

I invite you to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Matthew 12:36, and in the book of Ephesians 4:29. This can be found on page ___ and on page ___ in your pew Bibles. We are finishing our series today "Respectable Sins". Today's message reveals the power of words to heal and to build up one another in love.

Our Fathers Word

Matthew 12:36

36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

Ephesians 4:29

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

This is the word of God for the People of God.

I want to talk to you today about the power of words. Our words have power. More so than many may believe. If we recall the saying we frequently threw out as children, we would believe that “Sticks and Stones may break my bones, but, words will never hurt me!” This is so far from the truth of the matter. Our words have power. As many people have experienced in life, words have the power to tear them down destroying dreams, killing hope, and wounding love. Or, our words have the power to lift people, to help them get through a challenge, to push them into their destiny’s; The power to wound, or the power to heal, bless, and build hope.

When you tell someone, “I love you,” or “I’m proud of you,” “you did great on that project,” “you are so beautiful!” You’re not just being kind, those are healing words. We don’t know what people are going through, they may be smiling on the outside, but inside they’re hurting, they’re lonely, they’re discouraged. Let’s face it, we are in a hurting world, filled with hurting people. The evidence is all around us.

Many people are carrying around wounds from the past that are holding them in darkness and in pain for many years, even for a lifetime. Wounds from a relationship that didn’t work out, wounds from people trying to push them down, wounds from a verbally abusive family member or friend. A simple word of encouragement, “I believe in you,” “I’m praying for you.” A simple compliment, “you look so beautiful today!” It’s no big deal to you, but to them, it’s helping heal the wounds, it’s lifting their spirit, it’s causing them to believe in themselves. Your words are what can keep them moving forward.

Scripture tells us in Pr 18:21 **The tongue has the power of life and death.** What we speak can cause life or death, our words are that powerful. They have the power to heal or the power to wound. The power to cause life, or the power to cause death.

This is the very reason that the apostle Paul tells us in today's text, **"29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."**

Rather than taking the darkened path of the world, focusing on the negative, tearing down one-another in wrath, bitterness, and hate; causing death to someone's dreams, death to their hopes, and death to the love in someone's spirit. Choose to be children of light, God's ambassadors of Love, continually strive to build up one-another in love. We are to create life, and love, and hope in one-another.

We must reveal the fruits of the Spirit living in us by choosing our words wisely and evoking God's healing, loving power, bringing his blessings through what we say to our brothers and sisters.

I remember one time as a child that my mother actually washed my mouth out with soap. She took me to the bathroom sink, rubbed the bar of soap around in my mouth, and then rinsed it out and made me go to my room. Do you know what I had said? I think I had said, "Shut up!" to my sister. Now why should my mother wash my mouth out with soap for saying, "Shut up!" to my sister? She did it because she believed Jesus when he said, **"It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man"** (matt 15:11)

I had made myself dirty by saying, "Shut up," to my sister, and my mother had a white-hot zeal for my purity. So, she used an unforgettable object lesson. I think she did right.

"But really!" someone will say, "What's the big deal with saying, 'Shut up,' to your sister? It's not swearing. It's not taking the name of the Lord in vain. It's not a dirty word. Why get so worked up? What's really so bad about it?"

The answer is that when I said, "Shut up!" to my sister, it was mean. There was no affection and no good will and no kindness in it. It was ugly. There was no moral beauty, no holiness, no love. To use Paul's phrase in Ephesians 4:29, it was a "rotten word." It came from a garbage pile of pride and one-upmanship and anger and resentment—all very normal between siblings, and all very sinful. Be careful not to grow accustomed to sin because it seems so normal!

But what I thank God for more than that my mother was intensely moral is that she was intensely Christian. She knew that soap in the mouth couldn't touch the dirt in my heart. If she had thought it could, she wouldn't have cried.

So, she taught me the truth of Ephesians 4:22–24: "You must put off your old self-assertive, mean, uncaring self, son, because it is corrupt with deceitful desires. And put on the new meek and kind self, created by God in his own likeness in righteousness and holiness. In other words, son, you need to be deeply renewed in the spirit of your mind."

In the end the battle for purity in the mouth is fought in the heart, because "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." If you don't like what comes out of your mouth, listen carefully this morning, because the apostle Paul is at pains in this text to clean up your mouth from the inside out.

Let's look at verse 29. I said a moment ago that Paul used the phrase "rotten word." The RSV translates it, "Let no *evil talk* come out of your mouths." The NIV and NASB use the word "*unwholesome*." And the KJV says, "Let no *corrupt* communication proceed out of your mouth." What is this idea behind the words, "evil," "unwholesome," and "corrupt"?

The Greek word (*sapros*) is used in only one other context in the New Testament, namely, the places in Matthew and Luke where Jesus says, "It is not the good tree that bears *bad* fruit" (Luke 6:43; Matthew 7:17; Matthew 12:33). The term for "*bad*" fruit here is the same word for *evil* or *unwholesome* or *corrupt* in Ephesians 4:29—"Let no *evil* talk come out of your mouth!" The image in Paul's mind is probably one of rottenness and decay, something that is spoiled.

This kind of rotten language must be taken off like the old garment. It is part of the old self of verse 22 that needs to be stripped away when a person becomes a Christian. The garment of a rotten mouth must be taken off and thrown into the fire, just like the Ephesians had burned their old books on magic in Acts 19:19.

Now what sort of talk does Paul have in mind when he says, "Let no rotten talk come out of your mouth"? Let me suggest several kinds of language that I think Paul would include as "rotten" or "decayed" or "spoiled."

First would be language that takes the name of the Lord in vain. It is a great contradiction of who we are as Christians if, just because we are mad or surprised or amazed we say, "God!" or "Oh My God!" or "God Almighty!" or "Christ!" or "Jesus!". No one with a good marriage would stomp on his wedding ring to express anger. It stands for something precious and pure. So does the name of God and Jesus Christ!

The second kind of language that Paul would call rotten would be language that trivializes terrible realities—like hell and damnation and holiness. What's wrong with saying, "What the hell!" or "Hell, no!" or "Go to hell!" or "Damn it!" or "Damn right!" or "Holy cow!" or "Holy mackerel!"?

Among other things these expressions trivialize things of terrible seriousness. It's simply a contradiction to believe in the horrible reality of hell and use the word like a punctuation mark for emphasis when talking about sports or politics. The same is true of damnation. And if the divine command, "Be holy as I am holy," carries for you the same weight it carried for Moses and Jesus and the apostles, you will simply find that "Holy cow" or holy anything will stick in your throat because it treats something infinitely precious as a trifle.

The final kind of language I think Paul would call rotten is mean-spirited language—like, "Shut up!" The words themselves are untarnished. But the usage is vicious and loveless.

Those are the kinds of language I think Paul would include in "rotten talk." Now let's step back and ask what Paul might mean by calling language evil or corrupt or unwholesome or rotten. If we think of spoiled or rotten fruit, like Jesus did, four implications come to mind.

1. It Does Not Nourish

First, rotten fruit does not nourish. Neither does rotten language. It does not strengthen or improve or help. It is not useful for food. It is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

2. It Will Probably Make You Sick

Second, rotten fruit will probably make you sick if you do try to eat it. And rotten language can make people sick, too. In other words, it not only fails to give positive nourishment; it can cause negative harm. Words can wound a person very deeply. Words can be like the virus that transmits the disease of meanness or vulgarity from parent to child or roommate to roommate or colleague to colleague. Rotten language makes people sick if they are forced to eat it.

3. It Smells Bad and Makes the Atmosphere Unpleasant

Third, rotten fruit smells bad and makes the atmosphere unpleasant. I recall a couple of men I knew while in the Navy who seemed to carry the aroma of vulgarity about them. All they ever seemed to laugh at was sexual innuendo. The pitiful thing about it was that the nearer they got to the gutter, the more they laughed. With their mouths they created an atmosphere like a stinking locker room. It was unpleasant for everybody but themselves. And it made noble and high and worthy thoughts all but impossible. It's hard to savor beauty from a garbage dump.

4. It Probably Comes from a Diseased Tree

The fourth implication that comes to mind when we think of rotten fruit and rotten language is that it probably comes from a diseased tree. If the fruit is rotten as soon as it appears on the branch (as soon as the words come out of the mouth), then the tree is bad.

Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:34–37).

So if a person takes the name of God in vain, or trivializes the realities of hell and holiness, or makes words into weapons of one-upmanship and meanness, then we can say for sure, "There is a rottenness inside the tree as well as outside." If the fruit is bad, the root is bad.

If we see this, we won't be as surprised with what comes next in the text. It is not what you might expect. We might expect Paul to admonish us to clean up our language. We might expect him to talk about words that are not vulgar or rotten or corrupt, but are pure and wholesome and creative and clear. But Paul doesn't do what we expect.

Instead of proposing clean language, he proposes a whole new way of thinking about language. Instead of saying, "You don't need dirty language to communicate your intention," he says, "The root issue is whether your intention is love." In other words the issue for Paul is not really language at all; the issue is love. The issue is not whether our mouth can avoid gross language; the issue is whether our mouth is a means of grace. You see he shifts from the external fruit to the internal root. He shifts from what we say to why we say it. That's the issue.

Let's read verse 29.

Let no rotten talk come out of your mouth, but only what is good for edifying, as fits the occasion [literally: good for edifying of need—meeting a particular need is in view] that it may impart grace to those who hear.

Do you see the shift? He doesn't say, "Let no rotten talk come out of your mouth, but instead let fresh clean talk come out of your mouth." He says, "Let no rotten talk come out of your mouth, but ask this: Is my mouth a means of grace? Am I meeting a need with the words that are coming out of my mouth? Am I building up faith into the people who hear?"

This is a revolutionary way to think about your mouth, he shifts from the what to the why. All of our words are to be a display of grace, a blessing to others, a source of healing.

This is exactly what Paul does here in verse 29. He says, "Let no rotten talk come out of your mouth, but only what is good," and then he shifts from the what to the why, "for edification to meet a need that it may impart grace to those who hear." It is not Christian just to stop swearing. It is not Christian just to put good language in the mouth instead. It is Christian to ask the deeper, internal question: am I speaking now to edify? Is your mouth a means of grace, blessings, and healing?

All of our speech is to be a display of grace. Do you see how all-encompassing and how far reaching our Christian faith must be? This is an amazing verse about the grace of God in our lives. If my mother had only washed out my mouth with soap, and never prayed and labored to wash out my unloving heart with the gospel of the grace of God, I might today have an antiseptic mouth, but I probably wouldn't be a Christian.

God puts people in our lives on purpose, so we can bring healing. The receptionist at the office, the attendant at the gas station, a security guard, don't just pass by them every day for the next few years, take a moment to bless them with your words. To build them up with love. You don't have to take 20 minutes, just a simple, "great to see you today," "I really appreciate you taking care of us," you just spoke a blessing over their life. Letting people know that you care does more than you can imagine.

We live in a society that is filled with a lot of negative chatter. Through the internet, social-media, its becoming normal to be disrespectful. People think nothing of being condescending, saying hurtful or critical words. More than ever, people need your healing words. You have the power to help someone back on their feet, you have the power to keep them from falling into depression, you have the power to cause them to pursue their dreams.

Without your blessing words, without your encouragement, without your compliments; they won't become what they should become. Don't miss these opportunities. Don't be too caught up into your day, in your challenges, your routines; take time to be a healer, to be a lifter. God needs you, he has no voice to encourage on this earth except your voice. He's counting on you to help heal the people in your life.

When somebody does something good for me, when they are kind, when they say encouraging words that build me up, I'm very grateful, of course I tell them thank you. But when somebody does something good for my daughter, when they go out of their way to help her in a time of need, as a parent, there is nothing I won't do for them.

That's the way God is, when you go out of your way to bless one of his children. When you make it your business to encourage a co-worker that is down, when you stop by to see the friend that's not feeling well, when you call your relative just to say that you love them. Because you are taking care of his children, God will make sure somebody is always there to take care of you. To bring healing and encouragement into your life, to show you favor. Those are seeds of love and hope that you are sewing.

A Christian is a person whose rotten root within has been made new by grace through faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of God has taken the hate and anger and resentment that spill over in mean and vulgar and irreverent language, and has covered them with the blood of Christ and killed them along with the old unbelieving self.

And do you know what the grace of God has left behind in the place of the old hate and anger and resentment? It has left hope. This is the meaning of verse 30. It says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

What does this mean? It means that a Christian is a person in whom the Holy Spirit of God dwells, and that this Spirit of God seals the believer for the day of redemption. In other words, the Spirit God puts the stamp of his own image (4:24) on the life of the believer and guarantees that he will persevere to the day of redemption. The seal of the Spirit is the assurance of a secured hope.

The hope of all believers, guaranteed by the seal of the Spirit, is that at the end of history we will come to a day of redemption instead of a day of damnation. What, then, is this day of redemption?

It is the day when the long battle with sin will be over. It is the day when the deepest longings of our heart will be satisfied with the sight of the glory of the grace of God in the face of Jesus. No more groaning with imperfection; no more waiting; no more frustrated longings. Our redemption will be complete.

So what is the point of Ephesians 4:30 in relation to rotten language and gracious language?

The point is this: Paul says that the Spirit has been given to seal us and secure us for an infinitely wonderful future. In other words, the Spirit's sealing work aims to give you hope! So how do you grieve this Spirit? By not hoping in the day of redemption! By not hoping in the power of the Spirit to secure you and help keep you. If the Holy Spirit has been sent to give you hope in God, and instead of hoping in God you fret over your problems and become angry and bitter and resentful, then you grieve the Holy Spirit of God. You strive against the very purpose for which he was sent.

And the language that comes out of a heart that doesn't hope in God will not impart grace to those who hear. How can you make your mouth a means of grace for others when you don't hope in the grace of God for yourself? It is out of hopeless hearts of discouragement and frustration and anger and bitterness and resentment that all rotten and hurtful language comes.

But if you as a believer stop and think for a moment that Christ has died for your sin, that God has promised to work all things together for your good, that he has given you his own Holy Spirit for the specific purpose of sealing you for the day of redemption, then surely a deep and confident hope will be the root of your life.

And up through that root will flow the sap of grace, and out onto the branches of your life will come the fruit of a whole new way of talking.

The question for your mouth will not merely be the moral question: Am I avoiding dirty words? But the Christian question: Am I building the faith of others by what I say? Is my mouth a means of grace? Am I frightened and anxious and angry about my life, or am I filled and overflowing with hope that the Spirit of God will keep me safe for the day of redemption?

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your Love, for your Grace,

for sending us our source of hope, Jesus.

Forgive us for our harsh and wounding words

when we have not spoken as loving, healing, lifting

Children of light, encouraging hope into the hearts of those we speak to.

By your power make our mouth a source of grace

May our words edify, heal, bless, and build hope

As your love flows through our speech into

the hearts of those you put into our lives.

May we bring you all the praise, all the honor, and all the glory.

AMEN