

Walking in Our Father's Footsteps (Part 5)

Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2

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*Tom Pennington, Pastor
Countryside Bible Church*

I was thinking this week, it really is amazing how little we understand so much of the world we live in. We often fail to understand, I think, even the simplest conveniences that we use, even everyday things. For example, if I were to ask you this morning to define and explain to me what words are, what would you say? Webster defines it this way, “a word is a unit of language consisting of one or more spoken sounds or their written representation that functions as a principal carrier of meaning.” Words are in essence spoken or written signs. They’re signs that point to my thoughts. They are tools to express what is in my mind or in your mind.

In English, we certainly have plenty of tools at our disposal. English is one language with the most vocabulary. Linguists tell us that in Old English five hundred years ago, the total number of words available in English was somewhere between fifty and sixty thousand words. Today, that number has grown to a million words officially. In their book *The Story of English*, the authors of that book write, “The statistics of English are astonishing. Of all the world’s languages, which now number some 2,700, it is arguably the richest in vocabulary. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists about 500,000 words and a further half million technical and scientific terms. According to traditional estimates, neighboring German has a vocabulary of a mere 185,000 words and French fewer than 100,000.”

So, in English, and those of you who’ve tried to learn English as a second language certainly understand this, in English we have a rich vocabulary from which to choose. We have a lot of signs or tools to express what we’re thinking to others. But real communication over the last five hundred years has improved little if at all as we’ve grown from 50 to 60,000 words to a million words [why is that?] because having the tools of language and using them effectively are two entirely different things.

I have a book in my library that I have shared some quotes with you before. It’s called *Foolish Words*. It catalogues some of the most famous misstatements in the English language. It really is amazing, as you read this book and as you think about it, how difficult it is to get what’s in your mind, the thoughts of your mind, to express them through the signs and tools of words so that another person truly understands.

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There are a number of examples. One that's always available is Yogi Berra. Yogi Berra said, "You should always go to other people's funerals; otherwise, they won't come to yours." Now think about that for a moment. I think I know what he meant, but that isn't what he said. Or Miss Alabama, now I can quote her because I'm from Alabama. Miss Alabama, in the 1994 Miss U.S.A. contest, was asked if you could live forever, would you and why? Here was her famous answer. "I would not live forever because we should not live forever because if we were supposed to live forever, then we would live forever, but we cannot live forever which is why I would not live forever." I don't think she won that part of the competition.

But even the well-educated and the statesmen that lead us can misspeak. In fact, sometimes they misspeak the worst. Dwight Eisenhower, the American president, said, "Things are more like they are now than they ever were before." Or there's Elizabeth Dole, who said, "Only one thing would be worse than the status quo and that would be for the status quo to become the norm." And of course our former vice president Dan Quayle is often quoted with his malaprops and misstatements. He said, "Hawaii is a unique state. It's a small state. It's a state that's by itself. It is different from the other forty-nine states. Well, all states are different, but it's got a particularly unique situation." And on the heels of that, you'll really appreciate this one. He said, "Verbosity leads to unclear, inarticulate things." Amen.

Communication, that is, real communication between two people where what is in the mind of one is accurately transmitted to the other, is one of life's most difficult skills. We have to admit, don't we this morning, that all of us struggle in this area? If I were to bring up here on the platform all of the people near you and ask them for examples, I'm sure this last week would not be short of examples for where you and I have fallen on our face in our communication with others. Not a single one of us is exempt.

But our real problems don't come with our misstatements, with our malaprops, with those things that are slip-ups. Our real problem is that every day you and I make sinful and unwise choices in how we attempt to communicate with others. In fact, that is a far greater problem for us in our communication than those occasional slip-ups.

We desperately need to learn how to talk like Christians in our marriages, in our families, in our church and in every human relationship. And Paul is going to teach us how this morning from Ephesians 4. In Ephesians 4 through 6, Paul urges us to walk worthy of our calling that he's explained to us in the first three chapters. And we're learning here that to walk worthy of that calling means we must walk in love. That's the theme of this section we're studying, a section

that begins in 4:25 and runs down through 5:2. At the end of that section, Paul actually states his theme. Look at 5:1. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love.” Paul says if we want to walk in a way that’s worthy of our new position in Christ, then we must walk in our Father’s footsteps, our new adoptive Father. We must imitate Him and specifically, we must imitate Him by walking in love. We must live a life that is defined by love.

So, Paul then provides us with five illustrations in this section of how to imitate our Father by walking in love. We’ve looked at three of those five illustrations together. In verse 25, we saw that we are not to lie. Don’t lie; instead, speak the truth. In verses 26 to 27, we learned, don’t get angry; instead, resolve your conflicts. In verse 28, we learned, don’t steal; instead, work hard and be generous.

Today we come to the fourth illustration Paul uses of how to imitate our new Father by walking in love and it’s this. Don’t tear down with your words; instead, build others up. Don’t tear down with your words; instead, build others up. Ephesians 4:29 and 30 set the tone for all communication that we make, that we have with others, regardless of its context. Look at verse 29 and 30, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will 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.”

In those two brief verses, Paul turns everything we think we know about communication on its head. And he doesn’t stay with generic descriptions of what ought to be. Paul gets very specific. He tells us how to do this in real life. Specifically as we unfold and unpack these verses, I want you to see the three principles he gives us here, three principles that will revolutionize how we communicate with others in every relationship that we have. If you will embrace these three principles and you’ll pursue them, it’ll revolutionize the communication you have in literally every relationship in life. Let’s look at these principles together.

The first key principle we learn from this verse is that we must control our mouths constantly. We must control our mouths constantly. Look how he begins, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth.” Let me translate that for you directly from the Greek text including the word order because in Greek, word order is for emphasis. Listen to how Paul writes. “Every word rotten out of your mouth not let come.” “Every word rotten out of your mouth not let come.” You see, the emphasis is on every single word. This is to be a constant, vigilant effort. And the Greek construction, by the way, implies that we are to stop what’s already happening.

Isn't that a reality for all of us? We already do this. This is already true for all of us. We let unwholesome, rotten words out of our mouths and Paul says stop it. And he's going to explain why.

The bottom line is this. God holds us responsible to control what comes out of our mouths. In what sense? Well, Paul says there's a certain kind of word that you are, a certain kind of speech that you are not to let come out of your mouth. What does that mean, folks? That means we're talking about a matter of choice. You and I can help it. This is a decision of the will and Paul is commanding us to make that decision. This immediately confronts us because there are some people, even Christians, who say, "Oh, you just don't understand. I can't control what I say. It just flows out."

Well, that isn't true. In fact, that isn't even true of unbelievers. They can even control their speech to a certain extent. They can't change who they are, but in the right circumstance, if the price is high enough, then they'll be careful what they say. So, even unbelievers can, to some extent, control their tongue. And as Christians, we are not victims of our mouths. So, don't listen to yourself. Don't believe yourself if you're sitting there thinking, oh I just can't. If you're a Christian, you can. This is a command from God to you.

There are other people, even Christians, who are proud of their lack of self-control. They say everything they think. And when you ask them about it, they'll say something like this, "Well, that's just the way I am. I just people tell like it is. I just tell them what I think." It's odd, isn't it, to be proud of what God condemns? And yet some people live there.

Scripture says that as Christians, we can and must control our communication. It is a choice of obedience. The ultimate problem of course isn't with our mouths; it's with our hearts. That's where unwholesome words come from. Jesus said this in a number of places, but look at Luke 6. Luke 6:44. He's talking about speech, and He says, Luke 6:44, "For each tree is known by its own fruit." Think about that for a moment. You walk into someone's yard and you see a tree. Maybe you don't recognize its shape. Maybe you don't recognize its bark or its leaves. You don't know what kind of tree it is by any of those things, but you look and hanging there on the tree is a lemon. What do you think? Ah, that's a lemon tree, and on and on it goes. The tree, the inherent nature of the tree [stay with me], the inherent nature of the tree is made evident by the fruit it bears.

So, then Jesus goes on to apply that. “For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush.” If you pick a certain kind of fruit from a tree, then you know the essential nature of that tree is inherent with the fruit you picked. Verse 45, here’s the application, “The good man [the righteous man] out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil *man* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”

In other words, listen carefully. You know the essential nature of a person by the fruit, specifically in this context, the words that pour out of his mouth. If the words are evil, what do you know about the person’s heart? It’s evil. That’s what Jesus says. If the words are righteous, not merely in a few circumstances, not merely on Sunday, but as the flow of that person’s life, then what is that person? They’re righteous.

So, we have to understand that what we say shows the condition of our hearts. You know, we can really diagnose a lot about what we’re thinking, what’s in our hearts, by what we say if we really listen to what we say. Paul Tripp, in his excellent book *War of Words*, helps to illustrate how heart attitudes show up in our words. And he does so through an imaginary couple named Bob and Mary. He’s doing some marriage counseling, and he lets them speak as people often speak, and then he asks you to sort of diagnose what’s going on in their hearts.

So here’s Bob. “Bob says things like this, ‘I don’t want much. I just want a home with a little bit of order and love. Is that too much to ask? I’m doing my part. All I’m asking is that my wife do hers.’” What is he showing in his heart? Well, Tripp identifies it rightfully as anger. He’s angry because things aren’t going in his home the way he thinks he deserves.

“Mary often sins in angry outbursts. Bob responds to that with this, ‘Why does God let this go on? Why doesn’t He do something? I would like Mary to hurt just once the way she hurts the children and me.’” What’s going on at that point in Bob’s heart? Vengeance, he wants her to hurt.

“Bob says, ‘I just don’t understand Mary’s anger. I guess we’re just different. I’ve never felt the anger that Mary feels, let alone expressed it.’” What’s that? Self-righteousness, oh, maybe he doesn’t struggle in the same way with anger that Mary does, but by his very words he’s showing that he struggles with the sin of self-righteousness because he’s got his own sins, but he’s not recognizing them.

One more example, “Bob says, ‘You know, a man just needs a place to retreat to. I’ve got nowhere. When I punch out at night, I want the tough part of my day to be over. I don’t want a home more stressful than my work. I shouldn’t have to be on the job twenty-four hours a day. When do I get some time off?’” What does that show about Bob’s heart? It shows selfishness. He deserves his time. He’s not there to help and serve his family. He’s there to get what he needs and what he wants.

We need to ask God to open our eyes to what we say and to what it says about what’s going on deep in our souls. God demands that we control what we say and ultimately (listen carefully), ultimately the only way to do that is at the heart level. But that brings us back to Ephesians 4.

Listen very carefully because Paul wants us to know this. Even before we deal with what’s going on in the heart, we can stop what’s going on in the heart from coming out of our mouths, and we must. Some people think that if they don’t say everything they’re thinking, they’re being dishonest or even hypocritical. That’s not what Paul says. He says don’t let certain kinds of words out of your mouth even if you think them. There will always be certain words that come from our sinful hearts that want to come out. Let your teeth be a guard to keep those words in your mouth. Don’t say them, he says. We must exercise self-control, discipline in what we say.

Now Proverbs has so much to say about this restrain and self-control in what we say. And by the way, this is so contrary, isn’t it, to what you hear around you? Everything you hear around you is express yourself, say what you’re thinking, get it off your chest. It’ll help you. Let’s look at what God says. Proverbs, turn back with me. Let me just show you a few examples. Proverbs 10:19,

“When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is *as* choice silver, The heart of the wicked is *worth* little.”

In other words, it’s the old law of supply and demand. The wise restrains his word, doesn’t say much, and so they’re worth more. The wicked are just prattling on and on and so they’re worth very little.

Look at 13:3. “The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.” Chapter 15:28, “The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.” They just respond impulsively and just let it rip. Here goes, this is what I think. Chapter 17:27, “He who restrains his words has knowledge, and

he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.” In fact, verse 28, “Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is *considered* prudent.” Verse 2 of chapter 18, “A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.” You want to be into expressing yourself? You want to be into telling what you think? The Bible says you’re a fool. Verse 6,

A fool’s lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows. A fool’s mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare [or the trap] of his soul.

His soul is trapped by what he says. One more reference in Proverbs 21:23, “He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles.”

So, you can see then that the Scripture puts a very high premium on restraint and self-control on not saying everything you think. In fact, you fast forward to the New Testament. You remember James? We studied it. Now I know it’s a distant memory. Some of you weren’t even here at the time. But in James 1, James says, “If anyone thinks himself to be religious [that is, to really know God], and yet does not bridle his tongue [doesn’t even try to bridle his tongue], ... [he] deceives his *own* heart, this man’s religion is worthless.”

Now that takes us back to Ephesians 4. So, we’re not to let everything out of our mouths. We’re to use self-control and restraint, but specifically, what words does Paul forbid in this passage? Or to use the language of the context, what clothes that belong to the old person we used to be, that’s now dead, what clothes are we to put off? Notice what he says, verse 29, “Let no unwholesome word.” Every unwholesome word is to be put off. The word “unwholesome,” the Greek word, refers to what is “rotten, rank, putrid, disgusting or just worthless.” It’s used in the New Testament, the same word, of rotten fruit, of worthless trees and of trash fish that aren’t worth keeping but just worth being thrown back in. It describes something of poor, bad quality that has no worth. Our Lord used this word about language. In Matthew 12, he says, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or [else] make the tree “bad” [there’s our word] and its fruit “bad” [there’s our word again]; for the tree is known by its fruit.” Paul is probably borrowing from that comment of our Lord’s.

So, what are these rotten words? Well, the New Testament often refers to the kinds of words, the kinds of language that God strictly forbids. Maybe it’s slander, it’s lying, verbal abuse, gossip, vulgarities and obscenities, and certainly the word unwholesome or rotten includes all of that and more. But in the context, notice that Paul makes a contrast. He contrasts between these

unwholesome or rotten words and, later on in the verse, words that edify. So then listen carefully. Any word that doesn't build another person up classifies as an unwholesome, rotten or worthless word. Paul unilaterally forbids us to say a single word that doesn't edify those who hear us.

Now folks, that is a very high standard. It's hard for all of us. It's especially tough for some of you who came to Christ as an adult, you lived adult years letting your mouth say anything it, you want it to say. You were exposed to and used the worst kind of talk, cursing, vulgarity, words spoken in anger, critical words, gossip, slander, malicious, vicious words. And what happens is, because that's a part of our past, let troubles come, let difficulties come, and we are very easily tempted to revert to that. It happened to Peter. You remember? Peter probably had been a Christian for three, three and a half years. He had walked with the Lord. He lived with the Lord day and night. And when he thinks his life is in jeopardy, what does he do? He goes back to cursing and swearing like the fisherman he was.

But controlling our mouths is also a problem for those of us who have been Christians for many years. James says we all offend with our tongues. But this, folks, is the goal toward which we should be striving, controlling our mouths constantly. Put a guard in front of your lips. Don't let a single word come out that isn't intended to build up, not a single word that's rotten or worthless. So number one, we must control our mouths constantly.

That brings us to Paul's second principle. We must choose our words carefully. We must choose our words carefully. Look at verse 29 again. The negative, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth." The positive, "but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment." You know, words have amazing power in them. You ever thought about that? Those signs or tools that we use all the time to express what's in our minds, they have amazing power.

You remember when you were children? I remember at some point in elementary school, I don't remember what grade, I would get off at the bus stop and there waiting me was my arch-nemesis, waiting to challenge me to a fight. Now I didn't struggle with not wanting to fight. In fact, it was a real temptation. I got into fights quite often, but not with this guy because of course in the third grade, this guy weighed 200 pounds and already had a moustache. And so I refused to fight him because I was certain that if I went ahead and fought him, my parents would have to come up, come by later and you know, pick up what remained of me with a toothpick and a spoon.

And when I wouldn't fight him, you know what he would begin to do. Maybe this happened to you. He would say things like this, "What are you, a chicken?" And then became this string of names. Now when you're in elementary school, you're taught how to respond to that. You remember it? It's a little poem. Comes out easily, doesn't it? Even today, you still remember it. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Who were we kidding? Of course they hurt. We can still feel the wounds left by the careless words of others, in some cases, all the way back to our childhood.

Words have tremendous power. The Scripture acknowledges that. Proverbs 12:18 says, "There is one who speaks rashly [and it's] like the thrusts of a sword." Maybe you've experienced that. Proverbs 12:18 goes on to say, "but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Words can be like a sword, or they can bring healing. Proverbs 16:24, "Pleasant words are ... sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." Proverbs 18:21, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Words are incredibly powerful, so Proverbs says to handle them carefully like you would a sharp knife.

Now that brings us back to Paul and back to the behavior we should put on. There are clothes that fit the new person we have become in Christ. There are words that become the new person we have become in Christ. We're to put on a certain kind of speech. Notice what he says. We are to let out of our mouths only words that are good. Good in what sense? Well, he goes on to define it, "good for edification." Now we don't use the word "edification" a lot. In the New Testament, it's used in a number of places to refer to literal buildings. It means to build a building. When it's used figuratively as it is here, it refers to building someone up in their soul, to promoting their spiritual growth. We are to speak in such a way as to build others up, to promote their spiritual well-being and growth.

First Thessalonians 5:11, "encourage one another and build up one another, just as you are also doing." Even here in Ephesians, you remember back earlier in Ephesians 4:12? Spiritual gifts are "to build up the body of Christ." Verse 16, each of us contributes our part, and when we do [what happens?], the body grows, it builds itself up in love. It's important to understand that you and I have the responsibility to speak in such a way that what we say, the words we choose, build one another up.

Now understand this. Paul isn't being sentimental here. The need isn't always easy. What people need to hear, words that build up, aren't always easy. They aren't always warm and fuzzy. This doesn't mean that we'll never tell someone what they don't want to hear.

Edifying words can sometimes be hard, difficult words both to hear and to say. Paul experienced this. You remember the letters he wrote to the church in Corinth. If you've read them, you know there are some really hard things Paul says to the Christians in Corinth. But listen to how he describes what he wrote. Second Corinthians 12:19, "we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved [for your edification]." Even the hard things I've said, Paul says, were intended to build you up. In 2 Corinthians 13:10, "For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity (and I'm writing these hard things, these severe things) ... for building up and not for tearing down." So sometimes edifying words are hard words.

Our Lord did that, didn't he? Was our Lord always warm and fuzzy to everybody He came in contact with? No, He spoke a variety of ways. He often spoke confrontational words to those who were unrepentant. He rebuked those openly who lacked faith. He even spoke in scathing words to false religious leaders and about them. But Jesus' words were always appropriate. They were always good words.

You see, the key issue with edifying words is that whether they are encouraging or discouraging, winsome or warning, friendly or firm, they are always designed to do one thing [what's that?] to help. Edifying words are aimed at the problem, not at the person. Now how can we determine which words will build up? Look as Paul develops his thought there in verse 29. He says, "only such a word as is good for edification [that is, for building up] according to the need," in other words, the edification that is required by a specific need. Our words are to be appropriate to a person's need and circumstances. They're to be appropriate and timely.

You say how can I know that? How can I know what someone else needs? You ready for this? It's a secret. Try listening. Listening is not something we do well. Because of our own sinfulness, we usually want to speak and assert our own position, our own feelings, our own ideas, not listen to somebody else. And even when we aren't talking, rarely are we really listening. Instead, we're rehearsing what we're going to say next, we're thinking of a better story or maybe we're just, you know, buying time so we can make our next comment. That's how conversation goes. I have something else I want to say, but I buy the opportunity to say that by listening to what you're saying.

Listen, listening is a lost art and a lost virtue. You ever thought about this? God listens. God listens to us. I love what the psalmist says in Psalm 116. He says,

I love the Lord, because He hears my voice *and* my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call *upon* Him as long as I live.

God listens and He expects us to listen to others as well. And if we really listen, we'll know what others need and we'll be able to edify them according to the need of the moment. That's what Proverbs describes. Proverbs 25:11, "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances." Proverbs 15:23, "A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word," a word that fits the need. We must choose our words carefully to build up and to fit the need that that person has.

There's a third principle that Paul gives us here about our words. We must change our thinking completely. We must change our thinking completely. We need a renewed mind about this whole issue of talking and communication. We must change our minds about the reason for speaking at all. Most people, I include myself here, use words for all the wrong reasons. Usually when we speak, why do we speak? Think about that for a moment. When you speak to others, what are the most common reasons? Typically, either to make ourselves understood or to express our own thoughts. And there's a place for both of those, but what do both of those have in common? Me, getting something off of my chest, telling you something about me.

Instead, Paul says we are to speak for others' good. Notice what he says, verse 29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for building up according to the need of the moment [look at the end of verse 29], so that [for this purpose, here's why you're to speak, so that] it will give grace to those who hear." God has given us a mission with our mouths. We are His ministers to dispense His grace with the words we use. Through what we say, we are supposed to be an instrument of God's grace in the lives of others.

Paul Tripp writes,

Perhaps this is the highest goal for talk within the body of Christ that our words would be conduits for the life-giving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here we really do focus on being part of what God is doing in the lives of others. It means recognizing that our relationships do not belong to us. People do not exist for our happiness and contentment. Rather, God has appointed us to faithfully communicate His powerful love to them. Almost all of our talk is me-centered. Its highest purpose is to express my wants, my desires, my demands. Most of what

we say is an attempt to get what we want without reference to the lordship of Christ or His call on our mouths to be used as His instruments.

You remember back in verse 28 when we studied about stealing? We had to change our whole thinking about property and work. It's not just about my needs; it's about others. I'm to use those resources for others. Well, guess what? We come to verse 29, and it's the same thing with our words. Our words don't exist just for us and our needs. Our words exist for others. God didn't primarily give us the gift of language and words so that we can express ourselves. He gave us these gifts so we can love others through them.

But not only should our words be for the good of others, they should also be for God's purposes, for His good. In Greek, verse 30 is joined to verse 29 with the conjunction "and." And, verse 30, "and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." You say is what we say really that important? Paul says you better believe it's important. Maybe you've heard verse 30 all your life, but you've never really seen it in its context before. Paul says choose your words carefully because if you don't, you will grieve the Holy Spirit of God. When you and I choose to sin with our words, when they're all about us, when we fail to see ourselves as God's ambassador into the lives of others, we grieve the Spirit of God who has sealed us for God. Why?

Think about it. What's the mission of the Spirit? Why is He here? Look back in 2:22. You remember this? We're being built up together as believers, "built together into a dwelling of God", a temple. We are going to become a temple where God dwells. And he's doing all of this "in (or by) the Spirit." So the Spirit of God is all about (what?) building us up. He's about building us up. So when we tear down people around us with rotten or worthless words, it grieves Him because He's all about building up.

And listen, grieving the Spirit is not something you want to do. This text points back to an Old Testament text. Look back at Isaiah 63. In Isaiah 63, Isaiah recounts the exodus when God brought His people out of Egypt. And the end of verse 8, Isaiah 63:8, says they're going to be My people and "He became their Savior." Verse 9, Isaiah 63:9,

In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence [that by the way is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity who was with them in the wilderness, And the angel of His presence] saved them; In His love and His mercy He redeemed them, And He lifted them and carried

them all the days of old. But [verse 10, notice how they responded]they rebelled And [here it is] grieved His Holy Spirit [notice how God responds to it when we do that]; Therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them.

A very serious thing to grieve the Spirit of God who is there to build us up and we instead are all about tearing others down.

Now back to Ephesians 4. You remember the context of these principles about our speech? It occurs in the middle of a passage that tells us to imitate God, to imitate our new Father by walking in love. So, let me ask you a question. How does this command, to speak only words that build up, reflect our God? Is God really like that? Is that how God is? Yes, it is. Look at Acts 20. In Acts 20, Paul finishes his speech to the Ephesian elders, the last time he'll see them. And he ends with this beautiful verse, verse 32. As he comes near the end of this speech that he's making, he says in verse 32, "... now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace." You know what he's talking about? He's talking about how God has spoken. Where has God spoken?

God doesn't speak to us subjective feelings. God's never spoken to me. He's never whispered in my ear. This is how God speaks to us right here. And notice how Paul describes it. The gospel and everything connected to it, he says, is the word or message of (what?) His grace. Does the Bible contain some hard things to hear? Yeah, this would be one of them, wouldn't it, this verse we've been studying this, this morning? And yet it is the message ministering grace to us. Why? Look at the rest of the verse. He says, "which is able [verse 32] able to build *you* up [there it is] and give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." God has spoken. And every word that God has spoken to us in His Word is for one purpose. It's to minister grace to us and to build us up.

If we want to be like our God, if we want to be like our new Father, then we need to speak grace into people's lives, sometimes hard things, but always with the purpose of building them up, of promoting their spiritual life and growth, and not tearing them down because that's how our Father is.

Now, one final warning, this is a very serious business. I want you to see just how serious as we look in closing at the words of our Lord in Matthew 12, Matthew 12. Jesus is talking about words and what He says is not to be disregarded. Matthew 12:33. It's, the same long day we've

been studying on Sunday night, that day when the Pharisees accused Him of being in league with Satan. And Jesus says in verse 33,

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; 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 man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. [we saw that in the parallel passage. Look how He concludes, verse 36]. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

You hear what Jesus is saying? He’s saying words are such an accurate predictor of the heart, of the contents of the heart, that how you speak, what you say, the words you choose, will be marshaled as evidence when you stand before God. Your words will either justify your claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and to be His disciple, or they will condemn you as one who never was truly changed.

Words are a very serious thing because they simply reveal what’s on the inside. If I could look at the flow of your life, not just what you say on Sunday, not just what you say at the church, and you could look at the flow of mine, and we could examine our words over the period of time, we could know what’s in our hearts because they just flow out from the heart. And Jesus says if you’re not really a follower of Mine, if you claim to be but you’re not, every word you have spoken will be brought up and marshaled as evidence against you on the day you stand before Christ and your very words, your words, will condemn you to eternal hell, a very, very serious matter.

Therefore, Paul says,

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only *such a* word as is good for building up according to the need *of the moment*, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God....

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the hard things that You have said to us because we see even in Your Word how You are administering grace to us. It is truly the word of Your grace that is able to build us up and to give us an inheritance among those who are sanctified.

Father, we thank You. And I pray that You would help us, O God, to reflect You, our new Father. Lord, we at one time belonged to Satan. He was our father.

And now You have adopted us and we belong to You. Help us to live imitating You. May our words be words of grace that build up rather than tear down.

Lord, help us to determine to guard our mouths. Don't let us just rattle everything out of our mouths that goes on in our minds, but Father, help us to guard our lips. And then, Father, help us to deal with the thoughts and attitudes that are going on in our hearts as well.

May we be Your instruments, through our words, to reach Your grace into the lives of others starting with the people that live in our home, the people we work with and the people of this church and reaching out to every life we touch.

Father, I pray for the person here this morning whose words will condemn them when they stand before You. Lord, may this be the day when they turn in true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Whatever their claims may have been, Father, strip that all away, and help them to see that someday every word they've spoken will be marshaled as evidence to show that they didn't belong to Christ at all. May this be the day of their true salvation.

We pray in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.