

## **MAIN IDEA**

Our words matter. What we say can either build others up, or tear others down. Our words have the ability to change the course of someone else's life.

## **INTRODUCTION**

When you have good news to share, what is your favorite way to spread the word?

How many of you were told "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt you"? Did you find that to be true or not?

We all know that words can hurt us! Sometimes harsh words can be even more devastating than physical wounds – those ultimately heal, but the scarring from words can leave us with memories that last a lifetime. Whether someone said something unintentional, or directly attacked you verbally, words can wound, and sometimes with the sharpness of a knife.

Although words can be very harmful, the flip side is they can also be used as powerful instruments for good. Words can motivate, encourage, and inspire. They can bring hope in a hopeless situation. They can change the courses of our lives. This is especially true in the church. Words have a great impact on how we relate to one another in the body of Christ.

## **UNDERSTANDING**

**READ [EPHESIANS 4:25-28](#).**

In verses 25-28, what are Paul's 3 instructions for us when we get angry? Which of these is the hardest to do? Why?

How does a church benefit when its members speak with integrity?

How have you recently benefited from others who speak with integrity?

**READ [EPHESIANS 4:29-30](#).**

What are some additional aspects of modern culture that impact the way we communicate with one another? How is this different than 10 years ago? 20 years ago?

**READ [EPHESIANS 4:31-32](#).**

What habits, routines, and choices will empower us to make the changes commanded here?

What obstacles have the potential to hinder us from speaking with integrity each day?

## **APPLICATION**

How can you make yourself more intentional about speaking positively into other people's lives?

## **PRAYER**

Ask for prayer requests. Consider having group members pair up (same sex with same sex) and pray for one another in smaller groups. Ask everyone to pray that the words they use will encourage, inspire, and motivate others.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **EPHESIANS 4:25-28**

All Christians have responsibility for group unity and group maturity, as we saw in the previous session. In this passage Paul pointed out a series of individual behavioral changes each believer should adopt to better facilitate the group unity and maturity.

We believers are to put away lying as a filthy garment and replace it with truthful speech. Paul's biblical source was Zechariah 8:16, "Speak truth to one another." How can we love our neighbors if we deceive them? Furthermore, truth telling is especially important in the life of the church— because we are members of one another. We should be able to trust one another. Falsehood discovered is a guaranteed way to destroy Christian fellowship. (Paul was not suggesting that we have any "wiggle room" to lie to non-Christians.)

The fabric of unity within the body of Christ is woven with mutual love, trust, and respect. Lies destroy trust and respect and erode love. Believers should be forthright and honest in what they say at home, at church, at work, and at play. Remember, Satan is the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

The wording that Paul took from Psalm 4:4 (Be angry and do not sin) should be understood to mean "Do not sin when you are angry." Although anger is not in itself wrong, how we respond to anger can be. Anger may lead us to positive, constructive actions. For example, anger can lead us to work toward honest reconciliation or to correct an injustice. Anger also may lead us to take negative, destructive actions, that is, to sin, such as striking back in vengeance. When we nurse anger into a seething bitterness, we give the devil a foothold to invade and corrupt our lives. For our own good, we are to resolve anger quickly (before the end of the day).

To steal is to violate the Eighth Commandment. It is not enough for believers just to avoid the negative. Rather, a Christian is to do honest work with his own hands so that stealing isn't necessary. Believers are to support themselves and their families if this is at all possible. Sometimes people need a helping hand up, so the right thing to do is to work hard so that we can be generous to anyone in need.

Paul did not challenge believers to work hard for the purpose of becoming wealthy and enjoying a life of luxury but for the purpose of earning enough to share with anyone in need. The Christian life is focused on relationships and helping others, not on material gain and all that is associated with affluence.

### **EPHESIANS 4:29-30**

Foul language translates a word meaning "rotten, unfit for use." Paul meant what is vulgar, crude, or abusive—the kind of speech becoming more and more tolerated these days. But this is a characteristic of the non-Christian lifestyle that believers have renounced. What is to replace it? Speech that is intentionally good for the building up of others (see Prov. 15:23). As believers, we can seek to help by our speech rather than to hurt. When this happens, we are giving evidence that God's grace has succeeded in our own lives and that we are actively extending grace to those who hear us speak. Our words reveal our hearts. Loving hearts speak loving words. What we say and how we say it matters. Jesus said we would have to give an account for "every careless word" (Matt. 12:36).

Paul challenged his readers to understand that God's Spirit grieves when we express hostility to others, in attitude, speech, or actions. Parents grieve when their children squabble. How much more must the Spirit lament when believers squabble with one another? After all, He is Holy, and He intends for us to become more and more holy (unlike the Devil, who wants us to fall into more and more sin,

4:27). This is why He sealed us when we were converted.

The verb translated sealed means to mark with a seal or to mark with approval. In ancient times, a signet ring engraved with an image or crest would be pressed into wax, thus “sealing” an object such as a scroll. The impression left was a seal. The owner of the signet ring owned the object sealed. Three ideas were connected with sealing: ownership, protection, and proof of genuineness (or approval). Paul used the noun form three times, all figuratively. In two of these, he meant ownership (see Rom. 4:11; 2 Tim. 2: 19); in the third he meant proof of genuineness (see 1 Cor. 9:2). The apostle used the verb four times. One indicates proof (see Rom. 15:28). In the other three instances, the Holy Spirit—engraved in the believer by God—is the Seal marking believers as owned by God, under His protection, and approved “for the day of redemption” (1 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30).

The Spirit will keep us secure for the day of redemption, meaning the time of Christ’s return (see Luke 21:28). Thus, from the beginning of our Christian life when we were sealed until the end when we are fully redeemed, we are to grow in being like Christ.

### **EPHESIANS 4:31-32**

In verses 22-24 Paul had used the notion of taking off (the old self) and putting on (the new self) in reference to the decisive change that happened at conversion. Here he used similar language to speak of six sinful attitudes and actions. Believers constantly seek to keep these removed from their lives. They are all poisonous to personal relationships.

Bitterness can be translated “sourness,” referring to a cynical or resentful outlook. Anger refers to an outburst of rage or a flash of irritation expressed. When applied to people, wrath is a settled, simmering disposition of hostility. (But see 5:6 for God’s wrath.) The term translated shouting may also be translated “clamor,” “crying,” or “brawling.” It refers to loud voices raised in a quarrel or in a brawl. Slander means speaking evil of others, wishing to hurt their reputation. Malice can also be translated “evil” or “wickedness.” Malice is ill will that seeks opportunity to harm another person. This attitude may sum up all the preceding items on Paul’s list.

In contrast to the six vices are three virtues by which believers are to relate to one another. These are God-like qualities He has extended to us (just as God also). Kind means caring or showing love practically (see 2:7 for God’s kindness). Compassionate (tenderhearted) refers to being moved on one’s insides in response to a need and then acting. The Greek word for forgiving, based on the same root word as the word for grace, means to exercise grace in forgiving. Paul’s use of the present tense signifies that forgiving is to be the habitual practice of believers toward one another. Paul pointed out specifically that this is a God-like quality. We are to forgive one another just as God also forgave us in Christ. Why did God forgive us in Christ? Because we proved how sorry we were? Because we had suffered sufficiently for our offenses? Because we had paid “the pound of flesh”? No. God forgave us in Christ because of His love, grace, and mercy. Consequently, we too are to forgive other believers Christ loves and for whom He died.

When a believer lives by Paul’s commands in verses 25-32, that person has a positive impact on the church’s life and can move others to live by these principles.