
Speaking in the New Self

Ephesians 4:29-30

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Introduction Tonight is the second of our two-part series on *Godly Talk*. Pastor Chad gave us an excellent background on speaking from a redemptive-historical perspective. A redemptive-historical perspective is nothing more than tracing the themes that run throughout the Scriptures – from Old Testament through New Testament – and their development throughout the ages of redemption. Those themes make the 66 books one book. And the fact that God spoke in Genesis chapter 1 and He made man in His image, including the ability to speak, is profound for our speaking today. We are the only part of creation to whom God gave the ability to speak, think in a rational way, and glorify Him with our speech.

Last week, Chad showed us how God spoke, God acted, and God interpreted his actions to us. Chad said that, “The divine pattern seen in creation is ultimately fulfilled in Christ: God spoke in the Old Testament, God acted in Christ, the Living Word, and God interpreted Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension through the rest of the New Testament authors.”

We looked at Ephesians last week, and especially at verse 15 to understand what speaking the truth in love was all about. And we discovered that the truth was the Gospel. Speaking the truth was speaking the Gospel to each other so that we would grow to maturity in Christ. This speaking is to be done in love. Tonight I want to continue on in Ephesians to see how Paul works out this speaking in the context of everyday living. I believe that the Holy Spirit is teaching us that we must speak with the right heart, speak with the right words, speak in the right way, speak at the right time, and speak for the right purpose.

Let’s begin reading tonight with Ephesians 4 verse 17. Please follow along in your copy of God’s Word as I read. <read 4:17-24> <PRAY>

We need to start by laying down the basis of living our lives in relationship to the Gospel. Paul gives us a description of what an unbeliever is like after he gives us a strong encouragement to walk differently than the unbeliever. He describes why they and we were like that. But that is not the way that we were instructed to live by the Gospel, which is the truth of God. Please look carefully at the end of verse 21. Believers were taught the truth about this way of living that we received through Jesus Christ. And this is the principle that is used throughout the rest of the book, but especially in verses 25-32. It is a description of someone changing clothes. They are putting off the old dirty clothes and putting on the clean with an important principle placed in the middle.

The picture given here is that we are to take off the old clothing, that old self, that way of thinking and living that was futile, alienated from the life of God, sensual, and practicing every kind of impurity. And we are to put on the new clothing, the new self, which we received through the Gospel of truth that is in Christ. This clothing is created by God, after the likeness of God, and is true righteousness and true holiness. This putting off and putting on is something that we must do, if we are truly a child of God, saved by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From other Scriptures, we know that we have been clothed with Christ. The problem is, we don’t live like we are. The idea of taking off this clothing is that we would put it aside, never to put it on again. Why would anyone pick such filthy clothing

back up and wear it again, especially since we have been provided with clothing that is spotlessly clean. So we are being encouraged to live in the new self, since that is who we really are. The way that is done is through the renewing in the spirit of our minds. This is a constant action that we are to be doing all of the time. It is better known as the Holy Spirit using the Word of God in order to teach us what this new self looks like as we look into the mirror of the Word of God. Now look at the “therefore” at the beginning of verse 25. Whenever there is a “therefore”, we know that what follows is the outworking of what went before. So this put off and put on is going to be worked out in the verses that follow.

Speak With the Right Heart renewing the spirit of your minds

The first item that we need to consider is this renewing the spirit of our minds. This has to do with our hearts. We speak out of what is in our hearts. Listen to Dr. Luke, “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45 ESV)”. So the first thing that we must do is look into the Word of God, through which the scalpel can be applied to what we believe and what we want that is not God-honoring. And to have godly truth and desires transplanted in their place.

One of the deficiencies of our English language is the word you. It is both singular and plural. When I say you, I can mean you, Becky Cook. Or I can say you, meaning you, everyone sitting in this auditorium right now. So it is sometimes difficult to read our Bibles and know whether the author is meaning you singular or you plural. There are times when there is a footnote at the bottom of the page which says that you is plural, but that is not every time. In this passage, Paul is using you in the plural. So when he talks about speaking, he is talking to us as a community of believers. This passage is to govern our speech to each other in the context of our believing community here at the Chapel. Of course it also governs our speech in all of our relationships, especially those with whom we live.

Speech is a glorious gift from our Creator to be used for the good of others. Speech is never something that is ours to use anyway we want. It is to be used for God’s glory and for the good of others. What is controlling our hearts will come out in the way we speak to others. So it is vital that our hearts are constantly being renewed by the Holy Spirit using the truth of the Word of God.

Remember, when you speak with corrupting words, in the wrong way, at the wrong time, and with the purpose of it’s all about me, then that is living as though you are still in the old self.

Speak With the Right Words no corrupting talk

God made us creatures of habit. Many of us have had decades to perfect the way we respond and talk to others. It has become habitual. Now I know that I have done this Jay Adams example with many of you, but please play along with me once again. A habit has 4 characteristics: habits are done automatically, comfortably, unconsciously, and skillfully. This is where you participate to experience these characteristics of habits. Please fold your hands. Now look at how your fingers are laced together and which thumb is on top. Take your hands apart and lace them with the fingers so that the other thumb is on top. You are now

experiencing the effects of habits. When I asked you to fold your hands the first time, you did it automatically. It felt very comfortable. You did not have to think about it. And you did it skillfully – your fingers didn't run in to each other. But when I asked you to do it with the opposite thumb on top, you had to think about how to put your fingers. It was not done automatically. It did not feel comfortable. And you did not do it skillfully – you were very slow in getting your fingers laced correctly.

What's the point of this little exercise. Just this – your talk and response are just as habitual. You respond automatically, without thinking, and it is very comfortable and done very skillfully. Many times when I am sitting with a couple during a counseling session, I will stop them in mid-thought and ask them if they can repeat for me what they just said. It is a rare occasion when they are able. Why? Because it is habitual. So when we talk about speaking the right words, one of the biggest hurdles is realizing that you are speaking corrupt words and you don't even know it!

So how can you realize that you respond in a habitually corrupting way? Well, since you are concerned about being godly in your speech, you will humbly ask those closest to you to graciously help you see your habitual ways. This can be done very simply and very non-threateningly. Why not develop a signal that is used to signify that the person has responded in a corrupting way. Something as simple as pulling at an ear. Or putting a finger over your mouth. Or giving the "time out" hand signal. It is as creative as you want to be. But the reason for the signal is to interrupt the person during their automatic, unconscious, comfortable, and skillful response.

Now the only way this will work is for both parties to agree ahead of time that this will only be used in an honest way. It will not be used to stop a discussion because one party isn't willing to have it, and it will not be used in order to have the upper hand in a discussion. The person who receives the signal must believe the best about the person who gave it and use it as a time to evaluate their response. Even asking the other person what specifically made them give the signal would be very instructive.

Corrupting Talk

What is "corrupting talk" anyway? May I suggest the following very incomplete list of possible ways that our words are corrupting:

- Not being truthful (v.25) – this can be done by exaggerating ("You say the same thing every time we talk about this subject. If I've heard it once, I've heard it a thousand times. I wish I had a dollar for every time you've said that!"), or misrepresenting ("You told your mother that I didn't want to go. THAT is NOT what I said. I SAID that I didn't want to go BECAUSE I had already promised my sister that I would baby-sit the baby."), or telling just enough of the truth to be misleading are just a few of the ways of not being truthful.
- Mind-reading – you respond as if you know what the other person is thinking and what their motives really are. As an example, "I know why you said that! You always get that way when you really want ME to say that I'm sorry and that it's all MY fault. I know you too well to fall for that trick again!"
- Verbal manipulation – attempting to control, manipulating for your way many times using guilt as the means, or punishing by your words. "You know, I'm glad

when we have people over for a meal. It's the only time the house is clean and we have a decent home-cooked meal.”

- The final word – you must have the final say. You are the only one who really knows all and sees all.
- Anger and slander (v.31) – This is not limited to just words, but also to body language and tone of voice.
- Not listening – you are more concerned about your point of view than anyone else's.

Obviously this list could go on hours. But this is just a sample of the ways in which we use speech that is corrupting.

Right Words

Well then, what are right words? Where are we going to go for help to find these kinds of words? The first place we should go is the context of this verse and a second place that we can go for help is the book of Proverbs.

From the context, we know that our words must be truthful from verse 25. Why must they be truthful? Because we are living in the new self and have put off the old self. We are members of a believing community, “we are members of one another”, who are helping each other to renew the spirit of our minds so that we can be living in the new self. When we are not truthful, we are living in the old self. But being honest and truthful does not mean we can say the truth in any way we want. That's what this paragraph from verses 25 through 32 is all about. The truth is what is needed by the other person, not what makes me feel good, or affirmed, or right, or justified. It is the truth of the Word of God brought to bear in your life, as well as in the life of the person to whom you are speaking.

Right words are also kind, verse 32. Proverbs also describes the right words as helpful (Proverbs 10:32), leading to life (Proverbs 10:11), healing (Proverbs 12:18), and saving lives (Proverbs 12:6). Right words do not have a hidden agenda. They do have the good of the other person as their goal.

Right words are also words of humility, gentleness, patience, and love as we see from chapter 4 verse 2. Can you look back over the last week and see a pattern of your words that could be described as humble, gentle, patient, and loving? Oh, how much we need to be renewing the spirit of our minds so we will grow in our living in the new self!

Speak in the Right Way

good for building up

Even though we can have the right words, they can be delivered in a way that gives them the effect of being corrupt. They must be spoken in a way that builds up the other person.

Now, don't hear me say that I need to build up someone's self-esteem, or make sure they feel good about themselves, or more confident about themselves, or fill up their empty love cup. This is not what is being said by the Apostle. It is good for helping them in putting on the new self, not helping them live in the old self. Nor is it to be contributing to your living as your old self.

This building up that we must be concerned about is the other person's good. We are to be building each other up so we can be living in the new self more and more. In verse 25 we are told to speak the truth, and this truth is identified as learning Christ in verse 20 and as the Gospel in verse 21. So when we speak to our brothers and sisters, we use words that are true about the Gospel and speak them in a way that will be received in a manner that is interpreted as building up, not tearing down and corrupting.

In verse 3 we are told to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". How many times has maintaining the unity of the Holy Spirit and the peace and love that characterizes the body of Christ been your number 1 priority? How many times has that even entered your mind?!

We should be considering a number of questions when we are speaking in the right way. Such as:

- What is the spiritual understanding of this person?
- What kind of a relationship do I have with this person? Do they trust me that I have their best interests at heart? Is their normal response like someone that's being attacked?
- How is the best way for me to present this so they will be open to listening and receiving this message?

There are many things that enter into your approach and presentation. This is not something that comes naturally. Our natural inclination is to unload in any way we can or want to. After all, you are speaking the truth, aren't you! Isn't that enough? God says, NO, that's not enough. You need to speak in the right way. And sometimes the right way involves asking questions rather than you doing all the talking.

Speak at the Right Time

as fits the occasion

Speaking at the right time is a huge problem for many of us. There are often two kinds of approaches to a heated situation. One person wants to get this thing discussed and decided on right now before another thing is even done or thought about. The other wants to separate and spend some time alone cooling down and getting their act together. And the glorious thing about these two kinds of people, is that many times they are married to each other! It has to be the fodder that TV sitcoms are made of. Husband and wife are having a disagreement and the wife quietly slips out of the room and goes to another room. The husband follows with the decibel level increasing as he goes after her insisting that she stand still and get this taken care of. She goes to the bedroom and closes the door. Husband opens door and comes in even more disturbed than he was, still insisting that this get taken care of right now. Wife goes into bathroom and locks door. Husband stands at door knocking louder and louder demanding that she come out right now and get this cleared up. Have you ever experienced that? I think I am safe in saying that this is not speaking at the right time.

What is the right time? Many times it is not at our convenience. In fact, I think that God makes it inconvenient for us so that we will be relying on the renewing of the spirit of our minds and on His enabling grace more and more. I think that He wants us to realize that it's not something that we can do in our own power and with our own wisdom. Again, we need

to be asking ourselves questions in order to get a good handle on the right time. Questions such as:

- When will this person be calm? When will they be relaxed?
- When will they be open to talking without distraction?
- When will they be able to see clearly without having to defend themselves or question the motive of the person talking with them?

Plus a host of other questions that are specific to the people involved and the situation at hand. Some thoughts from Proverbs may also help. Proverbs 17:14 says “Beginning a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. (NLT)” Proverbs 20:3 says “Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor; only fools insist on quarreling. (NLT)” Proverbs 29:20 says “There is more hope for a fool than for someone who speaks without thinking. (NLT)” We all know that the fool in Proverbs is not someone that any of us wants to be known as. So we had better be thinking, praying, and flooded with the Word of God in this matter of speaking the right words, in the right way, at the right time.

Speak for the Right Purpose give grace to those who hear

The last part of this verse is the reason that we speak in this way. It answers the question, What is your agenda? Is your agenda to make sure that you feel better by getting things “off your chest”? Is it to make sure that you win? How about making sure the other person hurts and pays for their sins according to what you believe to be just? Is it all about you? And the answer to all of these agendas is a resounding NO!

This way of communicating within the body of Christ is one of the ways that Christ mediates His enabling grace to His body. The motivation behind everything about my speech is being used by God to minister grace to those that He has put into my path. My thinking process is governed by the renewing of the spirit of my mind. Our speech must be done with a redemptive goal in mind. How does God want this person to view this situation? What portion of the Word of God speaks to this situation? How does God want this person to view himself, to view God, to view others? Where is God in this situation? How can I be used of God to help in this situation? This is all about God and His work in our lives for His Glory. It is not about me and what I want and how I think I should be treated, or talked to, or thought about.

What happens when we don't use our speech as a means of grace is found in verse 30 – we grieve the Holy Spirit of God. What grieves Him? We are in the way of His grace in this person's life as well as in our own. How many times have you been in the way of grace? How many times has your agenda eclipsed God's agenda? How many times has your selfishness been a hindrance, rather than a help? As Paul Tripp states in his book, *War of Words*, the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to make us holy – more like Jesus Christ. This is a progressive, life-long work that is ongoing in EVERY situation and EVERY relationship that God brings into your life (page 239, emphasis mine). No wonder we grieve Him when we are in the way of his sanctifying grace.

Conclusion Our speech does not belong to us. Our speech is a gift from God. We were created in His image with this gift. He has given us speech in order to glorify and worship Him. This involves our speaking to each other in every and all situations. We are to love God and love others as we love ourselves. Speaking in any other way is speaking in the way that unbelievers speak. It is picking that filthy clothing back up and putting it on, thinking that we are more beautiful with that gross, smelly stuff on rather than the clothing that Christ has died to clothe us with.

Also, because of the use of the plural you throughout this passage, we should take to heart that our speaking should be such that we are making a profound difference in each others lives as we minister the grace of God to each other. We are not alone in this journey. We need each other in this journey to become more and more like our Savior.

Let us continually be renewing the spirit of our minds so that we can be speaking with the right heart, with the right words, in the right way, at the right time, and for the right purpose. May we be loving enough to do this with every person that God brings into our path.