

### **Psalm 19:9-14 Common English Bible (CEB)**

<sup>9</sup> Honoring the LORD is correct,  
lasting forever.

The LORD's judgments are true.  
All of these are righteous!

<sup>10</sup> They are more desirable than gold—  
than tons of pure gold!

They are sweeter than honey—  
even dripping off the honeycomb!

<sup>11</sup> No doubt about it:  
your servant is enlightened by them;  
there is great reward in keeping them.

<sup>12</sup> But can anyone know  
what they've accidentally done wrong?  
Clear me of any unknown sin

<sup>13</sup> and save your servant from willful sins.  
Don't let them rule me.

Then I'll be completely blameless;  
I'll be innocent of great wrongdoing.

<sup>14</sup> **Let the words of my mouth  
and the meditations of my heart  
be pleasing to you,  
LORD, my rock and my redeemer.**

Ephesians 4:17-32

#### **The old and new life**

<sup>17</sup> So I'm telling you this, and I insist on it in the Lord: you shouldn't live your life like the Gentiles anymore. They base their lives on pointless thinking, <sup>18</sup> and they are in the dark in their reasoning. They are disconnected from God's life because of their ignorance and their closed hearts. <sup>19</sup> They are people who lack all sense of right and wrong, and who have turned themselves over to doing whatever feels good and to practicing every sort of corruption along with greed.

<sup>20</sup> But you didn't learn that sort of thing from Christ. <sup>21</sup> Since you really listened to him and you were taught how the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup> change the former way of life that was part of the person you once were, corrupted by deceitful desires. <sup>23</sup> Instead, renew the thinking in your mind by the Spirit <sup>24</sup> and clothe yourself with the new person created according to God's image in justice and true holiness.

<sup>25</sup> Therefore, after you have gotten rid of lying, *Each of you must tell the truth to your neighbor*<sup>[b]</sup> because we are parts of each other in the same body. <sup>26</sup> *Be angry without sinning.*<sup>[c]</sup> Don't let the sun set on your anger. <sup>27</sup> Don't provide an opportunity for the devil. <sup>28</sup> Thieves should no longer steal. Instead, they should go to work, using their hands to do good so that they will have something to share with whoever is in need.

<sup>29</sup> **Don't let any foul words come out of your mouth. Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what you say.**

<sup>30</sup> Don't make the Holy Spirit of God unhappy—you were sealed by him for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Put aside all bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil. <sup>32</sup> Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

This is the word of God for us the people of God. Thanks be to God.

### The Power of Words – Tearing Down or Building Up?

“Handle them carefully, for words have more power than atom bombs.” Pearl Strahan Hurd

“You can change your world by changing your words...Remember death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Joel Osteen

“Don't mix your words with your mood, you can change your mood but you can't take back your words.”

“One kind word can change someone's entire day.”

For the next four weeks, we are going to consider the power that our words carry – both the words that we speak, and the words that we fail to speak. Words have the power to build up. Words have the power to tear down. We will talk about words within our families and we will even go there and talk about the words we use when talking about religion and politics. It's going to be a great series. And along the way, we are going to challenge you to practice the advice we find in scripture. We are going to challenge you to use your words to build one another up instead of tear one another down --- the goal is to begin to notice our words and to be purposeful about the words we use.

Can you imagine how different every aspect of our lives and our world might be if we **only** used words that expressed the love of Christ – if we **only** used words inspired by the Holy Spirit - words that were kind and showed compassion and patience...words that were full of goodness, gentleness and self-control.

Can you imagine how our marriages might change? Can you imagine how our relationships with our children and grandchildren might change? Can you imagine how our workplaces might change? And our schools? Can you imagine how our chance encounters with strangers might change? Can you imagine how politics might change? Do you think the atmosphere on social media would be different? And could you imagine even how our church might change? Do you think our mission to tell the world about the love of God might be exponentially effective if we **only** used words that build up?

Today's scripture from Ephesians is written by the Apostle Paul as advice to the church in Ephesus; he's writing from prison to people who were new followers of Jesus, and he's describing what it **means** and how it **looks** to live now that they are believers. He's telling them to grow up – to mature in their faith. If you would, look a few verses earlier in Ephesians -- look

with me at Ephesians 4:1, I want you to see the overall idea that Paul is encouraging the church toward.

Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness and patience. Accept each other with love and make an effort to preserve unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. Ephesians 4:1-3

Throughout chapter 4, Paul is explaining how it is that the church is called to live as people worthy of God's call. And it is pretty simple, isn't it? Paul doesn't say we have to accomplish these huge, amazing works for God, but he says that whatever we do, we are to be humble, gentle and patient – that we are to love each other and be unified. One of the ways that we live out this calling from God is to speak **words** that are **humble and gentle and patient**.

In today's scripture Paul draws a stark comparison between the old behavior and the new behavior. The attitude and words from the old life as non-believers and their new life as followers of Jesus should be vastly different. And so, let's dig into this- let's look at the very real application of this call to imitate Christ by using our words to build up instead of tear down.

Now you may have noticed a very stark picture comparing the old life with the new life in this scripture. In the old life Paul describes lying words, angry words and foul words. There was bitterness, shouting and slander (which is making a false and damaging statement about someone). In fact, Paul goes so far as to call this type of behavior evil. Some Bible translations of verse 29 use "evil words" instead of "foul words." And would you agree that there is evil in using these types of words – would you agree that the love of God is surely not in lying, angry, bitter, shouting, foul words?

Now, a couple of the Greek words that Paul uses in today's scripture really help us to understand exactly what he was saying. In verse 29 the Greek word for foul talk or evil talk is *sapros* (*saff-ros*) – this is the same word that is used to describe food that has rotted. A while back we had a really gross experience at my house. We had put a meat tray in the trash can outside in the garage. Do you know what I'm talking about – those yellow foam trays that you buy meat in. And this meat tray started smelling so horrible that we had to take the whole trash can out of the garage. It had stunk up the whole place, and I'm sure it would have stunk up the whole house if it had been inside. Has this ever happened to you that the juice from the meat gets down in there and rots and gets putrid? So, imagine that horrible, putrid smell being used as a description of the foulness of our words.

And in verse 31, the Greek word Paul uses for bitterness is *pikria* – this is a word that is used for bitter or poisonous food or drink. So Paul is saying these words can be poisonous, rotten and putrid. And isn't that an interesting meaning because don't bitter, angry and foul words poison our relationships – don't they cause our relationships to rot and decay?

And so, Paul says ..... put those kinds of life-destroying and relationship-destroying words aside. Paul encourages the church to instead use words that build others up and that are worthy of our calling. He says – get rid of lying. Don't let the sun set on your anger. Don't let any foul words come out of your mouth. Only say what is helpful in building up the community. Put aside all those bad attitudes and destructive words, and Paul says be kind, compassionate and forgiving to each other because God has forgiven you through the death of Christ on the cross.

But really these ideas can almost be a "so what" moment for us. Because we **know** all this. We **know** these things are true. We know words hurt – we learned it when we were young

children, didn't we. We can think of countless times we've been on both the giving and receiving end of harsh words.

The problem that comes for us with this task is not in the knowing but in the doing. The problem comes when we are out there in the world faced with a situation where the anger within us wells up – or when our bitterness gets the best of us. Or maybe, we just get caught up in the moment and find ourselves gossiping or cutting someone else down.

It is in the nitty gritty stressful situations of our lives that we forget to imitate Christ with our words. And I think that part of our problem in controlling our tongues is in recognizing and admitting that the words that come out of our mouths directly reflect what is going on inside of us. Now, I am no counselor, therapist or psychologist. But doesn't it seem that when we experience hurt, bitterness, pain and fear, that can burst out of us in words that are destructive? And don't you think that changing our speech really involves letting God change the inner sources from which our speech springs? Do you remember what Psalm 19 :14 says? This is the main verse of the day - this is the one on your phone wallpaper this week, and I hope you will memorize it and use it as your prayer over the next four weeks.

Let the words of my mouth

**and** the meditations of my heart

be pleasing to you,

LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

It is a prayer that the words of our mouths AND the meditations of our hearts would be pleasing to God. It's necessary not just that our words are pleasing but also that our thoughts and our inner selves be pleasing to God. If we want to be people who build others up with our words instead of tearing them down, **we must align our hearts with God.** Paul is really calling on the Jesus followers to change their inner natures. Scholar N.T. Wright said it this way:

“Living as a Christian demands that we grow up in our thinking: you have to learn to identify your own moods and behavior patterns to see which ones are going in the right direction and which ones in the wrong direction...we should regard our moods, and the speech which flows from them, as we might a strong but willful horse, which needs to be reminded frequently of the direction we're supposed to be going in.”

We must deal with our junk or junk is going to come out of us in the form of words that tear others down. And so it's our job to do whatever we need to to be healed - it might involve getting professional help or learning more about our inner motivations through a tool like the enneagram. But our main source for imitating Christ in all areas of our lives is to draw near to our God of miracles. God is able to heal our bitterness, our anger, our fear, our jealousy and our unforgiveness. There are many destructive attitudes that fester within us, but when we spend time in God's presence, we will be healed. We can become new creations in Christ who actually reflect the light of God to the world. But it takes effort to turn toward God. It can't be done with one hour of worship a week alone, it requires spending time daily in the presence of God – in prayer, meditation, reading scripture and spending time with a small group. This is why Church 2.0 is so important for us this fall. If we are serious about maturing in our faith, it is essential for each of us to dig in - to find ways to pray, to serve, to worship and to be a part of a small group. We will never be like Christ in our inner selves or our outer actions until we seek God in every

way we can! So, I challenge you this week to gather a small group, then send me an email so we can send you some details about how to get started.

Now --- I ask you this: how would you feel if you only received kindness, compassion and forgiveness from those in your life? And I ask you, will you commit to using the same kind of powerful words to build up those you speak to this week? Will you pray that the Holy Spirit might give you words of life and hope?

You know, God may never call us to be the next Billy Graham or Mother Teresa, but every single one of us can live out our faith and show the world the love of Jesus by the words that we speak. Every single one of us can show God's love with our words.

Just as the Apostle Paul encouraged the Ephesians:  
I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness and patience. Accept each other with love and make an effort to preserve unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. Ephesians 4:1-3

--May our words be worthy of the call we have received from God.

--May our words be a good and pleasing offering to our God.

--In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.