

# EPHESIANS

*blessed to be a blessing*

## WEEK SEVEN

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### Ephesians 4.29

Hey! This is the second time in this short section that Paul has referred to the stuff that comes out of our mouths. And, it's not the last. Do you think he's trying to emphasize something here? It might be subconscious, but what is sure is that there must have been a need in the Asian believers to call them out on what was coming out...of their mouths.

It's probably not too much of a gamble to say that there is good reason for us, too, to pay strict heed to these instructions and strive for wholesome, uplifting talk. Temptation to spew words of anger, cursing, gossip, condescension, or joking at someone's expense, either verbally or written, to people we know or don't know, can be very strong, especially if you have been offended or wronged in some way or if this is how you have been treated in the past. Words are extremely influential, especially to those in listening distance, and they have meaning even beyond what we may intend. Words can be like an earthquake, sending shockwaves to distances far from their source and possibly producing a seismic wave that can further destroy relationships. Or, words can be like a salve, bringing healing and nourishment to dry, cracked places in need of heartening.

As we have learned previously, our hearts are the seat of so much of who we are, and they are to be protected above everything else (Proverbs 4.23). When spoken through the words of Jesus, this Proverb says "*Out of the overflow of [the] heart, [the] mouth speaks.*" (Luke 6.45) When our hearts go unprotected, negativity and bitterness seep in and can be the source of much unwholesome talk. Alternatively, they can also be restored to health and become a wellspring of life for others. An antidote for the former is to pray Psalm 141.3 as a surrender to God's sovereign protection over our mouths: "*Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.*" Pray that God would replace bad, putrid words we use with words that offer grace and benefit the hearers. This all takes training and a massive infusion of God's Spirit, but His grace is everlasting and the benefits are eternally worth it! Amen!

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### Ephesians 4.30-32, part I

Pastor Kurt has an awesome quote that goes something like this: "Unforgiveness is like when you take rat poison and expect the rat to die." Waiting for an apology or for a person to right a situation – two things that may never come – can cause a build up of festering resentment and bitterness, and we may be sickened in many ways in the process. These things sap life from us and others on so many levels, and once they become entrenched, they are very difficult to overturn. One observable characteristic in people who are weighed down by ongoing resentment and bitterness is a habitual inability to forgive, especially for things that happened long ago. Additionally, their threshold to forgive even the slightest offenses becomes lower over time, and the smallest things begin to irk them.

Understanding that the whole definition of forgiveness is based on the offender's undeserved quality helps us grapple with forgiveness. We really have no control over other people and their actions. We may have the *illusion* of control, but in reality, people's selfishness, unkindness, disregard, or betrayal will affect us at some point in life no matter what we do to avoid it.

What we do have, however, are prayer, communication, and the involvement of trusted people to help us when we are being maltreated by someone. And, while these can be powerful provisions, what is desperately needed is our ability to eventually release the person from owing us anything, despite what they've done to us. And, since forgiveness very much goes against our human nature (do I hear an 'Amen!'), we are in dire need of the Holy Spirit to enable us to do such a thing. Invite Him into the process no matter how long you've been struggling with an offense, and receive His faithful help.

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### Ephesians 4.30-32, part II

Releasing someone from anything they owe us, like an apology or recompense for example, can be instantaneous (praise the Lord when it is!), or it may require much more processing over a span of months or even years. But, if you have invited the Holy Spirit into this process, the rewards will be invaluable! Re-trusting and post-traumatic stress disorder are other mountains to climb when dealing with offenses, but let's focus on the act of forgiveness for now.

The word Paul is using for "forgiving" stresses the present, ongoing nature of our forgiveness towards others, implying that because we are in relationship with people, there will be plenty of opportunity to practice this sometimes very difficult act! We are to continue practicing forgiveness "*just like God in Christ forgave you.*" A favorite saying by a friend is "I will do anything for You, Jesus." There are many situations where we show how deep our devotion for Jesus penetrates by letting go of offenses and treating others with grace and compassion.

Letting go is not strictly an intellectual pursuit, however, that we can hope to accomplish with our sheer resolve or determination. More than likely, the offense has deeply touched us emotionally, physically, psychologically, and even spiritually – every level that makes up our humanity. Take heart! We serve a King who Himself suffered much affliction (Isaiah 53), and He personally and completely let go, and then offered up His life as a sacrifice to the afflicters (and everyone else)! Forgoing worldly entitlements for the sake of His kingdom is probably one of the most humanly difficult actions to muster. Therefore, depend on the Holy Spirit to release your grip on grievances, and keep processing with Him and other trusted friends until you have let go. The Maker of heaven and earth and King of Eternity is calling us to this task. He, then, must know something more than we do about the significance of such a profound act.

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### Ephesians 5.1-7

Ground-truthing is a basic step in the geographic sciences that either verifies or disputes data collected from instruments. For example, if someone collected information about something on the earth using remote instruments (e.g., satellite imagery), then they would also need to send someone to that place on the ground to make sure that what they are seeing in the imagery equals what is actually there, because, hey, instruments can lead to false conclusions. So, if our imagery taken from miles in space seems to be telling us that below stands a sweet-smelling field of lavender, but in reality it's a garbage dump, then we'd want to know this and figure out what went wrong with our instruments. Unless ground-truthing occurs, then the data are still considered theoretical.

Likewise, in our faith, this is a moment of ground-truthing. Now is the time in our study to stop and ask ourselves: "Is the way I am conducting my life sweet-smelling to the Lord, or does it smell like something else?" We cannot study everything in Ephesians and walk away without having asked this revealing question, otherwise our faith remains theoretical. Are our lives typified by forgiveness, love, sacrifice for others, and thanksgiving just as Christ's was and is? Or, are our lives reeking of sexual immorality, other impurities, greed, obscenities, foolish talk, or coarse joking? As the passage says, if it is the latter, then this disputes our profession of Christ, and our words are empty. If we are professing Christ-crucified, then our lives should verify those words by being a fragrant offering to God. How we conduct our lives becomes a living sacrifice and proves our gratitude to an all-sacrificing Savior and Friend. May our lives remain grounded in the truths of our Savior and reflect His all-surpassing goodness.

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### Ephesians 5.8-14

Before our baptism in Christ, we were wallowing in darkness, and more than likely we were unaware of the depth of our immorality against God because, well, "pigs don't know pigs stink." Then a crack of light shone through the darkness the moment we first heard and believed, and God raised us out of our abyss of fruitlessness to forever walk in the light. Now because we identify with Christ and no longer with the disobedient, what must typify our lives are **goodness, righteousness, and truth**. These are solid spiritual markers that reveal our identity in an other-worldly Person Who beckons us to a life that yields Christlike fruit. It may sound like a tall order, but these things are fruit produced from the indwelling Spirit of Christ in us. Something supernatural happens when we submit our complete selves to His love and grace and will.

We do not need to walk in this new life with heavy shackles weighing us down – the dead weight of false guilt and self-determination – or in a frightful paralysis. Nor are we to cloister ourselves from the world and day-to-day interactions and decisions for fear of failure. No! We are now set free to walk in the world with the various situations of our lives as testing grounds for the Lord's will, trusting that God will guide us with the results of our actions by way of fruit.

How do we, then, keep all of this from remaining high theology that looks good on paper and instead allow it to filter into our lives as biography? Are the thoughts we are thinking, the deeds we are doing, and the words we are speaking good, right, and true according to our Holy God? Remember, we are not wallowing in ignorance anymore (Ephesians 4.18). Seek to know and do what pleases the Lord, and trust that the Holy Spirit will alert you to the fruit that He desires your life to be about. This is how we walk as children of light.