

## **“HOW GOD HATES SIN AND LOVES SINNERS WHO GOSSIP.”**

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**Scripture Texts: Ephesians 4:29-32**

**Introduction.**

It has come to my attention that there's someone causing some trouble in our church. This person is trying to stir things up, trying to get us talking about each other and against each other.

I have decided to bring this to our attention and even name the person. I thought about just using his initials but he only has one, S. His name is Satan. He has been busy trying to get us to sin in any way he can, to sin against each other. He uses any one of us he can and sometimes we don't even know it or see it coming.

He got me a couple of weeks ago. I sinned against one of our staff members with my tongue by saying something that was hypocritical. I found out about what I had done a week or so later and I went back to those that knew about it and apologized and asked forgiveness. I wasn't even aware, it was a blind spot. I asked the staff that when I do that again, I want them to help me by letting me know right away.

I am a sinner and when I sin I am being used as a tool of Satan to accomplish his evil purposes. And one of his favorite tools is my tongue. He loves to get me to say something that will hurt another person, or say something based on a misunderstanding or based on misinformation.

God has given us a remarkable gift, a gift no other creature on earth has, a gift that reflects His very nature. God has given us the gift of speech.

Satan takes every gift we have from God and tries to turn it for his own evil purposes. He's lurking about this very moment looking for a way to twist and turn my words so they will be misunderstood or misinterpreted or taken the wrong way or turned into an opportunity for gossip or criticism.

Our words are so important and powerful. Jesus says that our words reveal what's in our hearts and that God will judge us according to every word we have spoken.

**Matthew 12:34-37** [34] ... “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. [35] The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. [36] I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, [37] for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (ESV)

God hates how we sin with our lips and He loves us enough to tell us the truth, to point out our sin and to call us to repentance and forgiveness. In similar fashion as Christians we are to hate our sins and extend grace and forgiveness to those who sin against us. Our text this morning is another call in this Lenten season to hate sin and love sinners.

Ephesians 4:29-32 has a threefold pattern, a negative injunction, a positive injunction, followed by an explanation. And then that pattern is repeated a second time.

## **Eph. 4:29**

***Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.***

Paul wants us to think about our words, to think about their power and influence, to think about how we speak and what we say and the effect it has on those around us.

Paul is creating a contrast between the speech of pagans and the speech of Christians and saying there should be a noticeable difference. The speech of a person in Christ will sound different than a person of the world.

There won't be the constant chatter and talking without thinking and talking about our self. Our speech won't be corrupting, worthless, mean, foul, unclean, obscene. We can hear the polluting effect of sin all around us as things are said in public now that were never heard fifty years ago.

Paul's net is a broad one and includes gossip, slander, malicious talk, and a critical spirit.

Gossip means one who whispers, a whisperer. The words may be true, but they are spoken quietly behind the back. If it has to be whispered that's a pretty sure sign it's gossip and shouldn't be said at all.

Gossip is seductive because it's news and knowledge and knowledge is power. Gossip helps us feel better about ourselves, it builds us up as it tears someone else down. Gossip fulfills a need in us to feel better about ourselves, to improve our ego or self-esteem.

Don't let such talk come out of your mouth, if it enters your mind and starts for your tongue, stop it right there. Kill it before it comes to life.

But Paul would not have us stop at silence. He adds a positive injunction.

***Speak words that are good, words that build up,*** encourage, bless, edify.

Paul is a good model of this. There were a lot of problems in the Corinthian church, a lot of problems, lots of sin. But Paul still found good things to say.

**1 Corinthians 1:4** I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus. (ESV)

Every one of them was a work of grace, a work in progress under power of the Holy Spirit in them. The most flawed person here is a work of grace.

Paul says as much to the Philippians:

**Philippians 1:6-7** And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. [7] It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, (ESV)

The person you disagree with or don't like or have an issue with is a partner with you in the grace of Christ

Paul writes publicly about the good things he sees and hears about in others.

**Colossians 1:3-4** We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, [4] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, (ESV)

**2 Thessalonians 1:3-4** We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. [4] Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. (ESV)

They weren't perfect churches by any stretch of the imagination, they didn't have perfect leaders, Paul knew their flaws well, but there was grace present, there was good work being done by the Holy Spirit. Watch for grace and point it out, commend it, encourage it, spread it.

Think of good rumors you can spread. "I hear her cinnamon rolls are the best in the county. I hear her almond sticks are to die for. I hear he's a great cadet leader. I hear she's a great mom. I hear he's a man of his word and runs his business with integrity. I hear First CRC is blessed with good elders and deacons and they don't have to go begging to try to get replacements."

***"... that it may give grace to those who hear."***

Paul adds the explanation for this. That it may spread grace. We are in the presence of people made in the image of Christ who have eternal souls. There's more going on with each of us than meets the eye.

Those around us are hurting, broken, weary of sin, struggling with life, carrying burdens, dealing with disappointments, in need of more grace. Give grace, comfort, encourage, build up, aid in their salvation, grow in grace, be blessed.

I know this is not the easy path. The easy path, the path of least resistance is to grumble and criticize and gossip. That's our default setting we got from Satan. But with some thought and effort we can decide by God's grace to give grace to those within ear shot. When you wake up say a little prayer and ask God to use your words each day to strengthen someone's faith or increase their hope or joy, or lift their spirits.

**Eph. 4:30**

***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.***

The second half of Paul's explanation follows. Watch your words that you may give grace and not grieve the Holy Spirit. What grieves the Holy Spirit? Sin. Why does sin grieve the Holy Spirit?

Where does it come from? It comes from Satan. Sin is satanic, it's evil. Sin is the opposite of God and of good and of truth and righteousness and holiness. No wonder sin quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit in us. No wonder God hates sin and no wonder we should hate sin. It's

completed contrary to God and to the grace of God at work in us. When we sin we are acting like Satan, instead of reflecting the image of God.

I struggle to find the words to express to you the seriousness of this statement. When we speak corrupting words, words that are bitter, angry, slanderous, malicious, words of gossip, criticism, complaining, grumbling, murmuring, these words from our lips not only hurt the hearer, but hurt the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

My sinful words pierce not only the heart of another person, but the heart of God. It grieves the Spirit and disappoints the Father and wounds the Son.

***Sealed for the day of redemption.*** Sealing refers to the beginning of our Christian life when we received the indwelling of the Spirit. The day of redemption refers to the end of the Christian life on earth when we are liberated from sin and received into glory. In between these two points we are to live in increasing Christ-likeness seeking not to grieve the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

As we grow older our speech should be more like Christ's not less. As we grow older our words should be more sweet not more sour. As we grow older our speech should be filled with more thanksgiving and gratitude than complaining and criticizing.

As we grow older there should be less bitterness and anger, less quarreling, arguing, and ill will; and more kindness, tenderheartedness and forgiveness and grace.

The words of a 70 or 80 year old should reflect more of the seasoning of the Holy Spirit and the qualities of Christ than the words of a 30 or 40 year.

Paul returns to another negative and positive injunction followed by another explanation.

#### **Eph. 4:31**

***Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.***

Don't be like the guy who thinks he has the spiritual gift of discouragement.

Jesus didn't die on the cross and redeem us from the world to put us into His church so we could criticize it and complain about it and talk bad about the people in it. Jesus doesn't call us to be our church's accuser. Someone already has that job and he doesn't need our help.

It's interesting to note that this list of sins is all things that we tend to blame others for.

"Hey, you would be bitter to if you know what that person did to me. You wouldn't be able to forgive something like that either."

"I wouldn't be so angry if my fellow workers were more competent and my kids just obeyed and my wife was more considerate."

"Gossip isn't my fault. It's not me who starts all those conversations about others; and then when they ask me questions to pull me in, I can't just give them the silent treatment."

How do we put these sins away? How do we kill gossip, accusations, rumors, criticism and complains? One way to put out the fire of contention and gossip is by not fanning it, stirring it, or adding fuel to it. It will go out by itself.

And you can pour the cool water of a good word on it.

### **Eph. 4:32**

***Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.***

How does God love sinners? He's kind, tenderhearted, like a loving father. He's forgiving. He doesn't treat our sins as they deserve, He has mercy.

Be tenderhearted rather than hardhearted, caring rather than uncaring, caring for others more than we care for ourselves.

Be amazed at the amount of forgiveness you have received. Think more about being forgiven than about being right. Think about more about your own flaws and that God has forgiven you and saved you, than you think about other people's flaws.

Forgiving each other even as God has forgiven you. Paul lays the strongest possible foundation for forgiving and he gives the greatest possible example.

### **Application and Conclusion:**

#### ***Rules to live by.***

The Golden Rule: do unto others as you would want them to do to you.

Take the log out of your own eye before talking about the speck in their eye.

Blessed are the peacemakers. In so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all people.

Talk to people, don't talk about people. Don't talk about people to other people.

Don't talk about other's faults, if it needs to be addressed, talk to them about their faults.

Before you speak ask yourself three questions:

Will what I say build up or tear down?

Is my speech consistent with the Fruit of the Spirit, such as kindness and gentleness?

Finally, will it glorify God?

Can you imagine what it would be like if First CRC was a church without gossip or criticism or complaining or grumbling or murmuring? Can you imagine a church where never is heard a discouraging word? Can you imagine a church where the members are open, honest, humble and don't hid from conflict, confront sin face to face, where there are no accusations, no blaming, no finger pointing and tongue wagging? Can you imagine a church so filled with the Spirit of Christ that we start looking, acting and sounding Christ-like, where members are kind to one another and tenderhearted, generous with praise and encouragement, where forgiveness flows freely because Christ first forgave us so much?

Next week I invite everyone here to bring something with them to church. I want each of you, young and old, to bring a piece of encouragement or a piece of blessing or a piece of grace and give it to someone. Tell someone something good you heard, something you notice or saw, a compliment, a kind word. Bring something and share it. Notice a person who goes unnoticed. Let's build each other up.

Don't use Facebook to grip or whine or complain or criticize. Don't be petty or small minded. Rise above those temptations from Satan.

Pray far more than you protest or complain. Pray for each other and for your leaders. Pray for your leaders that when they are criticized they will have thick skin, that they will keep from sinning in response, that they would keep a tender heart and a cool head. Pray that they will be humble and wise, wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove.

Pray for your leader's wives and children, that critical comments or negative remarks would not discourage or defeat them or turn them against the church.

Pray that Satan will have a harder and harder time getting his foot in the door, that our flock will be more discerning at resisting his subtle and relentless attacks, that we will not let our tongues be his tool. Let's give the devil no opportunity in our words, let love cover a multitude of sin.

**Prayer:**

Father, enable us by the power and grace of your Holy Spirit in us to put off the old and put on the new. Cleanse our hearts so that what we speak will also be clean and new.