth reply. "We adopted" (Reader's Digest [June, 2005], p. 67). File that away in your memory as what never to say! (Steve Cole - see full sermon [below](#))

Illustration - Alan Redpath wrote, "I once formed a mutual encouragement fellowship at a time of stress in one of my pastorates. The members subscribed to a simple formula applied before speaking of any person or subject that was perhaps controversial.

T—Is it true?

H—Is it helpful?

I—Is it inspiring?

N—Is it necessary?

K—Is it kind?

When I look at those suggestions, I find that I might not have quite as many things to say.

A young lady once said to John Wesley "I think I know what my talent is. It's to speak my mind." Wesley quipped "I don't think God would mind if you bury that talent."

Weighty Words - Experts tell us that people often hide what they are trying to say behind a wall of words. This is a kind of double talk in which their words do not coincide with their feelings. Gerald Nierenberg, a New York lawyer, wrote a book about this problem called *Meta-Talk: Guide to Hidden Meanings in Conversation*. In it he gives 350 examples of verbal distortion. Another communications consultant says many people are afraid that honesty in speech will cost them friendships, love, or respect. So they either keep their lips zippered or say something other than what they mean. Additional factors that may impede straight talk are shyness, lack of self-worth, fear of displaying ignorance, fear of criticism, and fear of hurting someone's feelings.

Christians are not immune to this problem. Trying to be both loving and truthful is often extremely difficult. The Bible, however, provides a balanced and optimistic approach to this dilemma. Being honest with people may hurt, but if we speak kindly and with compassion we give them the support they need to face reality. —M. R. De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**GENTLE WORDS FALL LIGHTLY,
BUT THEY HAVE GREAT WEIGHT.**

Well Chosen Words - Marion F. Ash and an elderly gentleman were painting a farmhouse on a hot summer day. They had just refreshed themselves with a cold drink of water and were returning to their ladders when a small boy with only one arm came riding toward them on his bike. He stopped and said, "I live down the road a ways. Ma sent me to see if you needed some drinking water. If you do, I can go back and fetch it in a glass canning jar." Mr. Ash was about to decline the offer, but his older companion said, "You sure came in the nick of time, Sonny. A good drink of water would do wonders for both of us." The youngster grinned and called out, "I'll be right back. I bet you think you're lucky that I came along!" The elderly man replied, "You can say that again! Now our worries are over. We've got another man on the job." Commenting on this incident, Mr. Ash wrote, "With a few well-chosen words my friend had transformed a young, handicapped lad into a confident human being."

The world needs people who affirm the worth of others by acts of kindness and words of encouragement. This poor old world needs the wealth of positive attitudes and hopeful persuasion. —H. V. Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**KIND WORDS
ARE MUSIC TO A HURTING HEART**

Small Thing, Big Impact - Are most people truth-tellers? Can what they say be taken at face value? Or are they like the ancient Cretans, whose reputation was that they were "always liars"? (Titus 1:12+).

Lies, of course, are communicated by the tongue. That small part of the human body can make a powerful impact. It can ruin a reputation. It can destroy a friendship. It can cause lasting heartache.

On the other hand, the tongue can give comfort and hope in time of bereavement. It can shine the light of saving truth into the mind of someone wandering in spiritual darkness. It can praise and glorify God.

We shouldn't be surprised, then, that Scripture repeatedly urges us to exercise great wisdom and care in how we use this small part of the body. Pr 18:21 is not exaggerating when it warns us that "death and life are in the power of the tongue." David was not indulging in pointless poetry when he denounced "men . . . whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword"

(Psalm 57:4). And the apostle James said that the tongue can be as destructive as a fire (Jas 3:1-12).

By the Holy Spirit's power, may we use our tongues to bless our hearers, build up one another, and glorify our Creator in prayer and praise. — Vernon C Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, set a watch upon my lips,
My tongue control today;
Help me evaluate each thought
And guard each word I say. —Hess

The tongue is a small organ that creates either discord or harmony.

One of the greatest honors ever offered to me came during one of life's saddest times.

I was heartbroken last year when my good friend and co-worker Kurt De Haan died suddenly while out on his regular lunchtime run. Kurt was managing editor of Our Daily Bread from 1989 until the time of his death. Losing him was a huge blow to each of us at RBC Ministries, but his wife Mary and their four children were suffering the worst pain.

A couple of days before the funeral, I got a call from Mary, who asked if I would share a eulogy of Kurt. I was overwhelmed with this bittersweet privilege.

As I reflected on Kurt's life, one trait continued to surface. It was a remarkable characteristic, and it was something that I focused on in my eulogy. In the 22 years I had known him, worked with him, and talked with him, I never once heard Kurt say a negative word about any other person.

What a remarkable legacy of a true Christian heart! Kurt lived up to the standard of Ephesians 4:29, 30, 31, 32. He sought to build up others, showing kindness and tenderheartedness instead of bitterness and malice.

Will others be able to say the same about us?—Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Instead of hurling angry words
That wound and stir up strife,
Use words of kindness, filled with love,
That heal and nourish life. —Sper

A kind word is the oil that takes the friction out of life.

The Power of Words - One major area of breakdown in marriages and families today is communication. The apostle Paul used the word corrupt to describe speech that has the power to tear people down, adults and children alike (Eph. 4:29). He also stated that good communication is "necessary edification," for it has the power to build people up.

Here are examples of corrupt communication we often aim at our children: "Can't you do anything right?" "What's wrong with you?" "You'll never learn." "You're always breaking something." "Oh, let me do it." The list is endless. But so are examples of edifying communication. A list called "99 Ways To Say 'Very Good'" offers these encouraging words: "That's it!" "You're really working hard today." "I'm very proud of you." "Now you've figured it out." "You are very good at that." "That's the way!" "Now that's what I call a fine job." "Good thinking."

Paul said that when we edify others through our speech, we impart grace, or spiritual benefit, to their lives (v.29). Let's examine our speech habits for careless words, and then resolve to build up every person we meet, especially children. Remember, people need encouragers more than they need critics. Which one are you? — Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Button up your lip securely
'Gainst the words that bring a tear,
But be swift with words of comfort,
Words of praise, and words of cheer. --Loucks

**A word of encouragement
can make the difference between giving up and going on.**

Clean Up the Environment - What a frustrating problem pollution is! Everybody suffers from it, yet everybody contributes to it.

Pollution takes many forms, but one type is often overlooked. Charles Swindoll calls it "verbal pollution," passed around by grumblers, complainers, and criticizers. "The poison of pessimism," Swindoll writes, "creates an atmosphere of wholesale negativism where nothing but the bad side of everything is emphasized."

A group of Christian friends became concerned about this form of pollution and their personal part in it. So they made a pact to avoid critical words for a whole week. They were surprised to find how little they spoke! As they continued the experiment, they actually had to relearn conversation skills.

In Ephesians 4, Paul called believers to that sort of decisive action. He said we are to "put off" the old self and its conduct that grieves the Holy Spirit (vv.22,30) and "put on" the new self that builds up others (v.24). As we rely on the help of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), we can make those changes in our conduct, our thinking, and our speaking.

If we want to be rid of verbal pollution, we must choose to change and ask for God's help. It's a great way to start cleaning up our spiritual environment. — Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

What! Never speak one evil word,
Or rash, or idle, or unkind!
O how shall I, most gracious Lord,
This mark of true perfection find? --Wesley

Help stamp out pollution--clean up your speech!

Transformed Talk Ephesians 4:29

Steven Cole

A catering manager was discussing a baby-christening party with a young couple. She told the mother of the baby, "You look like you've lost most of your pregnancy weight." "Thanks," came the clenched-teeth reply. "We adopted" (Reader's Digest [June, 2005], p. 67). File that away in your memory as what never to say!

Try as we may, we all have erred with our tongues! James 3:2 says, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." While we may never achieve perfect control over our tongues, I'm convinced that if husbands and wives would consistently apply Ephesians 4:29, we would rarely see divorce. If parents practiced this verse toward their children, we would see few children from Christian homes rebel against their parents. If we applied it towards one another in the church, we would see few churches split over personality conflicts or minor doctrinal issues. In short, Ephesians 4:29 is a verse that would bring radical change in all of our relationships if we would apply it conscientiously:

"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."

As we've seen (Eph 4:22-24), Paul has taught us that believers will put off the old way of life, be renewed in their minds, and put on the new way of life, which is consistent with being a new creature in Christ. Then he goes from preaching to meddling by getting very specific: Put off falsehood and speak truth (Eph 4:25). Put on righteous anger, being careful not to let it spill over into sinful anger, which would give Satan a foothold in your life (Eph 4:26-27). Stop stealing and instead, work hard and give to those in need (Eph 4:28). Now, he says that Christians must transform their talk.

Transformed talk is implicit in truthful speech, in righteous anger, and in not stealing, since stealing usually involves lying. Paul will also deal with our speech in Eph 4:31 (bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander) and in Eph 5:3-4 (impure speech, coarse jokes). So our talk is a major area where the gospel will make a huge difference. Just as you can often tell where someone is from by his accent, so people should be able to tell that you're a Christian by your transformed talk. Paul is saying that...

Rather than using your words to tear down others, use them to build up others.

We will follow Paul's outline by first looking at the **problem** and then at the **solution**.

1. The problem: We can use our words to tear down others.

I do not advise it, but if you turn on any TV show on any night of the week, you will not have to watch very long before you hear examples of speech that tears down others. Most of the “humor” on TV sitcoms comes from husbands and wives, parents and children, or coworkers putting each other down! But, that is a characteristic of the old life, not of our new life in Christ. If you want God to transform your speech in line with our text, you should not be watching, much less laughing at, shows where the “humor” comes from the people putting each other down.

A. To get rid of unwholesome speech, you must identify it.

The Greek word translated “unwholesome” means rotten, useless, or unprofitable. It is used (Matt. 7:17-18) to refer to **rotten fruit**. It is also used of **rotten fish** (Matt. 13:48). John Piper observes that such rotten speech, like rotten fruit and rotten fish, will not nourish anyone. It contaminates. It will make you sick. And, it smells bad and creates an unpleasant atmosphere for anyone who gets near it. So Paul tells us to get rid of it like rotten fruit or fish.

B. Some examples of rotten speech:

We could probably come up with more, but here are twelve examples of rotten speech:

(1) Name-calling, put-downs, & trading insult for insult.

Often this is done for so-called “humor,” but it does not honor God or build up others. 1 Peter 3:9 says that we should not return insult for insult, but give a blessing instead.

(2) Inaccurate labeling.

This is not usually as caustic as name-calling, but it still tends to tear down others by lumping them with a negative group. Labels may be useful in identifying where a person is at on an issue, but they become harmful when we use them too quickly to write off someone because of some association. So be careful!

(3) Sarcasm, ridicule, mockery.

Godly people in the Bible occasionally use sarcasm, ridicule, and mockery against those who are leading people astray. Elijah, for example, mocked the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:27). Jesus ridiculed the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and legalism (Matt. 23). But my experience is that using sarcasm is like righteous anger. It must be carefully controlled or it spills over into sin. I would advise you never to use sarcasm or ridicule as a couple toward each other or with your children. Never mock something that a person cannot change, such as a physical feature or a family background issue.

(4) Blaming, exaggerated attacks.

Blaming others came in with the fall, and it is a major element in ungodly speech. Often it is coupled with exaggeration, such as, “you always,” or “you never.”

(5) Gripping, complaining.

Those in the world gripe and complain about everything, as you know if you have served in the military. But Christians are to do all things without grumbling or complaining (Phil. 2:14), because all complaints are ultimately directed at God, who sovereignly ordains our circumstances. Rather than griping about the difficult people in your life, thank God for them (1Th. 5:18).

(6) Destructive criticism.

If your words are not aimed at helping or healing, but only at venting your spleen, you are sinning. Proverbs 12:18 says, “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

(7) Angry words, including threats and revenge.

Such words are only trying to dominate or control the other person through fear and intimidation. Parents, of course, sometimes must warn a child of impending consequences if his behavior doesn’t change. But it should be done calmly with careful thought, not in the heat of anger. The aim should be to help your child grow in godliness, not to get revenge or to intimidate.

(8) Arguments where you seek to win so as to maintain power.

As husbands and wives, when you disagree about something, your aim should never be to win the argument, but rather to promote godliness in your marriage. You’ve got to judge your pride and allow Jesus Christ truly to be Lord of your tongue.

(9) Deception, lies, and manipulative speech.

We've already looked at this (Eph 4:25). Using manipulative speech to get your way is a form of deception.

(10) Gossip and slander.

Often, gossip and slander spread partial truths mixed with falsehood to make the other person look bad. Sometimes gossip and slander may be true, but the one you're telling has no need to know the information. Sometimes it is done under the cover, "I wanted you to know so you could pray." Often the one spreading gossip is feeding his pride by being in the know.

(11) Profanity.

We are not to take the Lord's name in vain. This includes using shortened forms of the Lord's name, such as (I would not even say it, but I often hear Christians say it), "O Jeez!" The same applies to the frequently used expression, "O my God!"

(12) Filthy talk and coarse jokes.

Paul specifically hits this (Eph 5:3-4). It includes all dirty jokes and using words for sex, which ought to be sacred, as swear words. We could probably come up with more examples of rotten speech, but that list should give you enough to work on!

2. The solution: As new creatures in Christ, use your words to build up others.

Paul says that we should use "only such a word as is good for edification, according to the need [the translators added, of the moment], so that it will give grace to those who hear." Five things:

A. To build up others, you must be a new creature in Christ.

Unbelievers may learn how to communicate civilly, but Paul is talking here about the transformation that stems from putting on the new man, "which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph 4:24). If you teach an unbeliever how to communicate in a nice way, you're just putting a tuxedo on a pig. You haven't changed his nature, which is prone to pride and self-seeking. So his nice speech is really just a tool to get his way or to manipulate people for his own goals. But the Christian uses godly speech to glorify his Savior. It is a completely new motive stemming from the new birth.

B. To build up others with wholesome words, such words must first be in your thoughts.

The deeds of the flesh include (Gal. 5:20-21a) "enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying..." Jesus said (Mt. 15:19), "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders." He also said (Matt. 12:34), "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart." So evil speech is rooted in an evil heart, which is why genuine conversion is the foundation for transformed talk.

But, I have even found Christians who do not judge their sin on the thought level, and so their evil thoughts escalate into evil words and often into evil actions. For example, a couple is having conflict in their marriage. He digs in his heels, and she clams up in anger. He storms out the door in the morning and throughout the day thinks, "That woman is so difficult to live with!" All day long he runs her down in his thoughts. Meanwhile, she does the same: "That man is so insensitive to my feelings!" She cries her eyes out and maybe calls up her friend and commiserates about how difficult it is to live with such a monster.

It's a no-brainer: after both of them have spent the day thinking such sinful thoughts about each other, they aren't going to have a wonderful evening together when he gets home from work! Their mouths will speak out of the sinful overflow of their hearts.

The solution is, judge your evil thoughts! Examine your own sins and shortcomings and ask God and your mate to forgive you. Take the log out of your own eye. Then, thank God throughout the day for your mate and pray for him or her to be a godly person. Think about how you can speak in such a way that will build up your mate. William Penn said, "If you think twice before you speak once, you will speak twice the better for it. Better to say nothing than not to the purpose. And to speak pertinently, consider both what is fit, and when it is fit, to speak" (Leadership [Summer, 1986], p. 75, old English updated)

C. To build up others, use wholesome words.

In Paul's words, "what is good for edification." Use words that will help the other person to grow in godliness. You can think of more, but here are nine examples of wholesome words:

(1) Encouragement and praise.

Paul writes (1Th 5:11), "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing." Too often, parents only criticize or correct their kids. Instead, catch your kids doing something right and praise them for it! Encourage them in areas where they are doing well. Do the same with your mate.

(2) Appreciation and gratefulness.

This is related to encouragement and praise, and it must come from the heart (not as flattery or manipulation). If you are thinking rightly about your mate or children or co-workers, express it verbally. Tell them how much you appreciate all that they are doing. They won't know it if you don't put it into words.

(3) Loving words.

Say often, "I love you." Say it to your mate, to your children, and to your parents. Someone has said, "If we knew that the world would end in ten minutes, everyone would be on the phone telling someone else, 'I love you.'"

(4) Patient words.

"Love is patient" (1 Cor. 13:4-note) (**Ed note:** patient = makrothumeo = "long fuse" in present tense "love is continually, habitually patient!") This is only possible in one who is continually filled with/controlled by the Spirit Eph 5:18+ or as Paul phrases it in Php 2:13+, energized by the Spirit). This is often expressed not only by words, but also by facial expression and body language. Sometimes you should say, "That's okay, you're doing fine." Impatience communicates pride on your part, because you're really saying, "If you'd just get it together like me, things would be okay!"

(5) Kind words.

"Love is...kind" (1 Cor 13:4+). You should especially be kind when someone has done something dumb or has failed. It is tempting to ridicule the person, but at that moment, godly words of kindness are needed. You can say something like, "You know, I've done the same thing many times. It's okay."

(6) Gentle words.

The fruit of the Spirit includes gentleness (Gal. 5:23+)

EDITORIAL COMMENT - This clearly indicates that we must be surrendered to the Spirit in order for Him to bear His fruit. Stop "trying" and start "dying" to self! But see caveat below). The Greek word does not imply weakness, but rather strength under control. The gentle person is under the control of the Spirit, who is pictured as a gentle dove. Gentleness means thinking about how the other person feels and how your words will make him feel.

ONE CAVEAT REGARDING THE EXHORTATION - "STOP TRYING AND START DYING" - This statement **DOES NOT** mean that we are to "[Let God and Let God](#)" which is a false teaching (probably originating from the [Keswick Movement](#))! And so, as an example, the phrase "stop trying" means stop trying to live the supernatural life in your natural strength, but in dependence on the Spirit. So does this signify you will do nothing? Does this signify you are a "passive participant" in your [progressive sanctification](#)? Of course not! Paul was very clear that while believers are **totally dependent** on the Spirit of Christ to live a supernatural life, we are also **totally responsible** to work out our salvation -- "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out** (command in the [present imperative](#) - but even obeying this necessitates the Spirit's enablement described in the next verse) your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for (strategic "[term of explanation](#)") it is God who is at work in you, both to will (desire) and to work *power) for His good pleasure. (Php 2:12+, Php 2:13NLT+).

(7) Scripture that God has used in your life.

I'm not talking about preaching or using Scripture to berate the other person, but rather, using Scripture as God has taught you. This is probably the most edifying kind of speech, because God's Word is given to build us up in the faith. You can say, "A verse that God used in my life when I was discouraged was, ..."

(8) Words of loving correction, when needed.

Sometimes we must use our words to correct someone who is thinking or acting wrongly. Never just lash out, even if the person is in the wrong. Rather, always pray and think about how to speak in the most effective manner, with the aim of helping the person to grow in Christ. Every pastor and every Christian should know and practice 2 Timothy 2:24-25, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth."

(9) Prayer.

Sometimes, you may not know what to say, but you can always say, "I don't have the answer to this problem, but God does. Let's ask for His wisdom and help."

So, to build up others, you must be a new creature in Christ. You must first have wholesome words in your thoughts, the kinds of words that we have just seen some examples of.

D. To build up others, be sensitive to their needs.

Paul says that you must use words of edification, "according to the need." This implies that you are sensitive enough to understand what the person's real needs are. If you don't understand the person's needs, even well intentioned words can often hurt more than they heal. So, how do you find out the person's needs?

(1) Learn the person's needs by listening.

We've all had the frustrating experience of trying to talk to someone who wasn't really listening. Perhaps the person offered a pat solution to your problem, but it was useless advice because you felt that he didn't really hear what your need was.

You've got to listen to discern what the other person's needs are. This is especially true when the other person is upset with you or criticizes you unfairly. You'll be tempted to reciprocate by tearing into him. But, whether the other person's comments are accurate or not, that person has a need and your words can either be like sword thrusts or like a scalpel that brings healing (Pr. 12:18). Coupled with listening well is...

(2) Learn the person's needs by asking questions.

Proverbs 18:13 states, "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him." To listen well, you've got to ask clarifying questions so that you really understand the other person. You can ask, "Are you saying, ...?" and repeat back what you hear the person saying to find out if you're hearing correctly.

(3) Learn the person's needs by picking up non-verbal clues.

This is part of listening well, because much of communication is non-verbal. You can say, "I can see that you're really upset. I'd like to understand what is wrong and help if I can." But you won't build up the other person unless you are sensitive to his needs.

E. To build up others, give them grace.

Paul says, "so that it will give grace to those who hear." If you are at odds with anyone, perhaps because he or she has wronged you, you'll be inclined to think, "But this person doesn't deserve words that build him up! He deserves to be put down!" But, grace is undeserved favor! Grace extends to others what God has extended to you. It also extends to others what you need in return from others, because you often fall short or fail them. So, although it may be true that the other person does not deserve kind words that build him up, give him such words anyway!

When God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus, John (1:14) says, "and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus is full of grace and truth! As those who have put on the new man, created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph. 4:24), we should make sure that our words and actions are full of grace and truth. When Marla and I were raising our children, I used to say to her, "If we have to err in relating to our kids, let's err on the side of grace, not of being overly strict." I said that because God saved me by His grace alone, not because of anything I deserved. His grace is the main thing that motivates me to holy living. So use your words to give grace—God's grace that you have experienced—to others.

Conclusion

There is a story in the Jewish Talmud about a king who sent two jesters on an errand. He instructed them, "Foolish Simon, go and bring me back the best thing in the world. And you, Silly John, go and find for me the worst thing in the world." Both clowns were back in short order, each carrying a pack-age. Simon bowed low and grinned. "Behold, Sire, the best thing in the world." His package contained a tongue. John snickered and quickly unwrapped his bundle. "The worst thing in the world, Sire." Another tongue! (Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations [Assurance Publishers], # 6387, p. 1422.)

An unknown poet wrote (*ibid.*, #6380, p. 1421):

A careless word may kindle strife.

A cruel word may wreck a life.

A bitter word may hate instill;

A brutal word may smite and kill.

A gracious word may smooth the way;
A joyous word may light the day.
A timely word may lessen stress;
A loving word may heal and bless.

Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Paul says (Eph. 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." Rather than using words to tear down others, as a new creature in Christ, use your words to build up others.

Application Questions

- **How would you counsel a professing Christian** who admitted that his speech was often unwholesome, but who wanted to change? Where would you start?
- To which form of unwholesome speech are you most inclined? How do you plan to change?
- How can you think wholesome thoughts about a person who is acting in ungodly ways? Is it wrong to tell this person how he makes you feel? How do you confront in love?
- Won't giving grace to a person just encourage him to sin more? Discuss in light of Romans 6:1-14; 1 Cor. 15:10.
([Transformed Talk Ephesians 4:29](#))