

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Speaking What is Healthy

by Dan Trygg

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, rather if any is good toward edification of the need, ...in order that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”
Eph. 4:29,30

This is the first time, in this context about intercommunication among members of the Body, that Paul finds it necessary to specifically address the need to *restrain* or *limit* what we say to each other.

Up until this point, his concern was to *encourage* us to open up and share ourselves, and our concerns, honestly with each other. We have masqueraded so long behind a false front that we need to learn how to open up and “be real” with each other. The truth is, however, that **most of us have learned by painful experience that it has been unsafe to “be real” in this way.** We originally designed our facade to protect ourselves from those who would misuse our vulnerability to hurt us. The world has *not* been a safe, nurturing place, ...a place where we could share our pain, insecurities, or inner thoughts without fear of ridicule, reprisal, or rejection. It was inevitable that **if the Body of Christ is to be such a safe place, there must be limitations placed upon *how* we talk with each other, as well as on the *content* of our interaction.** In addition, as a community of people attempting to live out the reality of the “new-person dynamic” in our lives, **this directive by Paul helps to clarify for us what the characteristics of this new life would look like** (as well as what it would *not* look like). He does this to enable us to learn to walk in the flow coming from the Holy Spirit abiding within us.

As we have mentioned before, the entire paragraph, beginning in 4:25 and proceeding through 5:2, was comprised of applications of what Paul had covered in 4:17-24. There he had encouraged the Ephesian Christians to no longer live as people who do not know God would choose to live out their lives. Instead, **we are to learn to put aside the old way of life**, with its unproductive practices, **and learn to walk in the new life God has put within our hearts.**

There is both a *negative* and a *positive* aspect of what Paul teaches regarding “living the Christian life”. There is a “*putting off*” aspect, and there is a “*putting on*” aspect. There is a *learning to “not do”* what we have always done before, or what we may be tempted to do now, that is not of God, ...and there is a *learning how to “do”* what we have not been accustomed, or skilled at, doing. **There is a measure of self-restraint, or self-control, involved in both aspects, but it is important to see that *it is not simply about self-restraint*, which would be tantamount to legalism, and would leave us wallowing in the swamp of self-effort. **Instead, it is about *realignment*.** It is about learning to *tune into* and *catch* the character, leading and flow of the Spirit of Christ *which is in us* and learning to *express ourselves* in accordance with that. It does involve the abandonment and “disowning” of the old behavior and mindset, as well as “putting on”, “owning”, or “incorporating” a new mindset, and a new relationship with God. **The inner leadings coming from our new relationship with Christ will naturally suggest, and produce, different outward behavior as we choose to give ourselves to walking them out.** The topic of the verses we are looking at today must be seen in light of this larger picture, in order to be correctly understood and processed.**

The word translated as “unwholesome” is the Greek word, *sapros*, which literally means, “rotten” or “putrid”, but often was metaphorically used to describe anything that was corrupt, impure, foul, vicious, or depraved. It also was used to describe things that were *bad, or of poor quality, and generally unfit for use.* It is in this latter way that Jesus used the word in the Gospels (Matt. 7:17,18; 12:33; Lk. 6:43; and Matt. 13:48). These are the only other instances of this word occurring in the NT. For anyone familiar with Jesus’ teaching, the connection would not be missed. **The entire point of Jesus’ instruction in the contexts of Matt. 7:17,18; 12:33 and in Lk. 6:43 is that a person’s *real heart* will be made evident in their actions.** He uses the word picture of a tree to illustrate the principle: “A good tree *cannot* bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.” In this Matt. 7 passage, the thrust of His teaching was about those who would *masquerade* as genuine prophets, but are in reality phony. Eventually, their true nature and orientation will surface. In the Matt. 12 context, Jesus is dealing with the issue of speech (as Paul does here in Eph. 4), especially as it regards blaspheming the Holy Spirit, or Himself. On this occasion, there is a small shift in what He has to say, “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree rotten, and its fruit rotten; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, *being evil*, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good person out from good treasure brings forth what is

good; and the evil person out of evil treasure brings forth what is evil.” **Again, the true nature of a person is revealed by their actions.** Note, however, that **speech comes from the treasure of the heart.** It is a product of one’s experiences, especially whatever the person has seen as valuable and has “stored away” within.

As new creatures in Christ, the application of these principles is clear:

(1.) We have been born from above, and have been made new. Our new nature is good, and (according to Jesus) **will naturally produce what is good** in speech and behavior (Rom. 6:11; 7:4; I Jn. 3:9), if we learn to walk in it.

(2.) We may still have “evil treasure”, i.e., old speech and behavior patterns that we learned in our B.C. days, that remains part of our mind (perception of reality). **This must be recognized, and our perception of reality must be renewed,** in order to practically “put off” the old person and learn to walk in our new nature.

(3.) This is a process involving revelation (from the Holy Spirit, self-awareness, and from the feedback of others), **learning different options, and making different choices.** There is a partnership between God, ourselves, and others which would be required to bring about the quickest, most effective changes in thought and behavior.

(4.) An important step in this process is exactly what Paul is advocating here: Do not give yourself to express the unhealthy, “garbage-behavior” anymore (Rom. 6:12-23). Don’t even let a word from that old source, that old storehouse, come out from your mouth. Why? Because when you do that, you are reconnecting with that old identity, that “old program”, instead of your new identity, your new inner source of direction (the Holy Spirit) and your new character of established life-patterns (II Pet. 1:5-7). [Important: God is less concerned about how our sin may be offensive to Him than He is about the set-backs, bondage and further injury we cause to ourselves and others by choosing old behaviors. Through it all, His heart remains steadfastly committed in love toward us. His resolve is to fully deliver us from every remnant of evil in our lives. He knows He will win in the end. Do not allow failures to distance you from Him. Without Him, we can do nothing.] **We are not to think in terms of “act good in order to become good”. Rather, Paul is exhorting us to “act as the new, good person we really are”.** We are not “acting in order to become something we are *not*”, rather we are acting consistent with the change which *has already been accomplished* in us, i.e., acting in agreement with *who we really are* on the inside.

The phrase, “Let no unwholesome word come out from your mouth” puts the unavoidable responsibility upon *us* to be in charge of our words. Though translated negatively, the Greek is actually stated in direct, positive terms: “Every rotten (*sapros*) word *not* (y’all) let it come out from the mouth of y’all”. “Every unwholesome word” is all inclusive. **Anything that would be unhealthy, or of inferior quality, is to be excluded.**

“**Rather, if anything good (healthy, beneficial, advantageous) towards edification of the need**” -- This phrase gives some *positive direction to our thinking*. Instead of being unhealthy and destructive, **is there anything that could be said that would strengthen, or build up,** the lack (need, want, hurt, vulnerability, weakness) of the other person(s)? For further clarification, Paul adds, “in order that [purpose clause] it may give (at a point in time) grace (graciousness, favor, unmerited favor, kindness, blessing -- It is the same word as is used to describe God’s grace.) among the ones hearing”. **If we say anything, it should be something that would bring about an openness of heart, a feeling of acceptance, a “binding-together” and “building-up” where there is a sense of emptiness, need or want, ...the exact opposite of the effect of “unwholesome words”.** The idiom “to give grace” commonly meant “doing a kindness to someone”, implying *action* going above and beyond the call of duty.

“**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**”. What is the purpose of this statement? **How could we grieve the Holy Spirit?** The word “grieve”, also means to “injure” or “pain”. The fact of the matter is that we can cause pain, grief and injury to the Holy Spirit. How? Because this verse is linked to the previous verse, it would seem that **we grieve Him when (a.) we walk in old, destructive, sinful patterns; and (b.) we hurt one another, ...causing isolation, division, estrangement, and the cementing of old sinful strategies of self-protection.**

Again, the whole purpose of Body-life is to **enable the interactive dynamic that allows Jesus to be most clearly and visibly seen, i.e., through our love for one another** (Jn. 13:34,35; Eph. 4:15). We have all been “sealed” together in Him, bought and kept by the same grace and on the same terms for the purpose of freedom, yet our words and actions continue to express and inflict the evil Jesus came to deliver us from. **When we continue to hurt one another by our unkind remarks, or when our words reinforce old attitudes and thought patterns that keep us “stuck”, is it no wonder that He is grieved** that we continue to hurt ourselves and frustrate the plan of God?

Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you to speak in such a way as to build up, strengthen and edify others, ...so that they may be transformed by the grace, truth and love of God being expressed from your heart to theirs.