

## Words of Gracious Glory – *Ephesians 4:29-32*

**Introduction** – The power of the tongue is incredible (James 3:6-8). We should pray as David, "*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips*" (Psalm 141:3, also Prov 13:3, 21:23). This final ethical exhortation in Chapter 4 is a charge against speaking corrupt words and instead speaking words of gracious glory – that is - grace-filled, brethren-edifying, God-glorifying words.

Once again, it is helpful to keep these commands in the context of the whole book. Paul is moving from "being" to "doing," from what we have become to what we are therefore empowered and commanded to do. All that God is commanding is coming from One Who has done to us "*to the praise of His gracious glory*" (1:6). God's glory is not sterile, white fluorescent holiness. It is a rainbow of love and mercy, with favor and acceptance; it is dripping with grace.

**Our Words Matter** – Jesus says that it is not what we put in our mouths that corrupts us, but what comes out of our mouths, that is what reveals the state of our hearts (Matt 15:17ff). This is what is connecting vv29-30 (and then 31-32). We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of God. What are we saying about the Spirit when we give in to our flesh in the way we speak and live?

**Putrid Words** (v29a) – Paul says, "*let no putrid words journey out of your mouth.*" Vulgarity, profanity, dirty jokes, these are not to be the words of Spirit-filled people. They "journey out" from somewhere, and that is the heart (btw, this means that you can't apologize by saying, "I didn't really mean that" as though it didn't come from your flesh).

**God is not Blushing** – It needs to be said here that Paul is not concerned that God is a Victorian prude, blushing as certain words or phrases are used. Through His prophets, through Jesus and Paul, God many times uses very poignant, crude, serrated words to make His point. God is not opposed to cutting language towards enemies of His gospel; He is opposed to using it in an uncontrolled way with your spouse, your children, or one another in the church. He is opposed to it being the normal way of talking.

**The Kinds of Attitudes, Words, Actions, that Must Be Put Away** (v31) – This is at least a start at the kinds of practical things to avoid to not grieve the Holy Spirit (more on that later). "*Bitterness*" is nursing grievances, either real or imagined, which then sees the whole world in jaundiced lenses. "*Wrath*" is "boiling over," a violent passion of the moment. "*Anger*" might be used here in contrast as a settled and regular condition, an internal smoldering. "*Clamor*" has to do with brawling, shouting, and an uncontrolled violence. "*Evil speaking*" literally is "blasphemy" but against others, so is referring to slander, gossip, and the ruining of other's reputations with words. "*Malice*" is the wicked desire to injure others. We are to "*put these away.*" They aren't supposed to be put away in a file somewhere to be pulled out on occasion. We are to mortify these. Too often, these are considered a little sin, betraying our low view of the power of words upon others and before the face of God.

**Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit** (v30) – Too much worry is given to what exactly this means rather than what exactly causes it (to which refer above). To grieve the Spirit is not to lose one's salvation. But we must see that God is not calling us to "be good" in the same way that unbelievers might try to be good. When we sin in these ways, we are lying about the graciousness of God, the gracious glory of the Holy Spirit residing in us. We grieve Him because His ministry is to testify about Jesus (John 15:26) and we are doing just the opposite. We are ignoring His very presence in the moments we sin. And when we do so, *we come to be deprived of some measure of His graces and comforts...and bring temporal judgments upon ourselves* (WCF XVII.iii). If we deny His gracious glory by refusing to speak and act according to it, He removes some measure of His graciousness from us – He gives us over to our own sin.

**Instead, Cultivate This Gracious Glory** (vv29b, 32) – It is not enough to put the wicked words and attitudes away. It is not enough to wait until you feel like doing something good, especially when you have been offended or sinned against. Because the Spirit indwells us, we are (able and required) to cultivate His gracious glory in our words. And this has real practical, earthy, relational application.

**Edifying, Gracious Words** (v29b) – Our words should "build up" others, even if corrective (Prov 25:12). They should be appropriate and appropriately timed with wisdom (Prov 25:11). They are to be like Jesus' words, "*...(they) marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth*" (Luke 4:22).

**Kind, Tenderhearted, Forgiving** (v32) – These are words that describe your Savior and Lord. They are words that describe the indwelling Spirit. They are words that describe the kind of glory that is bestowed upon us because it is the gracious glory of God. Paul writes literally, "*become kindnesses*" to one another – not a life punctuated every now and again with kindness, but a habitual response, especially to those whom you could legitimately nurse a grievance. "*Tenderhearted*" has to do with deep affections, compassion and care directed towards others. And of course "*forgiveness*" for which we could preach a whole sermon. But it is forgiveness "*even as God in Christ forgave you.*" The only people who can forgive others like that are those who have been forgiven themselves. And you have – with the Word of His gracious glory.