

The Letters From Paul – Session 12

Dear Ephesians: Say the Right Things, Do the Right Things, but Really, No Kidding, Say the Right Things

Ephesians 4:25-29

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. 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
(Ephesians 4:25-29, NRSV).

Paul is writing to the Ephesian believers about very practical and important personal comportment issues. This section is a mini-version of the Hebrew Holiness Code found in the Levitical writings of the Old Testament, made different in the age of grace in Christ. Let's say this is a much more practical and concise instruction in contrast to the heavy-laden Hebrew legal codes. In fact, this is so basic and practical none of us should have difficulty following these teachings. I should highlight and underline the word should, as even short and basic life-instructions can be difficult for us (O.K., maybe it's just me).

Paul begins with lying, which is the short, rather nasty word for *falsehoods*. Do any of us really need to read or hear that lying is wrong and should not be part of the believer's life? No, but lying in the white area, omission lies, substitutionary

truths, exaggeration-half truths are all variations of un-truth. We are called to live in the world of truth. Remember the biblical line *And the truth will set you free?* That's salvation talk. That's where we should be pitching our tents.

Next Paul channels James in saying, *Be angry but do not sin*. Scripture vacillates on anger and sin. In some verses/sections anger and sin are synonymous while in others anger is allowed as long as it doesn't lead to sin. We do not have the time or space to delve into that arena so we will stick with Paul's direct teaching. If we are angry then work it out inside and do not let it swell or encroach to the point that sin is evident. Think of an example.

When he writes, *do not let the sun go down on your anger*, he is promoting a Hebrew belief that suggests that sundown is a perfect line of demarcation for decision making and subsequent action. If you have unresolved issues with someone make sure you deal with them, seek to resolve them, before the sun sets. If it happened on that day, deal with them post haste that day. This makes even more sense when the next line is applied: *And do not make room for the devil*. Our sin condition comes roaring back to life when we entertain anger to the point of embracing it. "To know that something is wrong but to do it anyway...is sin."

Our main focus today is unwholesome talk and its effect on our spiritual lives. Verse 29 speaks to evil talk, while other versions read "unwholesome" talk. Either way it's a focus on negative and non-edifying language. So, what is evil talk or unwholesome talk?

One option is filthy language which comes from the original language's use of a word meaning rotten or putrid. It's easy to get the word-picture for this, in fact

one can almost smell the vile stench. Extrapolate that over to language and its words so bad and negative that it smells of rot and decay. Obviously putrid language is one extreme and we can likely steer clear of that on a regular basis. It's the next level down that we must be concerned with. Harmful speech of any kind is also a huge negative for believers.

Harmful to whom? Harmful to what? Well, harmful to another person. And harmful to ourselves. And harmful to the Kingdom. So harmful it must be eradicated as its equal opportunity destructive.

Words that defame, words that spread gossip, words that spread lies, words that spew anger, words that stream expletives, words that tear down... are words that do damage to the Kingdom. These are the words that we must gain control over.

Question: Do you consider yourself a negative or profane person? Likely not but it's worth the ask.

Question: What percentage of the average person's words/speech is negative on a daily basis?

Remember I said average person/average daily language. A detailed study found that 50% of the average daily words of the average person are inherently negative, 30% are positive and 20% are neutral.

Yikes! 50%? 50% daily. That's a lot of influence. And influence is what this is all about. What type/level of damage are our words inflicting on others? On the progress of the Kingdom?

So, this is more than cursing (or cussin' if you're from my hometown). This is about a pattern of language and an arsenal of words that we use each day.

Tim Cameron, author of **The 40 Day Word Fast**, writes: *Speech issues are not a mouth thing, they are a heart thing. Language issues touch the very core of who and what we are. It's our produce. It's our fruit.*

He quotes portions of Mark 7: 20 and following: *What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, theft, wickedness, deceit, blasphemy, pride and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.*

His best line is one I wish I'd thought of is (if you're keeping score, I'm up to about 400 lines I wished I'd written first): *Whatever is in the well comes up in the bucket.* Besides being a classic line, this is so spot on and true. Whatever is inside of us will eventually come out.

We do not have to live with a negative mindset or outlook. We do not have to live with a propensity for the profane. Our bucket can produce holy (set apart/different/unique/non-average) fruit.

Back to Cameron: *The words that condemn us, judgment – criticism – sarcasm – negativity – complaining – gossip, all come from deep within, so deep that only God's Spirit can bring purification.*

So, our language does matter. Our words make up our speech life and our language life and those lives can bring healing and build up or they can bring pain, destruction, damage and they can tear down.

Really not much of a choice, huh?

Takeaway: We should set a goal of purifying our language lives. To that end, all negativity must go; angry words must go; unwholesome words (like griping,

criticism and curse words) must go; judgment must go; gossip must go; degrading words must go.

None of these are Kingdom actions and we should settle for nothing less than Kingdom actions.

So, let's go for purity of our Spirit/Soul in all aspects of our language lives. Only wholesome, edifying, positive language should come from the mouth of a follower of Christ. That alone can change lives...ours and others.

And we mustn't forget, ***Whatever's in the well comes up in the bucket.***

Amen and Amen

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