

Ephesians 4:29-30

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Bible Text: Ephesians 4:29-30

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Again we are in Ephesians chapter 4. We've been covering this month versus 25 through 32 and let me read versus 29 and 30 which will be the focus of the sermon this morning. Ephesians 4 verses 29 and 30, I'll be reading from the Modern English Version. Once again, hear God's word to you. "[\[Ephesians 4:29-30\]](#) *Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, that it may give grace to the listeners. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you are sealed for the day of redemption.*" The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.

This text cuts deeper than it might seem at first. These two verses get at the heart of who we are, but also in how and why we operate in our communication, in our conversation with one another. It shows that the fulfillment of God's law in the life of the Christian really does center on our interpersonal interactions with each other. As Paul said in Galatians 5 verses 13 through 15: "[\[Galatians 5:13-15\]](#) *You, brothers, have been called to liberty. Only do not use liberty to give an opportunity to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For the entire law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* -- And he goes on-- "*But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another.*" So, brothers and sisters, how do we bite and devour one another? Isn't it with the words we speak? Not just what we say but how we say it, when we say it, and why we say it? We have to remember again, as we have in each section of this chapter so far, that Paul has given us the foundation for this work in our lives, for this change in our lives, this historical redemptive person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the redeemer, he is our Prophet, Priest, and King in His humiliation and in his exultation. And again, versus 29 through 30 are an application, an outworking of what we read previously in the chapter "[\[Ephesians 4:21-24\]](#) *if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off the former way of life in the old nature, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new nature, which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.*"

In today's days text, versus 29 and 30, our text shows that the Holy Spirit is at work through each of us to renew the Imago Dei, God's image in us. Remember, as Paul says, "[\[Ephesians 4:24\]](#) *you put on the new nature, which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.*" We are created with that image of God in us and in our fall it is marred, it is distorted, it goes from a beautiful reflecting object into a carnival mirror, distorting that image of God in us. And today's text shows that the Holy Spirit is at work through each of us, THROUGH each of us, to renew that image of God, that true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness in one another. Again [Charles] Hodge notes for us that, in almost every case in this section here, there's the negative given and then there's the positive statement

of the duty and then a motive and I pray that you'll be quite motivated by the end of this as our motivation is quite strong in the spirit of God. So again, being the uncreative person that I am, we have three points today: Paul's presumption, Paul's imperative, and Paul's rationalization. Joel, those are the same three points that you've had for the last month! I know! We'll eventually get through this section, we'll move on to three more points, but we have, again, that personalization to these two verses.

Paul's presumption, first of all, that we have powerful mouths. We have powerful mouths. "[\[Ephesians 4:29a\]](#) *Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth.*" This is describing filthy talk. This is describing unwholesome talk. This is describing what can happen with our mouths, with our tongues. That our tongues are powerful instruments. This is reflected in Old Testament wisdom in Proverbs 18 verse 24: "[\[Proverbs 18:21\]](#) *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*" Proverbs 15 verse 4: "[\[Proverbs 15:4\]](#) *A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it crushes the spirit.*" Now, as we enter into the land of powerful mouths, there is a fork in the road. And as Yogi Berra said 'When there's a fork in the road, take it!' You have to take one side or the other of this fork. One is the extreme charismaticism which is wrapped up in pagan philosophy: That I myself am god and so therefore I am the creator and so I am able, like the God of the Bible, to speak into existence and make things that aren't to be things that are, that that is the power of the tongue of which scripture is speaking. Now, this is wrapped up in the ideology that says that we just need to send good thoughts and positive vibes to those who are hurting and those who are struggling. Gone are the days where we have a conversation with the Almighty God of the universe and then He directly impacts the situation which that person is found. No, no, no! In our all of our earthly wisdom now we are god and so all that I must do is think positive thoughts and send good vibes to someone and I am able to directly impact them through that. That's one option as we think about our powerful mouths. But I'll give you a hint, it's not really an option because it's all a bunch of bunk. Ironically, for someone to know that you're thinking good thoughts and sending positive vibes you have to tell them that you're doing it. If they're really that powerful I wouldn't need to call Scott and say 'Scott, I'm sending good thoughts and positive vibes your way.' He'd be: 'I know, brother, I already feel it.' That's not the case, is it?

And in reaction to that, we can come to the land of powerful mouths and we see the sign and we turn around and walk away and we live in denial of just how much power we hold in the things that we say to other people. In this fork in the road we can either go to the way of pagan ideology and New Age fanaticism or we can go the biblical way and understand that when we speak we hold the power that our tongues have over other people and we can either build them up or we can tear them down. We can either encourage them and enrich them or we can destroy them. That's what Proverbs is talking about. That's what the apostle is talking about in this text. The apostle Peter quotes Psalm 34 in his first letter when he says in 1 Peter 3:10 "[\[1 Peter 3:10\]](#) *He who would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.*" The apostle Peter blows out of the water the modern day virtue of speaking what's on your mind, as if that in and of itself is virtuous. There is an ongoing Biblical connection to the heart and the mouth that is undeniable. Even here we recognize that what the apostle is talking about is not just, you know, don't swear and don't tell dirty jokes, at least not when the kids are in the room because that becomes a stumbling block to them. That doesn't quite get at where the apostle is going in this text. Gordon Clark, a well known Christian philosopher of the previous generation, in his commentary on Ephesians says "Here, of course, logos could refer to a single curse word, but on a more important level it includes sentences and communications in general." See, what the apostle Paul is doing here is he is once again breaking down our desire for a mere list of human do's and don'ts. 'Just give me the list of good words and give me the list of bad words so I know exactly what to do.' No, he calls us to use our, in this text, recently sanctified and regenerated minds to think about what we are about to say.

Notice how he puts it: "[\[Ephesians 4:29a\]](#) *Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth.*" How many of you have ever been led astray with this thought: 'Well I've thought it so I might as well say it!' I'm guessing that the end of that conversation was not as hopeful as you thought it might be. See, Paul here seems to be acknowledging in the language that the brain is already spinning, perhaps even in a way that it shouldn't. That just because the word even comes into the back of the mouth that doesn't mean it needs to come out of the front of the mouth. Paul's presumption is that you and I, brothers and sisters, have powerful mouths. That that death and life that are in the power of the tongue, that that is a real thing. That even applies to the saints of God, as we live life one with another. So Paul's presumption is that we have powerful mouths.

Paul's imperative, how do we put off the unwholesome talk, how do we put off those things, what do we put on, Paul's imperative is that we give encouraging grace. That we give encouraging grace. These two phrases: things that are good for building up, things that give grace to the listeners. Now, if you do much scratching beneath the surface of this verse, you'll find that this is some complicated Greek. But the New American Standard translates, paraphrases it well. There is no word for word translation from the Biblical languages to the English, I'm sorry, there just isn't. The New American Standard says "[\[Ephesians 4:29\]](#) *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.*" You can read all the commentaries and generally that's the type of translation you're gonna land on is what the New American Standard offers to us. So if we're to say things, only those things which are good for building up that it make may give grace to the listeners, or that word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment so it will give grace to those who hear, how do we do that? How do we give encouraging grace to those who are listening to us, to those who hear us? Well I have A through E here, okay? A) We don't say what is blatantly harmful. If there is no good way to say it, then there should be no way to say it. No way to saying it, okay? We don't say what is blatantly harmful. B) We do say what is good and needed. We do say what is good and needed. C) We don't say those good and needed things whenever. There is an appropriate time to say the good and needed things. So, D) We do say those good and needed things when they will have the greatest impact. So, E) And this is kind of putting this all together, we do say those good and needed things then, taking into account the timing, the setting, the state of the person to whom we are speaking, consideration also of those who are listening in, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. What Paul is telling us is that, as believers, we don't get to just say whatever we want, whenever we want, to whomever we want. We must say only those things that have the potential to build up at a time and in a way that can deliver the most grace to those who hear us.

Why? Why is this the case? This is the case because of Paul's rationalization for this which is the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The person and work of the Holy Spirit. Paul goes on in verse 30: "[\[Ephesians 4:30\]](#) *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you are sealed for the day of redemption.*" As a pastor whose job it is to stand and speak, you know, one sinner speaking to a bunch of sinners about the holy, perfect text of God, I was encouraged as I was deliberating 'Do I do [verses] 29 and 30 together or they are those two separate weeks? How do we go about it?' I was encouraged as I went and did my study to find a number of people saying it seems like [verse] 30 is kind of a non sequitur. It seems like it's maybe even just kind of stuck in there, but they are interrelated: how we speak to one another to this grieving of the Holy Spirit. Brothers and sisters, this is a, this has been a challenging text, as was last week's text, form me. This epitomizes the 'I am preaching to myself and you get to listen in on this.' This is a text that, as a pastor, it could be presumed that I am going to use this text to speak to the hearts of certain people in the congregation. And we all know that, as a fun loving guy, that I suffer from foot in mouth disease. So this is a challenging direction that Paul goes in

this text. This takes it to a whole 'nother level as to why we should speak the way we should and not speak the way we shouldn't as brothers and sisters together in the Lord. because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. "[\[Ephesians 4:30\]](#) *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you are sealed for the day of redemption.*" And as we think about the why we move, I pray, beyond 'Okay, let me just not say that' or 'Let me watch the timing of how I say this.' We move beyond the mechanics of it, we move beyond the walking on eggshells, into the glorious freedom in communication that Christ can give us as He works in us and through us because of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3, we are reminded: "[\[1 Corinthians 3:16-17\]](#) *Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy. And you are His temple.*" So, in a general way, due to the person of the Holy Spirit in us and in each of us, we are reminded that all we do as believers is done coram Deo, in the face of God, because God is present in us. And that which we do or say against a fellow believer is doubly so, for God's Spirit is not only in us but is also in them as we do or say the thing that we are doing or saying. Such a general thing but a more specific thing, more specifically the work of the Holy Spirit, challenges us not only that the Spirit is at work in us but how the Holy Spirit is at work in us. And part of that how is how we speak to one another, the words that we say and how we say them and when we say them and why we say them. The Spirit is constantly working to build us up in Christ. At our conversion, He takes up residence in us. He is laboring, He is conforming our hearts and minds to that of Christ Jesus, He is our counselor, He works to bring, as Matthew Henry says, "[\[Matthew Henry's Commentary, Ephesians 4:29\]](#) information, counsel, pertinent reproof, or the like" to mind as we go throughout our day. That is what the Spirit does. The Spirit is here to conform us to the image of Jesus, to take every step that we take, every move that we make, and bring us closer to Christ and closer to heaven.

And we are sealed by Him. "[\[Ephesians 1:13\]](#) *In Him you also, after hearing the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and after believing in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*" The Spirit has us and He ain't going no where. The Spirit is in us and He is working in us and through us and this should motivate, us brothers and sisters, to consider how we speak and why we speak to one another, because every word that we say should be a confirming activity to that work of the Holy Spirit which is seeking to conform us to the image of Christ and not just one step closer to heaven. Brothers and sisters, when you talk to one another, when you react to one another, when you hear things about one another and want to say something to one another, do you consider 'What I am about to say should in no way counteract or impede the work of the Holy Spirit in my life or in the life of my brother or sister.' In other words, is this thing I am about to say worthy to be part of the discipleship of my brother or sister in Christ? That becomes the motivating force. That becomes the boundaries to what we say to one another and how we say it and why we say and when we say it and who hears us say it. From the moment of the Spirit sealing us, from that moment of our conversion the Holy Spirit has marked as out, pointing us in our identity and in our growth, our changing character, to that last great day when we will stand before Christ. All that He has done and is doing and will do in us, to us, and through us is for that purpose. Brothers and sisters, how are we doing in encouraging one another with our words toward that end? Is what we say to one another pushing our agenda or the Lord's agenda? Is it encouraging a consideration of our opinion or the Lord's opinion? Is it causing us to lift the other's eyes up into the Lord's day, that great day of His judgment, or our own glory day in the hot sun as we sit in judgment of our brother or sister in Christ?

Now that's hopefully freeing because we realize there's a whole lot we can and should be saying to one another, but it is also heavy. If I can encourage you in one thing it is this: we will fail. Aren't you encouraged? Aren't you built up? We will fail. We will try to speak how and when and what and why

we should speak, but we will hurt. We will wound. We will be wounded by our brothers and sisters. And that is when we must remember, like the Psalmist in Psalm 119 who over and over and over again is driven back to the word of the Lord, is driven back to the words of Jesus. I can relate a lot to the apostle Peter. He suffered also from that same debilitating disease: foot in mouth disease. But I take hope that once in awhile I might say something smart, once in awhile, like he did. One of those things that we find is in John, chapter 6. Jesus has just laid down some sacramental theology which is a little too much for some of the people. In fact, its some of the words of Jesus that drove some of the early persecution in the early church as they considered those words cannibalistic: eating of Jesus's flesh and drinking of His blood. As Jesus is talking, He sees some people just kind of turn and start walking away and He turns to his twelve and He asked them 'Are you gonna leave, too?' Peter's response is beautiful and brilliant in its simplicity. "[\[John 6:68\]](#) Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Brothers and sisters, if you're like me in a certain sense that's easy to admit. Of course, Jesus has the words of eternal life and so turn to Jesus. But, brothers and sisters, our words to one another are to reflect and to encourage that eternal life in one another. How are we to speak to one another? How are we to respond to one another? How are we to counsel one another? How are we to even laugh with and enjoy one another? It's pointing one another to those words of eternal life which are the words of Jesus. Brothers and sisters, as we speak to one another, as those words enter into our mouths and seek to enter into the airspace of our brothers and sisters around us, may they be words of life. May they use the power to build up, to encourage, to nudge toward that last great day when we will stand in the Lord's presence together. May our words reflect the words of Jesus which bring eternal life.

Stand with me as we pray.