

HOW CHRISTIANS SHOULD TALK

Ephesians 4:29

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. **Proverbs 18:21** “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”
2. The tongue is a powerful thing. There’s no such thing as small talk. It’s all big. Talk is not cheap. It is very valuable. Actions don’t always speak louder than words—your tongue can undo everything you do. The old saying, “Stick and stones can break my bones, but words may never hurt me,” is not true. Words can hurt. With your words you can lead someone to Christ, you can talk someone off the ledge of suicide, you can teach someone how to save their marriage. But your words can do great damage as well. Words can discourage, they can destroy, they can ruin. Words can bring about the end of a marriage, a friendship, a career. Words can spread false teaching and push people away from Christ. Today we’re going to study a verse that will teach us how Christians should talk.

II. TEXT

1. **Ephesians 4:29** “No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.”

III. TWO STEPS TO TALK LIKE JESUS

1. The prohibited speech: No foul language.
 - i. **Ephesians 4:29** “No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.”
 - ii. What is foul language?
 - iii. Translations.
 1. NIV: unwholesome talk
 2. NRSV: evil talk
 3. KJV: corrupt communication
 4. NLT: foul or abusive language
 5. LEB: rotten word
 6. CEV: dirty talk
 7. NCV: harmful things
 8. GW: anything that would hurt another person
 - iv. Greek.
 1. Foul: *sapros*. Used 8x in the NT. The CSB translates it has bad, worthless, or foul. Kenty Hughes defines it as “rotten, putrid, or filthy.”
 2. It is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe rotten fruit or rotten fish (Mt 12:33; Mt 13:48). Rotten fruit has four characteristics. It is

distasteful, stinky, poisonous, and useless. Foul language has the same four characteristics. It is...

- a. Distasteful: It is any speech that is distasteful to God; that offends God.
- b. Stinky: It is any speech that will turn people away from Christ.
- c. Poisonous: It is any speech that hurts people.
- d. Useless: It is any speech that is unhelpful; unproductive.
 - i. **John G. Butler** said that foul language has no venue, and it has no value. It has no venue – there’s no appropriate time or place for it. It has no value – it doesn’t help anyone in any way.

v. 16 Types of Evil Speech:

- 1. Lying. (Col 3:8-9; 1 Pet 3:10; Eph 4:25).
 - a. **Ephesians 4:25** “Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor,, because we are members of one another.”
- 2. Profanity (Col 3:8-9; Eph 5:4).
 - a. **Colossians 3:8** “But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth.”
 - b. **John MacArthur** “Off-color jokes, profanity, dirty stories, vulgarity, double entendre, and every other form of corrupt talk should never cross our lips.”
- 3. Verbal abuse (Ps 1:1; 1 Cor 6:10; 1 Pt 3:9).
 - a. **1 Corinthians 6:10-11** “verbally abusive people.”
 - i. This is a list of people who will not inherit God’s kingdom.
 - b. Any speech that hurts someone’s feelings. Mean words, hurtful words, disrespectful (degrading) words, insults, name-calling, put-downs, teasing, sarcasm, derision, scoffing.
- 4. Criticism (James 4:11; 2 Tim 3:2).
 - a. **James 4:11** “Don’t criticize one another, brothers and sisters.”
 - b. The Greek word for “criticize” (katalaleo) means backbiting, defamation.
 - c. Backbiting speech is defined as “unpleasant comments and criticisms made about someone who is not there (MacMillan).”
 - d. It is talking bad about people behind their back.
 - e. What if it’s true? Does not matter. If you have something negative to say, only say it if it is necessary, and only to their face, when you are alone, with gentleness, and only for the purpose of helping them or the relationship.

- f. **Jerry Bridges** gives some examples. “He spends too much time watching television,” or “She’s not a good student.” “The questions we should ask ourselves about these kinds of comments are Is it kind? And Is it needful? By the latter, I mean does it really need to be said (*Respectable Sins*).”
- 5. Gossip (Pr 11:13; 16:28; 17:9 20:19; Rm 1:29-31).
 - a. **Proverbs 11:13** “A gossip goes around revealing a secret, but a trustworthy person keeps a confidence.”
 - b. Gossip is telling someone else’s secret; sharing confidential information about someone that they wouldn’t want exposed.
- 6. Slander (Col 3:8; 2 Tim 3:3).
 - a. **Colossians 3:8** “But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth.”
 - b. Telling lies about someone.
 - c. **Jerry Bridges** “Slander is making a false statement or misrepresentation about another person that defames or damages the person’s reputation (*Respectable Sins*).”
- 7. Complaining (Phil 2:14; James 5:9).
 - a. **Philippians 2:14** (NLT) “Do everything without complaining and arguing”
 - b. Complaining is...
 - i. An insult against God, that He isn’t doing a good job of taking care of you.
 - ii. A display of weak faith – doubting that God is in control and has you there for a reason.
 - iii. An act of irresponsibility -- claiming that your situation is not your fault, or that you can’t do anything to change it.
 - iv. Disobedient. Not only does the Bible forbid us from complaining, but commands us to rejoice in the Lord always and to give thanks in everything (Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:18).
- 8. Arguing (Phil 2:14).
 - a. **Philippians 2:14** (NLT) “Do everything without complaining and arguing”
 - b. The difference between an argument and a discussion: In an argument, voices are raised, speech gets faster, you start cutting each other off, then you start talking over each other, then sarcasm and insults come out, then you get angry and your adrenaline starts pumping, and this can manifest itself different ways – your heart starts to beat faster, your body

gets hotter, your face turns red, and your body starts to tremble.

9. Triangulating (Mt 18:15; James 5:9).
 - a. **James 5:9** “Brothers and sisters, do not complain about one another, so that you will not be judged. Look, the judge stands at the door!”
 - b. Triangulation is when someone wrongs you, and you go and talk to a third person about it, involving another person in the conflict when it should have been kept between the two of you.
10. Flattering (Rm 16:18).
 - a. **Romans 16:18b** “They deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting with smooth talk and flattering words.”
 - b. When you tell someone what they want to hear in order to deceive them into giving you what you want.
 - c. “I love your shoes! I love your hair! I love your car!”
 - d. Be sure that your praise and compliments are sincere.
11. Blaspheming (Ex 20:7).
 - a. **Exodus 20:7** “Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God”
 - b. Taking God’s name in vain, or misusing God’s name. God’s name is not meant to be a curse-word.
 - c. An example would be “OMG!”
12. Hastiness (Pr 18:13; Pr 29:20).
 - a. **Proverbs 29:20** “Do you see someone who speaks too soon? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”
 - b. Speaking before thinking.
13. Boasting (Jer 9:24; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Tim 3:2; 2 Pet 2:18).
 - a. **1 Corinthians 1:31** “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”
 - b. Boasting is when you talk about what you have done or can do to make people admire you. It is talking about how great you are. “Look at me! I’m awesome!” It usually involves one-upping, which is responding to someone else’s achievements by talking about how you are just as good if not better.
14. Harshness (Pr 15:1; 1 Cor 6:10; Eph 4:31).
 - a. **Proverbs 15:1** “A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath.”
 - b. Expressing your anger by raising your voice, shouting, or using an irritated tone.
 - c. Someone once said that 90% of the friction of daily life is caused by the wrong tone of voice.

15. Worthless words (Mt 12:36).

- a. **Matthew 12:36 (LEB)** “But I tell you that every worthless word that they speak, people will give an account for it on the day of judgment!”
- b. “Worthless” can be translated empty, idle. It is wasted words, using your words to serve God and help others.
- c. **JR Miller** (1828, *Young People’s Problems*) “Idle words are those that are empty — empty of love and of good, words of no value. There are many such words spoken. They may appear harmless; and yet they are useless — and uselessness always disappoints the Master. They give no comfort, they put no cheer into any heart, they inspire nothing beautiful in any soul. Too much of the common conversation of the parlor [living room], of the wayside, of the table, is of this vapid and empty order — talk about merest nothings, inane, without thought, without sense, without meaning. How it must astonish the angels to hear immortal beings use their marvelous gift of speech in such a trivial, idle way!”

16. Excessive speech (Pr 10:19; Pr 17:28).

- a. **Proverbs 10:19** “When there are many words, sin is avoidable, but the one who controls his lips is prudent.”
 - b. **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** “Ungodly people talk too much; they talk without thinking, they are always talking.... Probably we have not all realized that Christian people do not talk as much as non-Christian people.”
 - c. **Anon** “Never pass up an opportunity to keep your mouth shut.”
 - d. **Abe Lincoln** “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.”
- vi. Eph 4:29 uses the word “No.” No foul language should come from your mouth. That means none. Zero. Zilch. There’s no place for foul language in the vocabulary of a Christian.
 - vii. We’ve all messed up, and likely will continue to mess up with our speech from time to time. What do we do then? We go to God, and to the person we’ve hurt, and admit you were wrong, apologize, and ask for forgiveness.

2. The prescribed speech: Only edification.

- i. **Ephesians 4:29** “No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.”
- ii. Let’s begin by defining our terms:
 1. “Only what is good for building up.”

- a. Translations:
 - i. NASB95: only such a word as is good for edification
 - ii. NCV: say what people need – words that will help others become stronger
 - iii. AMP: only such speech as is good and beneficial to the spiritual progress of others
 - iv. GNB: only helpful words, the kind that build up
 - b. Greek: “building up”, *oikodomen*; 18x; used for an actual building, such as a temple, or a house; or it is used for the act building of the structure.
 - i. Think of every person you meet as God’s construction project; they are a work of progress. God’s goal is to bring them to Christ, and then to make them more like Christ. God is the contractor, and you work for Him as His construction worker. He wants to work through you to build people into who He wants them to be. Your job is to only use words that that build up; that help people grow in Christ; that move people closer to Christ.
 - ii. Don’t tear down what God is building. Don’t destroy what God is building. Don’t damage what God is building. Instead, build up.
 - c. Another word for “building up” is edification.
 - i. **Webster’s 1828** defines edification as “A building up, in a moral and religious sense; instruction; improvement and progress of the mind, in knowledge, in morals, or in faith and holiness.” In short, it means to build up spiritually and morally.
 - ii. When I was a kid growing up in church, one of the youth pastors started something in the church that I think would be a good thing in our church, and in your home. He taught us the meaning of edification, and then any time a student would say something foul, hurtful, cutting, inappropriate, he would say, “Edification.” That’s all he had to say to stop us in our tracks and remind us of God’s word. You parents, I challenge you to start using that in your homes. Any time your children say something inappropriate, just say, “Edification.”
2. “Someone in need”
- a. Translations:

- i. ESV: as fits the occasion
 - ii. NASB: according to the need of the moment
 - iii. NIV: according to their needs
 - b. It's possible say the right thing to the wrong person. You can also say the right thing in the wrong way. You can say the right thing at the wrong time. And you can say the right thing for the wrong reason.
 - c. So, when we talk we need to consider not just the content, but the context. Consider the person and what they need for edification, be sensitive to the timing, the occasion.
 - d. The skill we need to develop is the ability to speak the truth in a way that doesn't hurt the person or the relationship. And sometimes this is a matter of how you say it.
 - e. Chuck Swindoll writes about his time as a shoe salesman. His manager taught him to speak in a way that avoided offense. For example, instead of saying, "Lady, your foot is too big for this shoe!" you might say, "I'm sorry, ma'am, but this shoe is just a little too small for your foot." Both statements expressed facts, but one was an insult and the other a compliment (Swindoll, *Man to Man*)."
- 3. "so that it gives grace to those who hear"
 - a. Translations:
 - i. NIV: that it may benefit those who listen
 - ii. MSG: each word a gift
 - b. Every word you speak needs to confer a benefit or do a favor (D.A. Carson). Your words should give pleasure or profit (Charles Hodge).
 - c. **JR Miller (1898)** "That is, they should impart blessing in some way. We all know people whose words have this quality. They are not always exhorting, preaching, or talking religiously; and yet we never speak with them five minutes without being the better for it. Their simplest words do us good. They give cheer, courage, and hope. We feel braver and stronger after a little conversation with them, even after a moment's greeting on the street."
- iii. So our words should be "only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear."
- iv. **12 Types of Edifying Speech Between People:**
 - 1. Encouragement. "Don't give up. You can do it!"
 - 2. Comfort. "It's going to be okay."
 - 3. Praise. "Great job!"

4. Thanks and gratitude. "Thank you. I really appreciate it."
 5. Affection. "I love you. I miss you."
 6. Instruction. "Let me teach you."
 7. Constructive criticism. "You would be more successful if you tried this."
 8. Loving rebuke. "God's word says you shouldn't behave that way."
 9. Counsel or advice. "You would feel better if you did this."
 10. Evangelism. "Jesus died for your sins so you can go to heaven."
 11. Humor. "Why did the chicken cross the road?"
 12. Entertainment: "Once upon a time."
- v. Alen Redpath was an evangelist from England, and one time he formed a mutual encouragement fellowship during a stressful time in his life. The group would meet and encourage each other, but they made a rule that before they would speak about a person or a subject, they would think:
1. T – Is it true?
 2. H – Is it helpful?
 3. I – Is it inspiring?
 4. N – Is it necessary?
 5. K – Is it kind?
- vi. **Colossians 3:17 (NLT)** "And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father." Always remember that you are a representing Christ when you speak. Speak words that make Him look good; words that please Him; words that He would endorse. Words that would serve His purpose.
- vii. Make it your goal to cultivate a "missionary mouth." With every word you say, try to say in a way that would attract unbelievers to Christ, and encourage believers to keep growing.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. One time Jesus was talking to a group of Pharisees, and he told them that "the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart (Mt 12:34)." In other words, if you keep speaking foul words, it is because your heart is not right. And the only way to consistently speak edifying words, is to get your heart right. Our only hope for a Christ-like tongue is to invite Christ to do heart surgery. We need to confess our sins to Him, surrender complete control of speech to Him, and then ask Him to change us from the inside out so that we can speak life rather than death.