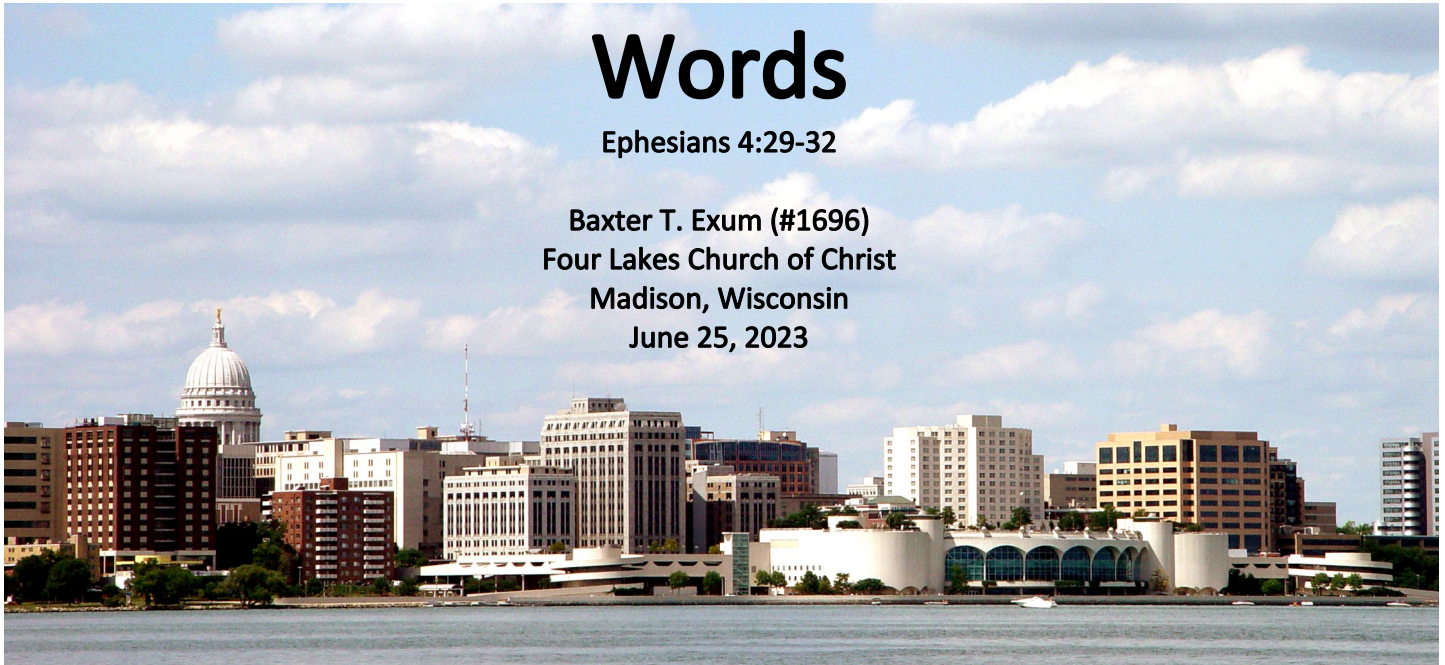


# Words

Ephesians 4:29-32

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Four Lakes Church of Christ  
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It is good to be together this morning, and if you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at [fourlakeschurch.org/visitor](http://fourlakeschurch.org/visitor). Or, you can use the cards in the pews this morning – not just if you are visiting with us, but also for special questions and prayer concerns. You can put those in the box on the wall in the entryway or give your card to me on your way out this morning.

I survived a week of camping with about 30 kids at Beaver Creek Bible Camp! It was a good week, and we are very thankful for your prayers over the past week. One young woman was baptized this week. I got to start the fires twice a day, I got to take out copious amounts of trash, I got to teach two classes on how to throw tomahawks and hatchets, I got to lead two hikes in the woods, I got to advise, and support, and encourage the new director, but a true highlight was being able to teach a class of 8-9 year old boys. What a blessing! We were studying Jesus calling the first disciples, and since they dropped their nets, we started class by making a fishing net with paracord. At the end of class, I suggested that these young men need to be thinking about becoming elders some day, and two of them said that they were already working on it. Awesome. Jordan came to camp and helped with crafts and in other areas this year.

**\*\*PPT\*\*** We are here this morning to preach the good news concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. As we've outlined on the wall up here (or on your screen at home) we obey the good news by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of sins, at which point we are born into God's family and the Christian life begins. And we've had a number of examples this week, starting with an update from Lake of the Ozarks down in Missouri. They posted online this week and they say,

Please welcome our new Brother in Christ, Cory! He has been attending Sunday class and worship for almost four weeks now, asking questions and learning. Tonight he realized his need to be baptized for the remission of sins. We immediately spoke with the preacher at the Jefferson City Church of Christ, and he agreed to meet with Cory at Binder Lake. They spoke for awhile, and then Karl baptized Cory into Christ! Prayers are appreciated for Cory as he learns more of God's Word and strives to serve Him.

This was a really neat picture in my opinion, apparently taken right after sunset, but so good to see this!

**\*\*PPT\*\*** This next update comes to us from Cary Gillis, who apparently led a recent campaign to Penonome, Panama. He says, “Baptism #10!!! The Lord is at work in this place! When honest hearts realize that our Lord was lifted up for them, they are drawn to His love. Just beautiful.” I shared this one primarily because of what these guys are wearing. I don’t know whether all of you can see this, but the man in the hi-viz reflective gear is being baptized by a man in a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles t-shirt. That’s a new one for me, but so good to see!

**\*\*PPT\*\*** There are many more we could have shared this week, but we’ll just share this last one from the Lord’s church down in Summerdale, Alabama. They posted this week and say that “We are excited to announce that Rene McDonald was baptized by her son London today. It just doesn’t get much better than this! God is good!” As our tradition has been, we share these pictures and these stories to encourage and to show exactly what it means to obey the gospel. And if you have not yet obeyed the gospel yourself, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

**\*\*PPT\*\*** This morning we are taking a break from our series of lessons on Hebrews, and we are taking a moment to study an important request that came in just a few months ago. It wasn’t signed, so I’m not sure whether this person is here today or may be joining us online, but the request was for a lesson on Ephesians 4:29-32, but “especially verses 31-32.” I would invite you, then, to be turning with me to Ephesians 4. Just to give at least a little bit of background, let’s just remember that the apostle Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus, a church he helped establish, and he is giving these people some inspired advice concerning how to live as followers of Jesus, even as they live in a completely ungodly culture. And starting in Ephesians 4:17, he gives a series of practical things they need to be doing and not doing, and it’s almost as if he’s using the picture of getting dressed: You need to take off this evil behavior, and you need to put on this instead (almost like you might take off one piece of clothing and exchange it for another). Back up in verse 25, for example, they are to lay aside lying and falsehood, and they are to replace those things with speaking truth to their neighbors. In verse 28, no longer are they to steal, but they are to labor with their hands so that they will be able to have something to share with those in need. We have several of these in Ephesians 4, and then we come to Ephesians 4:29-32. And I think we’ll find in this passage that Paul doesn’t just tell them what NOT to do, but he gives the positive alternative, and it’s a reminder that all of us need today. So, let’s jump right into it by looking together at Ephesians 4:29-32,

***<sup>29</sup> Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.***

For the rest of our time in today’s study, I’d like for us to honor the request that was turned in by one of our people, as we take a very careful look at the words that we speak.

**I. And we start this morning with verse 29, as Paul says, “LET NO UNWHOLESOME WORD PROCEED FROM YOUR MOUTH.”**

And the word he uses that is translated here as *“unwholesome”* is a word that basically means *“rotten.”* The word was used in the ancient world to refer to rotting fish or fruit that was no longer useful as food. We think about opening up the fridge looking for something to eat, and we find this container buried deep in there on the bottom shelf, and we can’t really remember what’s in there. It’s been a while. So we open it up, and we quickly realize that this food (or what used to be food) is now *“unwholesome,”* it is no longer useful as food. Or I think of our compost bin at home – the scraps, the cut-offs, the egg shells, the coffee grounds, the avocado seeds and skins – we put those things in the compost. I’ve brought a sampling of our compost this week (up here on the table). At our house, we fill up a paper lunch sack with those things, and when it’s full, we take it out to one of our five compost bins. It’s so good for the garden, but the items in the compost are no longer good for food. Or I think of an incident from my years at Lundahl Junior High School down in Illinois. I remember going through the line and getting some kind of English muffin (maybe with some kind of pizza topping on it). I took a big bite, and something seemed a little off, so I turned it over. You know what’s worse than a giant circle of mold? HALF of a giant circle of mold. Half of it was gone, because I had eaten it. That English muffin was no longer useful as food.

And that’s the illustration Paul uses here: Sometimes our words are like that. And not only are our words useless sometimes, but sometimes are words may be rotten, a bit like that sour cream in the back of the fridge from six months ago, or like the moldy English muffin, no longer good for food, perhaps even dangerous: vulgar, obscene language, dirty jokes, off color references, racial or ethnic insults, harsh and angry words, gossip, rumors, false accusations, threats, constant criticism. If it’s rotten, we aren’t to say it. And sometimes we may need help with this, sometimes we may need some encouragement. I’ve told you before about one of my college roommates who was so good at this. If he was in a group where someone said something inappropriate, he would call it out, without hesitation, “I don’t appreciate you talking about that person like that. Please stop.” Wow! That right there had a way of putting an end to it. I’m reminded of St. Augustine who supposedly had a plaque hanging over his dining room table. It said, “He who speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table.” No rotten words!

We may have excuses, “Oh, I was just joking,” or “This is just the way I am,” or “This is the way I was raised,” or “I was provoked into saying this,” or “It was true so I said it,” there may be any number of reasons for saying what we said, but Paul says: Don’t! ***“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth.”*** Do not go throwing your rotten words into a conversation.

**II. As we continue in this text, let’s notice how Paul doesn’t just tell us what NOT to say, he doesn’t just tell us what to REMOVE from our conversations, but he also tells us what to replace it with, and we find here that OUR WORDS MUST BE WORDS OF EDIFICATION AND GRACE.**

We are not to speak rotten words, but we are to speak, ***“...only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”*** The word *“edification”* refers to words that build up, words that are constructive, we might say. We are to speak words that encourage, words that help, words that bring peace.

And the point of speaking words that build up is that our words ***“give grace to those who hear.”*** *“Grace”* refers to a “gift.” Our words are to be a “gift” to those who hear – not rotten words, but words that build up and

encourage, gracious words. Someone summarized this passage by suggesting, “Every word, all good, all grace, all the time.”

And let’s not miss that our words are to be spoken *“according to the need of the moment.”* There are times when we say something that may be appropriate at one time, but not at the other. With criticism, for example, sometimes there’s a value to it, but that doesn’t mean that God wants us to go around criticizing people all the time. I suppose we could say the same thing about giving a compliment. There’s a value to telling somebody they did a great job with something, but if we go around telling everybody that what they just did was the best ever, it loses its power, doesn’t it. We are to build up with our words, *“according to the need of the moment”* – a word of encouragement before surgery, a “congrats” on a job well done, a kind-hearted suggestion concerning how to do something better the next time, and so on. We are to be thoughtful when we speak, slowing down to consider how what we say might build up, slowing down to consider how what we say might be a gift to this other person.

As we apply this part of our lesson to our lives today, I’d like to ask that each of us here this morning take out a connection card from the pews... You’ll also need something to write with. And once you have a card and something to write with, I want to ask that we all write down the name of one person who might benefit from a word of encouragement this week. This is not to turn in; this is for you. Write down one name, and tuck that card in your pocket, in your Bible, in your wallet (somewhere you’ll find it), and let’s make a point of saying something to encourage that person this week. Let’s find a way to speak some word that build that person up this week. Let’s find a way to speak something that could be considered a gift to this person sometime this week – a quick phone call, maybe a text, maybe in person, but let’s find a way to actually do what Paul is telling us to do.

**III. As we continue in this passage, let’s notice that what we say actually matters to God; in fact, the text tells us warns us that our words may, in fact, “GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD,” so the message is: DO NOT GRIEVE GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT WITH THE WORDS THAT WE SPEAK.**

The word *“grieve”* refers to a deep emotion, and it’s interesting to me that we can only really *“grieve”* a close friend or maybe a member of the family. And what I mean by that is: If some guy comes in off the street and tells me that he hates me, whatever! I mean, it’s not great, it’s not ideal, but ultimately I don’t really care. I won’t be tossing and turning all night worried about some stranger not liking me. My wife or my kids, though? If they were to scream in my face and tell me they hate me before storming out of the room? That’s a whole different issue, isn’t it? I’d be torn up over that. The same goes for a close friend, or if that were to come from anybody here in this room. I would be *“grieved.”*

Well, when Paul says, *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption,”* he’s letting us know that when we speak rotten words, God’s Spirit is *“grieved.”* By the way, one old preacher once said this, “It is an inexpressibly delightful thought, that He who rules heaven and earth, and is the creator of all things, and the infinite and ever blessed God, condescends to enter into such...relationships with his people that his divine mind may be affected by their actions.” Isn’t that amazing? Well, when we speak rotten words, we learn here that God feels it; he feels it deeply. And he’s not just offended or irritated, but he is *“grieved.”*

So, how do we deal with this? What do we do if we have *“grieved”* God’s Holy Spirit with our words? First of all, we don’t speak rotten words! But secondly, when we do, what grieves God’s Spirit should also grieve us; we are filled with regret, and we take steps to fix it: We confess our sin, we ask for forgiveness (from the

person we've spoken against), we ask for God's forgiveness, and we move forward with a renewed commitment to speak words that edify, to speak words that bless people. But the point here is: We need to be especially careful with what we say, so that we do not ***"grieve the Holy Spirit of God."***

#### IV. As we go back to the text, I want us to notice that **WORDS COME FROM THE HEART** (verse 31).

And I'm just summarizing here, but I do think it's interesting how we're talking about WORDS (that's the focus of our study this morning), but Paul suddenly starts talking about ATTITUDES. Why is that? Why the shift from words to attitudes? I think we understand that Paul is simply reflecting Jesus here, based on what Jesus says over in Matthew 12:33-37. Jesus is dealing with the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and he says,

***Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.***

We might say that the mouth is the release valve of the heart. If you have a tank-style water heater at home, you probably have a release valve. I remember ours failing several years ago. We came home from worship, and the house felt a little humid. I went downstairs and felt a squish as I took that final step into the basement. Something in the water heater had failed, and instead of exploding, the release valve did its job and let that hot water escape in a somewhat controlled way out the side of the tank. Well, in a somewhat similar way, the mouth is the release valve of the heart. What builds up in here (the heart) comes out here (through the mouth).

And that's why Paul starts in verse 31 with ***"bitterness."*** Bitterness isn't a word; it's an attitude. But does bitterness come out in our words? Absolutely! And it's apparently a problem in the church; otherwise, Paul would not have mentioned it here. The word refers to something that is "bitter" or "sharp." In this case, it's an attitude that expresses itself in words. Over in Acts 8:23, Simon the Sorcerer was caught up ***"in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."*** Simon had a sharp or bitter attitude. I know we're not in Hebrews this morning, but over in Hebrews 12:15, the author gives the warning, ***"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled."*** The bitter spirit is the attitude that refuses to be reconciled. I have a problem with you, and I almost love having that problem with you! The spirit of irritability. Someone who is permanently grouchy. Paul says: Leave this behind; put this aside.

The second attitude to put away is ***"wrath."*** This is the idea of passion, fierceness, or indignation. It's the idea of anger boiling up and then subsiding, boiling up and then subsiding, boiling up and then subsiding.

The third attitude to put away is ***"anger"*** itself. We had this word a few verses earlier in this chapter, where Paul gives the warning, ***"...be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity."*** So, anger itself is not necessarily a sin. There may be times, in fact, where it is a sin NOT to be angry. But the issue here is an attitude that expresses itself in angry words; a constant sense of indignation, being constantly mad at the world.

The fourth attitude to avoid is ***"clamor."*** This isn't a word we use too often. I've never accused anybody of

being too clamorous, but it's a word referring to an outcry. The word is used in Acts 23:9 to refer to the shouting of the Jewish ruling council when they were upset at the apostle Paul. It's the idea of yelling or shouting. So, it's not just the words we use, but it's HOW we use those words. Bitterness has a way of showing itself explosively and loudly. Put this away, Paul says.

The fifth issue here is "*slander*." The word Paul uses basically what we would recognize as "blasphemy," evil speaking, to speak against somebody, to speak in a way that hurts somebody's reputation.

And the last thing to be put away here is "*malice*." It's the idea of having a bad feeling about somebody or harboring ill-will toward somebody. And often, this will express itself in what we say. All of these attitudes are to be put away.

V. As we come to the end of this passage, let's close with the positive command that we are to **BE KIND** (verse 32) **\*\*PPT\*\***

First of all, we don't see any fine print here, do we? I don't notice any exceptions. We are to "*be kind*." The word refers to being "useful" or "serviceable." It's the idea of doing something productive for somebody. I think I remember my mom telling us to "make ourselves useful." It's kind of hard, isn't it! In fact, it's almost impossible to be consistently kind under all circumstances, but that's why Paul includes the rest here, "*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you*." He gives us an example, doesn't he? Sometimes we encourage each other to "be Jesus" to the people around us. This is it, right here. Be Jesus! Do for others what he has done for us. Have we been forgiven? Then we are to forgive others. I don't have to be bitter. I don't have to be full of wrath and anger. I don't have to go around yelling at people to get off my lawn. I don't have to speak evil about people. I don't have to go around with a bad attitude about people. Jesus didn't do that for us, so we don't do it for others. But above all, be kind. Be tender-hearted; not hard-hearted, but tender-hearted. And to be kind, we might need to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. Isn't that what Jesus did for us? He came to this earth and he lived among us. He identified with us. And so, when somebody loses their temper with us, we may need to pause for a bit before retaliating, and we may need to remember that their temper may not have much to do with us at all. You're not invited to a wedding or a party? It's not about us, is it? We don't need to go around being offended at everything. If somebody speaks evil against us, remember that we don't know what brought them to that moment. As God's people, we are to be quick to forgive, quick to overlook minor offenses, because that is what God has done for us. We are to be kind and tender-hearted, and when we are, we are behaving like God. We are being Jesus to those around us. Kindness has come from God, to us, and we (in turn) pass it along to others. Be Jesus!

**Conclusion:**

Just a few moments ago, we heard that passage from Matthew 12, where Jesus said that "*...every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*." We can't take back our words, can we? Once we've said something, it is out there. We're guilty. Most of us have almost certainly said things that we regret saying. We've hurt people. We have said some rotten things. And although we cannot undo the damage, forgiveness is available, if we repent, if we turn to God and approach him on his terms, through our obedience to the gospel, and if we've already obeyed the gospel, through confession, repentance, and prayer. From here on, we use our words to edify, to encourage, to give grace to those who hear. And when we're tempted to say

something rotten, when we're tempted to say something that's not helpful, we have this passage as a reminder.

When I first saw the request for this morning's lesson, I anticipated it being a lesson on profanity. But it's a whole lot more than that. There are certain things we put away, but we've also been reminded to be Jesus to those around us. It starts at home or with those who are closest to us, and we work our way out from there. Imagine how much good we could do if we could simply allow this passage to change us.

Before John leads us in a song to prepare us for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You made us, and you blessed us with the gift of communicating to each other through the things that we say. We want to honor and obey what you have spoken to us today through your word. We pray that you would forgive us for the rotten words we have spoken in the past, and we pray that you would empower us to put away bitterness, along with the loud and angry spirit that's so common in the world around us. We pray that we would bless others through the things that we say. Change us, Father, from the inside out.

We come to you today through Jesus, the Eternal Word, who spoke this world into existence. Lord, come quickly! AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)