

God-Pleasing Speech

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.

(Eph 4:29)

*'Wherefore putting away lying'
'and evil speaking, be put away from you'*

"Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

(Eph 5:4)

The pastor solemnly announced, "Sadly folks, the time has come for me to take action on a problem that is about to split our church. I hate to do it; but, it must be done! In the Sunday evening service, I am going to name the member that is about to destroy this church." A collective gasp rose from the audience. Instantly, murmurings and whispered discussions sprang from every corner of the auditorium. One woman almost fainted. While some faces turned deathly pale, other faces became two to three times redder than usual!

"Who could it be?" raced through many people's minds. More than one member suspiciously glanced at the other. Some craned their necks and rolled their eyes while still trying to appear to face forward. Eyes searched the crowd, trying to pick out the ornery rascal—or "rascalette." One woman leaned over and pompously whispered to her friend, "I know who it is. Call me later...and I'll tell you" Evidently, she was not the only one who knew. Indeed, many phone lines burned that afternoon. Accusations and denials went flying: "I'll bet it's _____. You know what she told _____, don't you?" "Don't you know _____ has been mad at Pastor ever since Pastor..." and "Well, if it isn't _____, then I don't know who it could be"

In the course of that long, hot, sordid, summer afternoon, almost every member was not only mentioned as the potential Judas, but also unceremoniously tried and condemned in absentia. Some members actually looked forward to having the traitor publicly humiliated in the evening service, gloating, "It's about time he got what's coming!"

A small number of the self-repentant met with the pastor immediately after the morning service, they apologized with many tears, promising never to cause trouble again and confessing many hidden sins—if he just would not name them from the pulpit. The pastor sadly responded, "I'm sorry. I forgive you for any wrong you've done me, and I know that God will forgive you as well. However, I said I was going to do it. Now I have to do it."

Other members spent the day contemplating what other church they might attend after their "blows up." But they had no intention of looking for another church home that night. They wouldn't miss the show for anything.

Some of those "church-shoppers" called pastors and members at surrounding churches, explaining, "I don't want to gossip, but you should probably expect an increase in your membership."

If their names were mentioned, some members planned to stand and publicly denounce their pastor. Others announced that they would stand with them. The media was called and was told that trouble was brewing—maybe even a fight would erupt at the church that night. The press promised full coverage with cameras inside and out. No one planned to miss the evening service. In fact, a record-breaking crowd attended - that many people hadn't turned out for revival meetings! Even the pastor was amazed at the large crowd!

Finally, the moment of truth arrived. The pastor solemnly approached the pulpit. He carefully surveyed his audience. The whole scene appeared almost apocalyptic. With a grave voice the pastor began, "I am now going to name the member that is going to split this church." He paused, "Please turn in your Bibles to James 3:5 and 6:

'Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature

Here Paul says what is to be put off is filthy communication, filthy speech. The word for filthy is literally *rotten*. Consider that idea – rotten. When you place one rotten apple amongst others, what does it do? It corrupts the others. The metaphor here is that rotten words will corrupt, pollute or harm the people that hear them. Jesus said of Himself:

"For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luk 9:56)

Therefore a Christlike person, one seeking to become like Jesus Christ and walk in holiness cannot have speech that harms others. Instead, he is to put on the kind that is good for building up, so that others may receive grace when they hear it. We must put off rotten communication, and put on edifying communication by renewing our minds with God's attitude toward the tongue. As we keep on taking in God's view of our words, we can imitate His words and put off the old and put on the new.

What then is the Corrupt Communication that we must put off?

We can put corrupting speech into three categories. Speech that **Deceives**, speech that **Destroys** and speech that **Defiles**.

Speech that Deceives

When we looked at verse 25, we studied lying in its many forms. We said there are four kinds of lie. There is:

- 1) The Outright Lie – where we totally deny the truth, like Peter did when he said he did not know Jesus.

- 2) The Half-Truth – where we tell half of the truth, and leave out the rest, like when Abraham said that Sarah was his sister.
- 3) The third kind of lie of Evading the Truth, like Cain did when asked about Abel, he said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”
- 4) The fourth kind of lie is Exaggeration, making the truth seem smaller or bigger than it is to try and make our point more intense. Elijah did this when he said, “I, I alone am the only one still serving the Lord!”

All these are acts of deceit. It’s part of corrupt communication.

We also saw that there are many different ways in which we lie.

We lie when we **break promises** that we have made, when we tell someone one thing when we plan to do another, or when we are careless with making sure we do what we promised.

We lie when we **justify** ourselves, even though we know we were wrong.

We lie when we **blame** others for what is our fault.

We lie when we **boast** and pretend to be greater than we are.

We lie when we **compare** ourselves with others to try and look better.

We lie when we **manipulate** others, like when Delilah said to Samson, “You don’t love me! Your heart isn’t with me; otherwise you would have told me the secret of your strength.” One form of manipulation that is often used is the crocodile tears. Some can turn tears on like we turn taps on and thereby bring the whole communication process to an end, while the focus shifts to them, them needing sympathy; the other person being such a brutish bully for making them cry, giving apologies when none are actually needed – manipulation - a form of deceit. Manipulation is saying one thing to gain another.

We even saw that **changing the subject** can be a form of lying, when our sin has been exposed. The Samaritan woman tried to change the subject from her adultery to the issue of where Jews and Samaritans ought to worship. Trying to divert the topic away from needed change in our lives – that is deceitful.

Interestingly, **avoiding others** can be a form of lying – like when Adam and Eve hid themselves from God after they had sinned. For that matter, you might not avoid a particular person, since it might be impossible, but you can lie by **avoiding necessary communication**.

There are some other forms of speech that are not purely honest, loaded statements are one example. When you are not open enough to come out and state the truth, then you use the deceitful tactic of **loaded statements**. “No, I didn’t have a chance to print that document out, there were quite a few things left undone in here, and I had to see to it” “You know, what would be so nice is if there was more than one person in this house interested in feeding the cat.”

Hinting can sometimes be the same. Now there can be harmless hinting, but then there can be a pattern of never coming out and stating your desires or what is needed, and always veiling it behind hints.

No matter what form it takes, deceitfulness is a form of corruption that harms those who hear it.

“A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.” (Pro 26:28)

“He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.” (Pro 10:18)

Lying does not love the ones it lies to. It harms them in favour of itself.

Speech that Destroys

This kind of corrupt communication ends up destroying someone. If not harming them themselves, then harming their reputation; harming their image in the eyes of others. The most obvious form of destructive speech is:

Slander / False Witness

This is to deliberately say something that is negative and untrue about someone else. This kind of thing God despises:

“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. (Pro 6:16-19)

A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. (Pro 19:5)

Gossip

A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter. (Pro 11:13)

Gossip is sharing details about another person or situation which is personal or sensitive, with someone else who is not a part of the problem or a part of the solution. It is not gossip to share some good news about someone else. It is not gossip to relate an interesting story that someone told you, when you know that the source of the story would be comfortable with it being shared. It is gossip when you are revealing details about someone that you would not discuss if they were present in the room, and you know the discussion is not tending towards a solution. Gossip is the telling of true stories about others.

The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. (Pro 26:22)

The words of the Hebrew here can be translated, ‘the words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels’. It’s tasty to the flesh to hear stories about others. But if you are not part of the problem or the solution, why listen, and why relay the story? Gossip is destructive, and most often is a form of broken telephone with someone else’s reputation.

Innuendo is the next kind of destructive talk.

This is often where we leave things unsaid, so as to suggest the worst about someone without actually saying so. Like on board a ship where the first officer had been drunk, and so the captain wrote in the ship's log, 'first officer drunk today'. Some months later, the first officer took revenge by writing in the ship's log, 'captain sober today'. Innuendo: the knowing look, the raised eyebrow, the 'tch, tch, tch'.

Criticism

Now we all know there is a place for constructive criticism. But we use that term 'constructive criticism' because most of it is anything but constructive. Especially in the church, self-righteousness and judgmentalism are too quick to enter, and we size everyone and everything up and cut it down to size. I remember a pastor telling me of how a lady had come to his church and was taking notes throughout the sermon. After the sermon she met him and handed him her notes. She said, "These are all the things that are wrong with your church"

Diminishment

We all know it is wrong to lie about someone – to slander them and make false charges. But how many of us refrain from any speech which runs someone else down, even if it is true. We think that if the information is negative and true, then we have a right to repeat it to others. No – there is no reason to do so.

James 4:11: "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers." That forbids any speech, true or false, which runs down another person. Minimising other's achievements, saying things which deliberately cut people down to size, - this is not pleasing to God. Some think, because they do it face to face, it is somehow justified. No, the Bible does not say, do not speak evil of one another except to that person's face – it forbids diminishment.

Flattery

We spoke a little about flattery when we looked at lying. Flattery is saying to someone's face what you would not say behind their back. Flattery is destructive.

"A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet. (Pro 29:5)

Why would you want someone to think they are better than they are? To gain advantage, without thought that you are deceiving this person, and encouraging pride in them.

Silent Treatment

It might surprise you to have this included in the list of form of destructive speech, but it can be deadly. Some have called the silent treatment 'slow murder'. It is where you refuse to communicate to punish the other person, to make them squirm, to make them beg you to talk again, to gain the upper hand in the disagreement, to look like the wounded party, while you refuse to humble yourself and engage the other person. Silent treatment destroys communication, and causes rage in other people.

Destructive speech – slander, gossip, innuendo, criticism, diminishment, flattery and the silent treatment, all harm others – they are rotten words, breeding more rottenness.

Speech that Defiles

In this category are words that are impure and defiling both to hear and to say.

Dirty Language

Here we include taking God's name in vain, using profanity, using swear words and cursing. It also includes the so-called substitute swear words – words that are for whatever reason seen as not so profane, but simply take the place of a more profane word. *“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” (Mat 5:37)*

Sinful Topics Ephesians 5:3-4

This is discussing things that are inappropriate, listening or telling inappropriate jokes. Paul describes this as filthiness. Sexual innuendo, crudeness – these words are defiling. Moreover, even if it is not a joke – we do not need to be discussing things of an unclean nature in a way that seems to make the acceptable conversation. *“For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. (Eph 5:12)*

Crude Joking

Humour can be a wonderful tool – if it is humour over the right things, done in the right way, but it can get out of hand. It must never laugh at things that displease God. It must never be used to humiliate. It is not meant to be used to shame another person, or to belittle them, or ridicule them in a way that they could not enjoy. We can and should all be able to laugh at ourselves. But there is a kind of humour that takes it to where someone is not laughing with you, you are simply laughing at them. Humour can get out of hand to where it becomes silliness and foolishness.

Murmuring *“Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; (Phi 2:14-15)*

To murmur and complain is frowned upon by God because it is the very opposite of gratitude. It defiles us, and defiles those who hear us, while we try to paint the world in one colour – self-pity.

Idle Talk

This is what Paul refers to when he says ‘foolish talking’. When our conversation has no point and no direction, then it will become fuel for something destructive – crude talk, crude humour, silliness, complaining, and criticism.

Insults

No matter how angry we are at someone else's incompetence, indifference, foolishness or even their sin, we are not authorized to insult. *“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.” (Mat 5:22)*

Nagging

Nagging is a defiling form of communication. It gnaws at others, trying to wear them down, rather than communicate biblically.

A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. (Pro 27:15)

Defiling communication – dirty words, sinful topics, crude joking, idle talk, murmuring, insults, nagging – these all defile us and others. Speech that deceives, speech that destroys, speech that defiles – these we must put off. You might be asking by now, what's left? Well, what's left is the edifying communication that minister's grace to people.

In Colossian 4:6 Paul says: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. (Col 4:6)

Let your speech be flavoured, let grace change your speech so that it becomes attractive, something that others can receive and be edified.

Speech that is true

We should always speak the truth about ourselves and about God. Sometimes that means saying things that will not always be immediately popular. *"Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. (Pro 27:5-6)*

It can also receive correction in a godly manner: *"Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. (Pro 9:8)*

It receives the truth about itself. It does not have to boast, justify, compare, blame, avoid others, and change the subject. It deals in the truth with itself, with God and with others.

In contrast to speech that is destructive, edifying speech is loving. It seeks not to harm, but to help those it speaks to.

Speech that is loving

Loving speech will not say things to harm another. The loving tongue is given to praise others. That means it commends, congratulates, appreciates, and gives credit and honours where it is due. It praises people to their face, and it praises them in their absence. It esteems others and does not seek to destroy them in the minds of others.

Loving speech is also tactful. It considers how these words will be received, and therefore seeks to make them no harder than they need to be. *"There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health." (Pro 12:18)*

It knows what to say, how to say it, and even when to say it.

"A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" (Pro 15:23)

Likewise, loving speech is filled with thankfulness. In place of murmuring and complaining, it shows love to God for the circumstances it is in with thankfulness.

Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. (Eph 5:4)

In place of defiling speech, we must put on...

Speech that is Pure

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words. (Pro 15:26)

In order to have pure words we must...

* Think before we speak *"The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things."* (Pro 15:28)

*Put a premium on your words – less is better. *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. (Pro 10:19)*

Pure words will keep the actual words and the subject matter wholesome and edifying. Pure words will make God and His Word a frequent part of the conversation. Whether it is to encourage another believer, or whether it is to witness to an unbeliever – we can bring God into the conversation. The presence of God as a topic usually purifies the conversation even further.

I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, (Isa 62:6)

Now we will put off deceitful, destructive and defiling speech, as we put on truthful, loving, pure speech. Notice again, the means for sanctification is to look outward to others – my speech is not for me, it is to bless others. So much of the key to sanctification is to see that God does not simply want you to stop sinning for yourself; He wants you to serve others.

Renewing the mind

To put off the old and put on the new, I must be renewed in my mind. I must have God's thoughts on this issue. And what are God's thoughts on this?

Consider the Power of the Tongue

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." (Jam 3:2-8)

Consider the Judgement of the Tongue

“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

(Mat 12:36-37)

*The tongue can destroy you and others. You and I will be judged for our words.
Godly Speech finds its foundation in a desire please God by controlling the tongue
“Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” (Pro 21:23)*

Self-control is probably the fundamental core of godly speaking. A desire to submit one's actions and reactions to God is what will produce edifying communication.

Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.

(Psa 141:3)

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

(Psa 19:14)