

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

## **(LESSON SEVENTY-ONE)**

### ***“WATCH THE WAY YOU TALK”***

#### **EPHESIANS 4:25-29**

*25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.*

*26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:*

*27 Neither give place to the devil.*

*28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

*29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*

My precious brothers and sisters, as I was preparing for this Lesson, it occurred to me that it would be beneficial for us to pause for a moment and review some of the material that we have covered within recent times. The following quotation from the American theologian and pastor, **Wayne Barber**, provide an excellent summary of our recent deliberations:

**“Ephesians 4:20-24** says we are to put on a new life, a new garment. That garment is Jesus Christ. We have already worked through all of that. We are to take off the old and put on the new.

The new garment is a lifestyle, a lifestyle that all the world can see. What I say I possess is one thing, but the way I live is another thing. You don't tell a man about your faith, you live it out. He sees it by the way you live, by the way you speak and by your actions.

In **Ephesians 4:25** Paul starts qualifying what that garment is. He starts showing us what that fabric is really like. He says in **Ephesians 4:25** that when you put on the new garment you are going to have a **transformed tongue**. It is amazing what comes out of the mouth. Jesus said it is not what goes inside a man that defiles him, it is what comes out because it reflects his heart. He says first of all, you are not going to lie. That is the new garment. That is the Lord Jesus in your life. You see, when you tell a lie or when I tell a lie, and it is always easy to do that, what we are doing is protecting ourselves. We are never to protect our flesh. We are to confess our flesh. We are to be open and honest before God. We are never to live deceitful before others because the Lord Jesus is a truthful being. He is truth, and He lives in us. Therefore, we cannot lie.

Secondly, you have a **controlled temper**. It is amazing. **You are angry at the right things for the first time**. Now it is not wrong to be angry. He says, 'Be angry but do not sin when you are angry.'

Now, the anger of man, **James** tells us, never accomplishes the righteousness of God. So this is a different kind of anger. This is God's righteous indignation rising up in us...We are angry at the right thing and we know where to focus all of our anger. We don't let the sun go down on our anger. We are making sure consistently that we are quiet in our spirit. It is incredible the disposition of a person who puts on the new garment.

Then in **Ephesians 4:27** Paul says we have a **frustrated tempter**. In the context, what Paul is saying is, if you want to frustrate the devil

put on the new garment. When you put on Christ you have frustrated the tempter in your life. As a matter of fact, the word for 'devil' is even very important to the context. The word 'devil' is the word **diabolos**: [dee-ab'-ol-os]. It means to cast in between, to separate and to divide. Now what was **Ephesians 4:1-16** talking about? Preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. How do we continue to do that? We don't give the devil an opportunity. How does the devil take opportunity? Only when he can tempt us into putting on the old garment and taking off the new. Don't let him have that opportunity. You continue to walk in the new garment and you will continue to preserve the unity in the bond of peace.

Paul gives two threads and a warning or a principle about the garment. **We don't lie and we control our temper and we frustrate the devil.** Let's look at **Ephesians 4:28. I become one who is a giver and not a taker.** That is the new disposition. This is the new garment. I don't lie. My temper is under control. I am frustrating the tempter. Now I am a giver instead of a taker...

Do you know there are two kinds of people in this world? There are **replenishers** and **depleters**. A **depleter** is somebody you are around that absolutely sucks everything out of you. You have no energy left to do anything with this person. He is a taker, never giving anything back. That individual has never put on the new garment.

But when you find a person who is a **replenisher**, he has put on the new garment. He is a person who doesn't take. He gives and replenishes and replenishes...**The new garment changes everything about your disposition towards all relationships whether at home, church or wherever you are...**

Verse **28** says, '*Let him who steals steal no longer.*' What does it mean to steal? That is pretty obvious. You break into a store and you steal something. Now wait a minute. The word is **klepto**. Now what word do

you think we might have in the English language that comes from that? **Kleptomaniac**. That is a person who habitually takes what is not his. He can't help it. Wherever he is, he is always an opportunist and he grabs for himself whatever he wants to take. Well, the present tense and the active voice is used. It is a participle. Here is a person who consistently, by his own lifestyle, depletes...

Do you realize how this affects our families? Do you realize when I've got the old garment on in my family, I will manipulate my wife and others to get what I want out of them? **Every one of us are that way**. When I have the old garment on, all I have are false relationships with anybody. I don't care who it is. People may think I am their friend. Oh, no. I am a user and I'll use that person for my own benefit. I'll step on whoever I need to step on to get what I want out of them. That is what the old garment is. That is why three out of every four marriages are ending in divorce. Why? Because people are takers. They are depleters and they've got the old garment on...I want to get out of your mind that a thief is somebody who sneaks into somebody's house and steals something, or somebody who breaks into a store to rob them. That is a thief, yes. But there are other ways to steal. You've got to go deeper than that.

Look in **Ephesians 4:28**. After he tells him not to steal any longer He says, *'But rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.'*

There are two things Paul tells us here about a thief. Number one, he is too lazy to work. He will not go after it on his own energy. He wants to take it. He wants people to give it to him. He thinks the world owes him something. Secondly, he will not share what he has. He is not a giver. He won't work and he won't give.

'You mean to tell me if I am wearing the old garment, even though I'm not going out and robbing a store somewhere, I am still a thief?' Yes, you are. To some extent you are stealing from other people what could have been replenished in their life. What you are doing is you are depleting them, robbing them...That is the very instrument that the devil is using to divide the church of Jesus Christ worldwide. He won't put on that new garment. He would rather steal, deplete and take rather than give and replenish."

The fourth filthy garment of the **old man** that Paul urges believers to put off is **corrupt communication**, or **unwholesome talk**. In **Ephesians 4:29** he writes, "*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*"

**The Message** translates the verse as follows: "*Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.*"

The word "*corrupt*" is a translation of the Greek word, **sapros**: (**sapros**'), which means, "rotten, putrid, no longer fit for use, worthless." The basic meaning relates to the process of decay. In secular writings **sapros** was used to describe spoiled fish, rotten grapes on the ground, and crumbling stones. The word refers to that which is in an advanced state of decomposition and has a foul odour. Figuratively, it refers to that which is offensive and injurious. Paul uses this word **sapros** to present a picture of the disgusting, offensive and destructive nature of the speech that is characteristic of the **old man** that the believer has **put off** in Christ. Such speech does not build-up, but tears down instead; it is unwholesome and creates an unpleasant atmosphere for those who are around. Using this vivid metaphor, Paul commands believers to **put off** such speech in the same way that one would throw out rotten fruit or fish!

Paul is condemning any speech that is morally unhealthy; any speech that suggests impure thoughts; any speech that reflects trivial views of sin, or a lack of reverence towards God; any speech that intentionally offends or injures others. He is commanding us to forsake all profanity, obscenity and meanness. The context indicates that “**sapros**” speech is any utterance that is not good for edifying where that is what is needed. In that sense, a “**sapros**” word is an unprofitable word. Our words do not have to be foul or obscene to be worthless!

Brothers and sisters, let us not fool ourselves! Corrupt speech comes from a corrupt heart, and pure speech comes from a pure heart. The battle for oral purity is fought in the heart! Listen to the words of our Lord, recorded in **Matthew 12:33-37**:

*33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.*

*34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*

*35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*

*36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.*

*37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

Jesus warns us in this passage that our words testify of what is in our hearts. The words we speak are the “fruit” of our heart. If our heart is a storehouse of good, that good will overflow through our lips and edify others. But if our heart is a storehouse of evil, that evil will spill over through our lips and defile both the person speaking and those who are listening.

The phrase “*idle word*” in verse **36**, means words that accomplish nothing. Brothers and sisters, this verse clearly indicates that God is going to judge what we consider to be “small talk.” How much more then, will He judge our deliberate words? It is by what comes out of our mouths at unguarded moments that our true character is revealed.

The speech of a believer should be **edifying**: It should result in the building up of those who hear. The speech of a believer should be **appropriate**: It should be suitable to the occasion. The speech of a believer should be **gracious**: It should minister grace to the hearers.

**We say again, the battle for purity in the mouth is fought in the heart.**

Paul says, “*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.*” The words are in a construction in the Greek which forbids the continuance of an action already going on. Paul is saying in essence, “Stop letting these rotten, putrid, idle, worthless words fly out of your mouth.” That covers the whole range of corrupt talk, from obscenity and filth to idle rumors and gossiping. We do well to note his admonition in the next verse (verse **30**): “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” It is evident that Paul associates corrupt communication with grieving the Holy Spirit!

In his epistle, **James** repeatedly makes the point that what we say reflects who we are in our inner-heart life. In chapter **1** verse **26**, he says, “*If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless*” (**New English Translation**).

In chapter **3**, verses **1-2**, he writes,

*I Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.*

*2 Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.*

**(New English Translation)**

It is apparent that several of the persons to whom James was writing wanted to teach and be spiritual leaders. It is likely that these persons were impressed with the authority and prestige of the office, and were not aware of the tremendous responsibility and accountability of the office! They did not understand that in God's economy, those who teach the Word face stricter judgment than those who do not. Those who exercise a teaching ministry must use their tongue to share God's revealed truth. Furthermore, teachers must practice what they teach; otherwise, their teaching is hypocrisy. Think of the damage that can be done by a teacher who does not consistently heed **2 Timothy 2:15**: *"Make every effort to present yourself before God as a proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately"* **(New English Translation)**. Consider also the damage that can be done by a teacher whose spiritual life is not up to par.

But teachers are not the only ones who sin with their tongues. Every believer must admit that *"we all make many mistakes."* And sins of the tongue seem to head the list. Believers who are able to discipline their tongue give evidence that they can control their whole body. They prove that they are spiritually and emotionally mature.

Someone once made the following remark in connection with James' declaration regarding the tongue:

*"When the doctor examines us, one of the first things he does to determine our physical condition is to say 'Stick out your tongue!' James is saying in a sense 'Stick out your tongue so I can assess the condition of your heart.' This principle applies to the life of the person whose religion is pure and undefiled, for the tongue reveals what is in our heart.* Inconsistent speech bears witness to a divided



heart for it is 'out of the abundance of the heart' that the mouth speaks (**Matthew 12:34**). 'Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing,' James writes later in this same letter and adds 'My brethren, these things ought not so to be' (**James 3:10**).

It follows from what James says and from each of our own experiences, that the tongue is indeed a restless evil and full of deadly poison and cannot be bridled. The question then arises is how can one practice pure religion or religion worth anything in the eyes of God?... In regard to the tongue the answer of course is that **tongue control is not possible in our natural power but requires supernatural Holy Spirit power and amazing, life transforming grace**. As you have undoubtedly heard some pastor articulate 'The Christian life is not difficult...it's impossible!' And so is tongue control, short of Spirit control. God's Holy Spirit alone can enable a saint to bridle his tongue from unholy speech."

Brothers and sisters, a tongue that is under control is a clear indicator of a spirit that is under control. It is only when the Holy Spirit dominates and controls an individual, that he or she is able to control his or her tongue. The only way we can control our restless tongue is by surrendering it to the power of the Holy Spirit and letting Him control it. As **J. Sidlow Baxter** noted: "One of the first things that happens when a man is **really** filled with the Spirit is not that he speaks with tongues, but that he learns to hold the one tongue he already has."

Instead of allowing anything rotten, putrid, idle, or worthless to come out of your mouths, we should speak "*that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers,*" or, as **The Message** translates the phrase, we should, "*say only what helps, each word a gift.*"

Remember that in this verse, Paul is continuing to give his readers practical application of how the filthy garments of the **old man** are to be **put off**, or **laid aside**, and by contrast, how the righteous and holy

garments of the **new** man are to be **put on**. The garment of “*corrupt communication*” is to be put off, and the garment of edifying words that minister grace and are sensitive to the needs of others, is to be put on. This is simply another way of saying that, as believers, we are to let Jesus Christ live out His beautifully efficacious and supernatural life in and through us.

Brothers and sisters, our new life is not only “with Christ” and “in Christ.” Our new life “**is Christ!**” **Jesus Christ Himself is our Life!** The **New English Translation** renders **Colossians 3:3-4** as follows:

*3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.*

*4 And when Christ, **who is your life**, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.*

As believers, we should speak “*that which is good to the use of edifying.*” The word “good” is the translation of the Greek word **agathos: (ag-ath-os)**, which means “intrinsically good, good in nature, good whether it be seen to be good or not.” “**Agathos**” words would include those which provide instruction, counsel, and comfort. These words are based on one’s assessment of the hearer’s need and are spoken accordingly so as to meet that need, building him or her up rather than tearing them down.

But how do we cultivate a heart that yields the fruit of “**agathos**” speech-speech that is edifying, gracious and profitable? Paul tells us in **Ephesians 5:18**: “*Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit*” (**New English Translation**). Interestingly, Paul indicates that the first effect of being “*filled with the Holy Spirit*” has to do with what comes forth from our mouths! In verse **19** he says, “*singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts*” (**New English Translation**).

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**, the Welsh Protestant minister and medical doctor wrote: "I must consider the people to whom I am speaking; I must make an assessment of them, and my speech and conversation must be appropriate for them...The Christian's word of edification should always fit the occasion! ...We are to discover, first of all, what is the exact position of other people. My business is to speak to them in such a way as to help them exactly where they are."

A young lady once said to **John Wesley** "I think I know what my talent is. My talent is to speak my mind." Wesley replied, "I don't think God would mind if you bury that talent."

**We are to speak to each other in such a way that our words become an expression and a conveyor of the grace of God!** As Eliphaz said of Job, "*Your words have supported those who stumbled, and you have strengthened the knees that gave way*" (**Job 4:4, New English Translation**). The edifying, appropriate and sensitive words which we speak among ourselves, may be used by God to minister grace to each other. We, as His ambassadors, should function as channels of His grace in our everyday conversation. The Holy Spirit desires to use our grace-filled words to transform trials into triumphs, tests into testimonies and mess into messages!

**Steven J. Cole** notes that "If you are at odds with anyone, perhaps because he or she has wronged you, you'll be inclined to think, 'But this person doesn't deserve words that build him up! He deserves to be put down!' But, grace is undeserved favor! **Grace extends to others what God has extended to you. It also extends to others what you need in return from others, because you often fall short or fail them.** So, although it may be true that the other person does not deserve kind words that build him up, give him such words anyway (Enabled by the Spirit Who gives you the Desire and the Power! **Philippians 2:13!**)"

The well-known British pastor and author **Alan Redpath**, once formed a mutual encouragement fellowship during a time of stress in one of his pastorates. The members of the fellowship agreed to adhere to a simple formula which was to be applied by them, prior to speaking of any potentially controversial person or subject. The formula was in the form of an acrostic that spelled out the word “think”:

**T**—is it **true**?

**H**—is it **helpful**?

**I**—is it **inspiring**?

**N**—is it **necessary**?

**K**—is it **kind**?

If we were all to subscribe to this formula, we would probably find that we would not have as much to say as we generally do.

A group of Christian friends once became concerned about the atmosphere of negativism that seemed to characterize their conversations. So they made an agreement to avoid negative words for an entire week. They were surprised to find how little they spoke! As they continued the experiment, they actually had to re-learn their conversation skills! Perhaps many, if not all of us who worship at **The Grace Workshop Ministries** would have much less to say, and would also have to re-learn our conversation skills, if we were to eliminate “*corrupt communication*” from our discourses.

In verse **29**, Paul initially seems to be concerned with **what** we say. He says, “*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good.*” But in the last clause of the verse his focus shifts from the “**what**” to the “**why**.” He says, “*to the use of edifying, that it*

*may minister grace unto the hearers.*” Paul’s main concern is **our motive** for speaking.

**John Piper** notes that “It is not Christian merely to stop swearing. It is not Christian just to put good language in the mouth instead. It is Christian to ask the deeper, internal question: am I speaking now to edify? Is [my] mouth a means of grace? All our secular work is to be a display of grace; and all our speech is to be a display of grace. Do you see how all-encompassing and how far reaching our Christian faith must be? These are amazing verses about the grace of God in our lives.”

Brothers and sisters, as believers we should ask ourselves the following questions: “Is my mouth a means of grace?” “Am I meeting a need with the words that come out of my mouth?” Am I edifying my fellow believers when I speak?”

We will conclude this Lesson with a poignant and thought provoking poem, written by **Judd Mortimer Lewis**, entitled “*Forget It.*”

*“If you see a tall fellow ahead of the crowd,  
A leader of men, marching fearless and proud,  
And you know of a tale whose mere telling aloud  
Would cause his proud head to in anguish be bowed,  
It’s a pretty good plan to forget it.*”

*If you know of a skeleton hidden away  
In a closet, and guarded and kept from the day  
In the dark, whose showing, whose sudden display,  
Would cause grief and sorrow and life-long dismay,  
It’s a pretty good plan to forget it.*

*If you know of a spot in the life of a friend,  
We all have spots concealed, world without end,  
Whose touching his heartstring would sadden or rend,*

*'Till the shame of it showing no grieving could mend,  
It's a pretty good plan to forget it.*

*If you know of a thing that will darken the joy  
Of a man, or a woman, a girl, or a boy,  
That would wipe out a smile, or the least way annoy  
A fellow or cause any gladness to cloy,  
It's a pretty good plan to forget it."*