

INTRODUCTION

Paul has been giving us very practical instructions about living as Christians in our modern world. He has told us that we are to 'put off' everything that is not in keeping with our faith in Christ and we are to replace those sinful habits with new habits. The reason for this is that we were created in Christ to be like God in righteousness and holiness (v 24). Therefore our lives if we are Christians must be seen to be righteous and marked by holiness.

In this current section Paul is being very practical and in the overall the structure of this section Paul is telling us to put something off, and to replace it with something else and on every occasion he gives us a reason or a motivation for doing so. So for example we are told to put off falsehood and to replace it with truthfulness and the reason for it is that we are all members of one body (v 25). Now let's pick it up where we left off last time.

1. DON'T USE YOUR TONGUE FOR EVIL BUT RATHER FOR GOOD (v 29)

Paul now turns to the use of our mouths. Speech is of course a wonderful gift of God just imagine what life would be like if we could not communicate through the use of speech to one another; almost all that we do involves speech. Every task would be made much harder if we could not speak to one another (in France with French workers). But speech is one of our human capacities, which reflects our likeness to God. We are made in his image and God is a God who communicates to mankind, he speaks to us and it was through the medium of speaking that God created the world.

Speech is one of the things that makes us different from the animal kingdom; animals do not speak yes they make noises like barking or mooing but they do not communicate by speech to one another or to us.

Therefore speech is such a wonderful gift we must not let any unwholesome talk come from our own mouths. The word that is translated 'unwholesome' is literally the word 'rotten.' It was used in the bible for rotten fruit or rotten trees and even rotten fish. We are not to let any rotten speech come out of our mouth anything that is dishonest, crude, vulgar, bad language, unfair criticism, pulling others down and anything else that will ultimately lead in hurting people.

Our words are not to be destructive because words can be a very powerful medium every Christian must be careful that we use our words the right way

So if we are Christian I want you to think about your words this past week. How often did we use our words to tear others down, to degrade others and to unfairly criticise them? How often were we ungracious in our words or unkind? Perhaps we were vulgar or crude or simply our words were less than truthful this past week.

Well all such things ought not to be. I wonder if every word that we spoke this week could be heard by the person that you spoke about would those words have been absolutely true. Have we said things behind the backs of others this past week that if heard by the person spoken about would cause him or her untold hurt and damage? Well as Christians such things need to be repented off and our speech needs to change for we ought to be people whose speech does not tear others down but in fact will build them up.

It is so easy to use our words to tear others down but it actually is much harder to use our words to encourage and to build others up. Our Lord Jesus is our great example here (Luke 4:22) when he spoke he spoke to build others up that of course meant that he spoke the truth and the religious leaders did not like it but ultimately if they had of heeded his words they would have been built up.

So Paul does not mean that we should never confront people and tell them the truth about their sins and failures but it all has to do with our intentions and our motives. If we are telling someone a harsh truth in order to tear them down and elevate ourselves then that is clearly wrong if we are doing it for their sake that they will ultimately be built up in their faith then that is a proper use of our tongue.

What about encouragement? There is nothing that builds others up more than encouragement. It's a sad fact that the church of Jesus Christ very often falls short in this area. We are all too quick to criticise and too slow to encourage. A simple but sincere word of encouragement can go a long way in helping a struggling Christian along the Christian pathway. We can all find things in one another's lives that are encouraging so why not tell one another what we do find very encouraging about each other.

Then there is building one another up by simply showing appreciation of what others do. A simple thank you goes a long way. If someone invests his or her time in the church or does something for you personally or others then why not use our tongues to say thank you. You might think that is easy but the truth is that our lives are often so selfish that we never stop to think or appreciate all that people do for us, the church or for others.

We live in a self-centred society and it is so easy to become like our society so we need to learn to appreciate others and say thank you to them. So why not find out who cleaned the church this week and say thank you to them. Or say thank you to the people who were involved in the various activities that go on in the church this past week.

Our hearts are the key here, for the bible says that what comes out of our mouths is a reflection of what is in our hearts (Luke 6:45 & Matthew 12:34-26). So if you are having problems with your speech; if you find yourself tearing others down rather than building them up then have a good long look at your heart and repent of what you find there and ask God to replace impurity with purity.

Paul says that our speech must be tailored to people's needs. It is worth asking what does each person need? Perhaps they are downcast and they need a word of encouragement perhaps they need a word of comfort or a word of support or perhaps they do need to hear some truth that will be hard to take but will ultimately build them up.

So we need to be sensitive to others we need to know one another, this obviously involves talking to one another and getting to know one another and sharing with one another and spending time with one another.

In a world that is focused on self it is always going against the trend to seek to spend time with others not for our benefit but for theirs ultimately. So make sure Christian that you spend time with every Christian in your church that you talk to every Christian and seek to really get to know them. It might mean no more than making sure we spend at least some time with them on a Sunday after the service asking appropriate questions and listening to them.

For others of us it might mean having people round for a meal or inviting them out somewhere. But the important thing is to get to know people and know their needs and then seek through our use of our tongues to build them up in appropriate ways with appropriate words. The final phrase translated 'that it might benefit those who listen' really means 'so that it might give grace to them that hear.'

This is the reason given for why we should not let unwholesome talk come from our lips but why we should seek to use our words for building others up so that our words might be grace to others. That God might be gracious to those who hear our words and that our words might be the very means that God uses to bring grace to those who hear. In other words our ultimate purpose in our

speech is that God might bring grace into people's lives and he does that through our words to others. That is a real encouragement for us to root out unwholesome talk and to promote wholesome speech, speech that will build up and by the kindness of God bring grace to others.

Another reason or a greater motivation for wholesome talk is that unwholesome talk grieves the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer who uses such talk (v 30). The verb here is in the continuous tense so Paul is saying stop habitually grieving the Holy Spirit. Now this obviously points to the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person and not an impersonal force. He can be grieved.

This ought to help us think before we speak we need to realise that when we are assassinating another Christian's character although that fellow Christian might not know what you are doing the Holy Spirit within you knows and he is grieved. You know how we feel when we grieve another individual we do feel awful and often regret what we said or what we did, but just think of how much more we grieve the Holy Spirit of God by our unwholesome and wasteful words.

The Apostle Paul was so much more aware that behind all the actions of mankind there are invisible personalities present and active; either evil spirits seeking to destroy or the Holy Spirit seeking to build up and bring grace. If we could see the spiritual world more clearly then it would help us to make sense of all the evil actions in our world but it would also help us to be careful that our own actions and words do not grieve the Holy Spirit. The reason why we should not grieve the Holy Spirit is that he is our seal (1:13); he is our guarantee that we are in fact Christians. If so then we ought to live like Christians and in this context we better speak like Christians. The seal you see is a mark of ownership it's like a stamp to confirm something belongs to you.

Therefore we are saying to everyone we belong to God because we have the Holy Spirit within us as a consequence our speech needs to be consistent with our claim otherwise we will grieve the one who sealed us. But God granting us his Holy Spirit is not only a seal of ownership but it is a seal of assurance for we are sealed for the day of redemption. Now we are redeemed now, Christ died on the cross to pay the price for our sin to buy us back for God.

But the full realisation of what that redemption accomplished is still in the future. Yes we have our sins forgiven now, yes we are justified now but we still sin now we still feel the effects of sin but one day when the Lord Jesus comes back the fullness of his redemption will be realised by his people. We will be given new resurrected bodies fit for our new home and our new conditions. Sin will be no more and the effects of sin will be no more, all of that is guaranteed because God now seals us with the presence of the Holy Spirit. We have his mark of ownership on us and so on that final great day we will receive our inheritance not because of what we have done but because of what Christ has done for us on the cross on Calvary. If that is what waits us on that final day then how can we now live so inconsistently? If we have such a glorious future let our lives now reflect that future by living a holy life unto God.

So that when that final day comes no one will be surprised to see that we are one of God's people. Our lives, and especially our speech, was one that built people up and brought grace to them rather than speech that was unwholesome.

2. DON'T BE BITTER AND ANGRY BUT KIND AND FORGIVING (vs. 31-32).

Here Paul groups a whole host of things that the Christian is to put out of his life and a couple of things that he is to replace these sins with. The first thing to put off is 'bitterness.' The word is used in Greek of things that have a bitter taste; we are not to become sour people (sourpuss). Although this sin affects us all it seems to me that this is often found in older people. People who have seen life and have had many bitter blows and now as they look back they feel extremely bitter.

They are bitter at missed opportunities to better themselves; bitter at their treatment within the church; bitter because of their experiences of life in general. They might have lost their partner when young, or their children; they might have lost out financially through no fault of their own, they might have been overlooked for leadership within their company and within the church. As a result they become bitter and negative and cynical about life and especially about church life.

I have met professing Christians like this and they are the saddest and most miserable people I have ever met.

They do not have a good word to say about anyone and are a great hindrance to the work of the church. But the way that you deal with bitterness in old age is to deal with it now to put it out of our lives so that it will not take root and fester and raise its head when we are older. That's what those who are older and are not bitter have done and we are seeing the fruits of it in many older people's lives today for which we thank God.

The next thing that is to be dealt with in our lives is 'rage' and 'anger.' The idea behind the Greek word for rage is a boiling up with overwhelming passion of anger. It's the blow the top sort of anger and therefore 'rage' is a good translation for this word. The word 'anger' is often used of God's wrath but in this case it is sinful anger, anger that is a settled hostility towards others. This rage and anger has no place in the life of the Christian. We are to be self controlled people for that is the fruit of the Spirit who indwells us therefore there is no place in the church for outburst of anger and rage there is no place for a settled hostility against another Christian or against the leadership in churches. Does this go on in God's church?

Is this rage and anger found in our hearts? Of course it is, it was found in Ephesus that's why Paul tells the Christians there to get rid of it and to replace it with something else, as we will see in a minute.

I have heard professing Christians who have exploded at members meetings in fits of rage and have verbally abused the Minister or others present. Why do you think that in many churches the members meeting is so poorly attended? You know the reason is that some Christians use it to let their anger and rages explode usually in verbal attacks. But this ought not to be. Rage and anger must be dealt with it must be rooted out of our lives.

The next sin Paul mentions is 'brawling' the Greek word has the idea of shouting or the idea of an outcry. It is used of raising our voices in a quarrel; you know the idea the one that can shout the loudest wins the quarrel. Christians are not to be fighters in the wrong sense of that word, we are not people who shout and rant and rave but we must be calm controlled sort of people. Again sadly this sort of attitude and sin is seen in the Christian church and often once again in member meetings where some think they have to rant and rave and shout to be heard.

The truth is that such people are very rarely listened too in churches. You know the sort of person that at every members meeting and on Sundays too they have to rant and rave about some imperfection in the life of the church. They often say they are doing it for the good of the church the truth is their hearts are full or rage and anger that needs to be rooted out.

Next Paul mentions 'slander,' which is a word in the Greek that denotes insulting and abusive speech. Such people love to slander others run them down and in doing so promote self. Next Paul mentions 'malice' or ill will, which raises its head, in all kinds of ways. Paul says none of these things should be found in the life of the Christian if they are; then we must take action and root them out because they do untold damage to the cause of Christ.

If we are to root such sins out of our lives then we must replace them with more wholesome qualities. Things like 'kindness.' What is it that will help us change our attitude towards a fellow

Christian that we are angry with and in danger of flying off the handle with? It is to do something kind to them. What will stop us slandering our fellow Christian it is being kind to them you see all of the sins mentioned here can be overcome with God's help by doing something kind instead of being bitter towards them.

There is nothing that will help relationships in the church like a little bit of kindness towards one another. It doesn't take much but it does take a change of attitude an attitude that will be different from the one that displays bitterness, rage and malice to others. It is much harder to criticise those that we are constantly kind too.

Next Paul says put on 'compassion,' which means to be deeply moved from within. Once again here is the antidote to all these sins mentioned. We need genuine feelings of compassion, which lead to loving actions towards one another, and once we act in compassion then we will find it hard to be bitter or angry or be malicious to those that we truly have genuine love for.

Only God can grant us compassion for our fellow believers and for the world at large but when we are serious about rooting out all these sins then God will grant us a compassion for others.

The final quality that we are to display is 'forgiveness.' This is the key. Bitterness rage, anger, brawling slander and malice would not develop as often as it does in our hearts if we only learnt to forgive others. Forgiveness means not bringing the past up. If we say we will forgive someone then it does not mean we will forget for we cannot do that but by forgiving we make a conscious choice not to remember their sin against us and therefore never to bring it up against them.

Even when they commit the same sin in the future we will not say; look remember last time you promised not to do that. No! We will forgive again and again because we choose not to remember their past. Would this not completely change many a church if it only practised forgiveness? Of course it involves going to those we have sinned against and asking for forgiveness but it involves us deliberately forgiving not holding it against them dealing with that person as if nothing has happened.

That is difficult only God's grace can enable us to do so, we do not have the power. But our great motivation and reason for forgiveness is that Christ has forgiven us. Is God not angry at our sin and have every right to condemn us in hell. Have we not hurt and grieved God that many times yet on every occasion when we seek his forgiveness he grants it to us never to hold it against us.

He continues to deal with us as if we had never sinned against him and he does not act differently towards us because of our continual sinning but he continues to grant forgiveness. He is incredibly kind to us and shows compassion day after day.

Therefore as we have been forgiven let us be forgiving people and let root out of our lives the sin of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice and let us by God's grace replace those things with deeds of kindness, and with compassion and continual forgiveness.

Amen