

The Old vs. the New Life – Part 2

Ephesians 4:29-32:

²⁹Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Introduction

No one can see your thoughts or my thoughts (e.g. while sitting at the desk typing or at the bus stop). So it's hard, isn't it, to work out what people think or feel? And even when we can see someone's actions, or observe someone's behaviour (e.g. crying, pacing), we don't always know why they do what they do; we can guess, but we don't really know.

In fact, we cannot really know people unless we hear them speak. **Speaking is basic to communication because speaking communicates more than just information.** Speaking communicates our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Speaking communicates why we think a certain way, or why we do certain things. Speaking is one of the ways we get to know people because what people say, how they speak, what they speak about, and the pattern of an individual's conversation, reveals what they are like, and who they really are in here (the heart).

And so it's no surprise that Paul begins to unpack for us what the new normality for speech should be, under the gospel. If the new reality is this: saved by grace, made alive in Jesus, raised to new life in Jesus, and seated with Him (2:5-6), and the new self created in the image of Jesus now resides in me (v.24), then **there is now a new normality when it comes to my speaking because my speaking should reveal my changed heart**, and my speaking most reveals whether the heart has truly been saved, transformed, renewed, and made alive.

So what does the new normality for believers look like when it comes to our speaking?

Don't Use Your Mouth to Corrupt, But to Build Up (v.29)

Paul's Framework:

- The negative: let no corrupting talk come out of your mouth
- The positive: speak only what is good for building up
- The reason why: so that it may give grace to those who hear you

Paul moves from what we do with our hands to what we do with our mouths. **The gospel renews and brings saving grace to our speech and mouths.** When God saves, He leaves no part untouched; a new creation dawns. We are not just saved out of the ocean of filth, but cleaned and given a new life as His son or daughter.

So here Paul tells us to put off every kind of corrupt talk: unwholesome talk, rotten speech, and evil speech (v.29). *Our words are not neutral*; the Bible tells us that our way of speaking reflects two realities. **Our normal pattern of speaking reflects two realities: the old self or the new self** (vv.18-19, a heart hardened, a darkened mind, living in ignorance, callous towards God, and living for yourself and personal desires, or vv.20-24, a new heart, an awakened mind, living wisely, alive to God, and no longer living for self, but as a new creation, and with new desires after God in true righteousness and holiness.)

And so Paul says that here is the new normality when it comes to my words and my speaking: *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths.* The word 'corrupt' here is used to speak of rotten trees and rotten fruit. It literally means rotten or putrid, and generally refers to profanity or obscenity. (Mt.7:17-18; 12:33).

Matt. 7:17:

So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Matt. 12:33:

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.

Paul is literally saying 'let no rotting, putrid, or decaying words flow out of your mouth'. Every kind of putrefying, decaying, and rotten speech, don't let it journey out of your mouth. **It's the image of a flowing river, where our speech is like that river.** It will either be a wellspring of water that refreshes, or it will pollute and poison. When it comes out of our mouths, it will reverberate with effect on others around us, in ways that tear down or build up. **2 Timothy 2:16 says that corrupt talk will start a journey that leads to a place where people are less godly than before we spoke!**

What is 'Corrupting' Talk?

So what is this putrefying, decaying, rotten, and corrupt talk that Paul has in mind? There's a whole range of possibilities. And the way to work it out is to **consider the alternative: the positive Paul lies before us.**

Instead of corrupting talk, what kind of speech are we to pursue, overflow, and bear in our lives? **V.29** says to *speak only what is good for building up.* The opposite of that is to tear down, destroy, and damage. So **corrupting talk, or speech, are really words that damage others, tears down others, belittles others, and destroy others,** which is expressed in many different ways.

(E.g. Dishonest words that manipulate people, unkind words that hurt people, vulgarity that's used to crush people, sarcasm that belittles people, slander that lies about people, and profanity that treats God with contempt.)

Corrupting talk is speech that's like rotten fruit: decomposing, putrid, foul, and off to the person before whom that fruit is presented. And it's true, isn't it? Every so often I'll find rotten fruit in our fruit compartment: a half decomposed kiwi fruit, or a half decomposed strawberry box. **No one in their right mind serves up rotten fruit that's putrefying and decomposing, all watery and putrid.** It offers no nourishment, and is totally repulsive; there's nothing attractive in decomposed fruit, and if you eat it, it'll make you sick.

Paul says that when you and I speak, the fruit of our lips is either like fruit that nourishes and is attractive, or fruit that is putrid, foul, and makes people sick. My speaking in the presence of others should be like a dish that is served up.

Examples of 'Corrupting' Talk

What are examples of corrupting talk (decaying, putrid, and foul speech)?

- **Talk that tears down** (opposite to talk that builds up)
 - ***Speaking abusively to others.*** (E.g. ‘what’s wrong with you?’, and ‘you never do anything right!’)
- **Talk that is ungracious or unkind** (opposite to talk that gives grace)
 - ***Speech that lacks kindness towards others, and is just mean in what it says to others.*** (E.g. ‘you’re incompetent!’, ‘you’re useless!’, and ‘where did you get your degree from – the internet?’)
- **Talk that is uncontrolled and impatient** (opposite to talk that gives grace)
 - ***Speech that is unrestrained and explosive in how we respond to others;*** speech that is impatient and short in our dealings with others.
- **Talk that belittles people** (opposite to talk that builds up)
 - ***Cynicism and sarcasm that makes people look small and you big; that crushes people’s spirit.***
- **Talk that is foul and filthy**
 - ***Speech that’s vulgar and filled with profanity;*** speech that makes vulgar references to sex to express our anger or surprise. (E.g. ‘F* you!’, ‘go F* yourself!’, ‘you’re full of s*!’, ‘oh sh*!’, and ‘oh f*!’)

I can tell you that they build no one up. They belong to the old reality because it takes something good, like sex - a gift from God. It gets taken and is now used as an expression of anger or surprise. *It abuses what is good, and uses it to express the old self and its callous ways: callous to God and callous to sex.*

That’s where the hardened heart and darkened mind ends up. It takes the good gifts of God and corrupts it. It doesn’t honour God; instead, it belittles His good gifts, and it certainly does not build up others around you.

- **Talk that uses Gods name in vain**
 - ***Using God’s name as an expression of shock or anger.*** (E.g. “my God!’, ‘Jesus!’, ‘Christ!’, and ‘God!’). It treats God with contempt. It belittles Jesus. Remember commandment number 3: ***you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. (Exodus 20:7)***

Imagine someone using your name as swear word, or to express anger. It would be treating you with contempt because it belittles you, and treats you with disrespect.

It’s like a married couple who, every time one of them gets angry or married, stomps on their wedding ring to express anger or excitement, or uses the name of their wife or husband to express shock or anger. That ring is precious, and that relationship is precious; so too is Jesus and the Father. It doesn’t honour God; instead, it belittles Him, and it certainly does not build up others around you.

Our Pattern of Speaking is a Reflection of our Hearts

And I know that, even right now, some of you are wondering: 'man, what's the big deal with my speaking?' It seems so harmless, but it's not harmless because the overflow of the mouth is really a reflection of the heart. **Jesus says that what comes out of our mouths is a reflection of what's in our hearts: *the pattern of my speaking is a reflection of my heart.***

Our normal speech patterns, the way we speak to people, and our words when communicating, reveal what's in our hearts, whether the gospel has taken root, whether our hearts are dead or alive, or filled with polluted waters of the old self or clean waters of the new self.

Matthew 12:33-37 says that you will know a tree by its fruit. This is clear and obvious. (E.g. A lemon tree bears lemon fruit and an apple tree bears apple fruit). No one can speak good if they are evil within. If the tree is diseased it will produce rotten and putrefying fruit. If the tree is healthy it will produce fresh and nourishing fruit.

Notice in **v.34: *for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.*** Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. **What we say is the overflowing of what is in our hearts.** So here is the old self and new self from Jesus' perspective in v.35. The good person, out of his good treasure, brings forth good, and the evil person, out of his evil treasure, brings forth evil.

There are two kinds of realities, and two kinds of people: one in whom God has worked a new creation - in whom Jesus dwells and lives as their supreme treasure, and in whom Jesus fills - **and the other in whom the old self dwells and lives** - with itself as its treasure, and with itself as the object of its love and worship.

Notice what Jesus says in **Matthew 12:36-37, *on the judgment day people will give an account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified/saved, and by your words you will be condemned.*** **NOTE: Jesus is not saying that if you're a swearer, or a vulgar person who cusses, you're going to hell.** People go to hell not because they swear, but because their hearts remain dead to God; **they remain unsaved because their heart is hardened, and the mouth is only reflecting the dead heart.**

Matthew 15:11, 18-19: ¹¹*it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person ...* ¹⁸*But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.* ¹⁹*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*

What makes us unclean? It is our speech. Why? **Matthew 15:18 says that what comes out of the mouth comes out of the heart**, and it's what's in the heart that kills us, defiles us, and pollutes us because **the mouth reveals what's in the heart.** It is a wellspring of life giving water, or a wellspring of poisoned water.

Luke 6:45. ⁴⁵*The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*

Rom.3:14. ¹⁴"*Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.*" The unregenerate mouth is really a reflection of an unregenerate heart.

Our Speaking is an Overflow of the Heart

So where the gospel has taken root, where there has been a change of heart, where a new heart now beats, and where the heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh, so too flows out new speech patterns, and new kinds of speaking. **Patterns of speech are no longer for the self, but for others; no longer a weapon of destruction, but water that refreshes.**

We move from speech that is self centered, insists on our rights, and tears people down, to speech that builds up, and now overflows with kindness and grace; speech that edifies (v.29). So here is the logic of gospel transformation: if, as Paul says in verses 20-24, we are new creations in Jesus, and made in the image of Jesus, then **there are now new standards of conversation:** the way I converse with you is also part of the new creation God has worked, and is working, in me.

Instead of hurting people with our words, we want to use our words to comfort them; instead of speaking to belittle people, we want to use our words to lift them up; instead of using our words to discourage people, we want to use our words to encourage them; and instead of obscenity that's abrasive, we use words that are attractive.

Proverbs calls attention to two kinds of speech and words: the words of the wise and the fool – Proverbs 12:18: *There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.* Are your words like the thrust of a sword that kills, cuts, and bleeds people, or are your words like that which brings healing and restoration?

If there's a new gospel reality then there must be a new normality in my speaking, thinking and actions. **So if there is NO new normality – if my speaking, thinking and actions remain unchanged - then what does it say about the reality of the gospel in my life? It says that my heart is still captured and enslaved, and still living in darkness.** My heart is dead to God, my mind is darkened and callous to God, and I'm alive to my sensuality; living to fuel my self-centered passions and desires in life.

The way you speak is an overflow of your heart.

In fact, James 3:8-12 describes the tongue this way; it functions as a warning to us in our speech. Here is the power of your words, people: *the inconsistency that we downplay in the way we speak, and our lack of conscience in the inconsistencies of our speech.* **James 3:9:** *with the same mouth we praise God, and with the same mouth we tear people down.* **From the same mouth comes words that praise and words that destroy.** James says, in **v.10,** *brothers, fellow believers, this should not be.*

Is it possible for a well to give out both fresh water and bitter water? Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grape vine bear figs? So too a dirty pond cannot bring forth fresh water. James is saying exactly what Jesus says, that **your speech tells you what kind of pond resides here in your heart.**

The stains run so deep when it comes to speech and the old way of life. *The fact that we are so used to profanity in our culture is a reflection of how deep those stains run.* We are so used to vulgarity and profanity that it doesn't bother us; not just in our lives, but all around us. We are so used to vulgarity in our entertainment that we are desensitized to it, but we shouldn't be.

Vulgarity and profanity come off our lips easily as well, and it doesn't bother us. We are immune to it. We slander people and it's normal, and bitch about people and it's acceptable. We say nasty and unkind things to people, off the cuff, and we laugh it off, finding it acceptable. **But Paul says it's not normal, and it's not acceptable for God's people.**

Don't misunderstand the Bible when you read '**let no corrupt talk come out of your mouth.**' God is not primarily concerned with the words that come out of your mouth. He is not sitting there watching to see whether you say nasty things to someone, or waiting to catch you swearing. **God's concern is the heart because the words that journey out of your mouth reveals your heart** (Matt.15:11 says that what comes out of our mouths make us unclean because they reveal what's in our hearts).

So guarding your speech is as much about guarding your heart because it reveals what's in there, and whether grace rules. New reality means new normality when it comes to our speech.

God is concerned with the state of your heart. So under the new reality, in place of corrupt talk, Paul says in **v.29, we are to now speak only what is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.**

So here is the positive: the new normality under Jesus. God isn't just calling us to stop speaking words that tear down and destroy others; He's also concerned with the positive effect of your words on others around you.

The positive to this new normality: stop speaking words that corrupt; instead, speak what is helpful for building up according to their needs; that it may give grace to those who listen. Notice what we're called to do; **notice how we are called to speak what is much narrower than we're used to.** We're not told to say what we want to say as long as we don't use vulgarity or profanity, or if it isn't rude or offensive, or if it doesn't harm anyone: 'As long as it doesn't hurt anyone; it's fine ... as long as it doesn't offend anyone; it's fine.' NO it's not!

The standard of gospel-shaped and driven speech is this: if it does not build up and benefit the person I am speaking to, and if it doesn't bring grace into their lives to lift them up, then it's not worth saying. If what I want to say doesn't overflow with kindness, goodness, encouragement, hope, love, and compassion that lifts your hearer up, then it's not worth saying.

Oh how convicting is this portion of scripture! How much do I actually say that builds up? How much of what you actually say imparts God's grace to others; that reflects kindness and compassion? **Do a speech assessment.** Most of what we say is what? It's worthless!

We are cynical; rarely do we have positive things to say about people. Most of our conversations are really about others: their faults and failures, which we then laugh at. And sometimes we're

abrasive in the way we deal with people; impatient and unkind in our putdowns. Rarely do we speak words that strengthen and encourage.

And I think the principle of speaking to build up doesn't just apply to speech; it should also flow over into what we post online. What we communicate online, as gospel men and women, and as men and women clothed in the image of Jesus - who should be overflowing grace – even our Facebook posts should reflect the transforming effect of the gospel. **The same principle applies online too: if it doesn't build up, and if it doesn't impart grace appropriately, then it's not worth posting.**

So here is the new pattern of our speaking under the new normality, and under the gospel. **Our speech must be marked by three things:**

1) It must build up, and it must edify

- Pause and think about that word: my speech and conversations must be edifying to the one I am speaking to. Paul uses a building word. Like the building of a house, the last thing you want is a careless builder. You want a good builder who is careful with the way he is building, who places the right bricks in the right place to build the house; so too with our speaking.

The result of my words should be that the person whom I am speaking to leaves encouraged and strengthened and built up.

NOTE: there might be room for small talk or light conversation, but **even light conversation is powerful in the effect it can have on the person you're speaking to.** If someone is hurting, looking for hope, and needing encouragement, but they leave starving, still hurting, hopeless, and discouraged, then our light conversation has not helped, has it? Not when we could have spoken to build them up.

One practical application is to ask God to help you use your speech to bless others. Resolve to speak what will build people up, and to learn to be mindful in the way you speak. Is what I am going to say edifying, or beneficial to the one I'm speaking to? It might be funny, it might be challenging, and it might be smart, but is it edifying? Is it going to build them up? Are my words going to nourish the one I am speaking to: to hope in Jesus, trust in Jesus, be encouraged to trust God, and be more thankful? Will it give them joy? James 1:19 says it's not just a call to be slow to anger, but also quick to listen and slow to speak!

2) Speak what is good for building up as befits the occasion

- In other words, my speaking must be wise in working out how to best encourage, in how to best strengthen, and in how to best build up my listener. **Your words might be good, but they might not be appropriate because you haven't taken into account the occasion and the situation.**

For example, someone hurting needs encouragement, but there you are giving them a lecture on encouragement instead. Someone discouraged needs strengthening, but there you are throwing Bible verses at them. They are all good things, but inappropriate to the occasion.

We must speak what builds up appropriately. This takes wisdom. **One practical application is to ask God to help you be discerning as you speak to people, to help you work out how you can say what needs to be said to build them up. Resolve to listen well and to speak words appropriately.**

3) The effect of our words must impart grace

- Our speaking should always give grace to those we are speaking to. It must be marked by grace, so that our listeners receive grace from us. **What marks God's grace? It is unnumbered mercy, overflowing compassion, unlimited kindness, abundant love, and continued forgiveness.** It is everything we've read so far of the grace of God in the gospel, in chapters 1-2.

If that is what we have received, then it must also be what we impart to others. **One practical application:** everything that I have received in the gospel is now to be reflected in my speech so that it gives grace to those listening. I must be speaking with mercy, compassion, kindness, love, and forgiveness, at work, university, home, in my relationships, at the football, and at a BBQ. **In every situation, ask yourself if what you are going to say is going to reflect grace: unmerited love, kindness, and compassion.**

Resolve to mark your speech with grace, to match the new reality that God has worked in your life: clothed with Jesus, and a new creation in His image now dwells in you, so the new normality is speech marked by overflowing grace! **God's grace works in us, and is to flow out to others.**

Everyone knows that pollution is a problem; we suffer from it, yet we also contribute to it. But here is a pollution that often gets overlooked: verbal pollution that we are so desensitized to - the poison of speech that is destructive, hurtful, selfish, cynical, sarcastic, belittling, slanderous, unkind, discouraging, pessimistic, impatient, and rude to others.

If you try to speak differently this week - to do away with corrupt speech and only speak what edifies and gives grace to others - I suspect, like me, you'll find that you won't have much to say. And what that means is that, **under Jesus, I must relearn how to speak in the image of Jesus, and I must work at the new normality in my patterns of speech.**

I must have my mind renewed by the new reality and by the gospel. I must pray constantly by giving myself to Paul's prayer in chapter 3, to have Jesus fill my life more and more, and for my grasp of the gospel to increase more and more, such that Jesus becomes the treasure of my heart more and more. **The more He fills me, the more it will flow into every area of my life as I become more like Him.**

To Not Live by the New Reality in my Speaking Grieves the Holy Spirit

To do any less would be to grieve the Holy Spirit. (v.30) Notice what Paul goes on to say in relation to our speech in **v.30: *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.***

In the previous verse, v.26, Paul warned us about not letting the devil gain a foothold in our lives, and to not give the devil an opportunity in our lives. Here **Paul reminds us that we're not to grieve the Holy Spirit, who has sealed us for the day of redemption.** He reminds us again of the new reality that the gospel has brought about in our lives. **When you became a Christian, and when you responded to Jesus, God sealed you with His Spirit. (Eph.1:13 - In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit)**

What does a seal signify? It signifies ownership: you are no longer your own. For example, in *Toy Story*, there is a scene where Woody looks at his foot, where Andy has penned his name. It reminds Woody who loves him, and who he belongs to. It gives him the strength, motivation, and drive to get up.

It is the same here in the gospel. This is the new reality. You were once a slave, to what? Chapter 2:1-3 says you were a slave to the devil, world, and self. Now having experienced grace, been made alive in Jesus and raised to new life in Jesus, and set on a throne with Jesus, chapter 2:5-6 says you now belong to Him, and are sealed with His Spirit.

He didn't write His name on your foot; He came and dwelt in you and clothed you with Himself. That is the new reality. *So when you live by the old reality, and when your speech goes down the path of the old self, you grieve the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.*

Can you see what Paul's doing? He's reminding us of who we belong to, and the new reality of the gospel in our lives: sealed by the Spirit of God, Jesus dwells in my heart (3:17), we're clothed in Jesus, and we are new creatures made in the image of Jesus (4:24)!

So, to then have my speaking reflect anything less than Jesus, grieves Him. For if He dwells in my heart, if He has changed my heart, and if I am a new creation in Him, then to have poison flow out in my speech is not just wrong; it is tragic (out of the heart the mouth speaks). **It grieves the Father, who loves you; it treats the Son with contempt, who died for you; and it hurts the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you.**

We are to live by a new reality, and our speech and conversations are to be marked by that which builds up, nourishes, and overflows with the grace of the gospel, in kindness, compassion, mercy, love, forgiveness, encouragement, and hope.

Here is the new reality: we are saved, Jesus now dwells in you by His Spirit, God has sealed you by His Spirit, and you belong to Him. **So what's the new normality in your speaking, and in your conversations?**

Application

- 1. It must build up, and it must edify.**
- 2. Speak what is good for building up as befits the occasion**
- 3. The effect of our words must impart grace**