

INTRODUCTION

1. In 2009, the New York Times featured a controversial Seattle pastor who generated a new wave of debate about vulgarity in the pulpit.
2. This pastor had developed a reputation and was known as “the cussing pastor.”
3. The article states that he repented starting with a public apology for having become known for “good theology, a bad temper, and a foul mouth.”
4. This, he said, “is not what I want to be known for.”
5. He had earlier expressed his regret at a 2008 Desiring God conference where he said, “I have sinned a lot. I have said things I totally regret.... I have crossed the line. I have gone too far. I am deeply convicted over sin in my past. I am being sanctified by the grace of God. What I have said will live with me forever, and I am deeply sorrowful to Jesus, and this message for me is incredibly painful because it hits on one of the great weaknesses in my ministry and some of the greatest failures of my life.” (<https://www.driscollcontroversy.com>)

6. As noted a year later in the 2009 article, the problem with this confession it was short lived and apparently not genuine.
7. The pastor I am referring to is Mark Driscoll and in August 2014 the board of Acts 29, the church planting network that he founded, expelled him, and his Mars Hill Church, from membership on the grounds of his ungodly and disqualifying behavior.
8. Two months later he resigned as lead pastor of Mars Hill Church.
9. But two years later (2016), he founded The Trinity Church in Scottsdale and his ungodly behavior continued.
10. More than 40 elders who served with Mark Driscoll during the final years of Mars Hill Church are publicly calling for him to step down from his current pastoral position and seek reconciliation with those he has hurt.
11. They write, “We are troubled that he continues to be unrepentant despite the fact that these sins have been

previously investigated, verified, and brought to his attention by his fellow Elders, prior to his abrupt resignation” from Mars Hill.

12. “Accordingly, we believe that Mark is presently unfit for serving the church in the office of pastor.”
(<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/july/mars-hill-elders-letter-mark-driscoll-pastor-resign-trinity.html>)
13. Did Mark Driscoll heed the advice of his former Elders? No!
14. Did he genuinely repent? Unfortunately not!
15. What is demonstrated here is what Paul says to the Ephesians in Ephesians 4:29-31
16. He says, “29 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. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

17. There is no place for vulgar language out of the mouth of a Christian period!
18. Whether it is in the pulpit or in any other place.
19. So in verses 29-30, Paul mentions sins that have to do with our speech.
20. In verses 30-31 we see those sins that affect our attitude.
21. All of these must be dealt with in a serious manner.
22. They should not be treated lightly because “all sin is against God” (cf. Ps.51:4).
23. First we need to understand that sin is always present as long as we are in this world.
24. John Owen says, “Some have wrongly and foolishly believed that we are able in this life to keep the commands of God perfectly and are wholly and perfectly dead to sin. Through ignorance of the true life in Christ and His power in believers, they have invented a new righteousness that is not in the gospel. They are vainly puffed up by their fleshly

minds. Indwelling sin continues to live in believers in some measure and degree while we are in this world. We should not speak as though we had already attained, or were already perfect” (The Mortification of Sin, 6).

25. Second we must understand that sin is still acting and laboring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh.
26. John Owens again says, “When sin lets us alone, we may let sin alone; but sin is always active when it seems to be the most quiet, and its waters are often deep when they are calm” (Ibid., 7).
27. It is the Holy Spirit who aids us in opposing sin and lust as Romans 8:13 indicates.
28. Paul says, “If you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”
29. It is only “by the Spirit” can we put “to death the deeds of the body.”
30. The flesh would have us believe otherwise.

31. John Owen again says, “Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness, and every degree of spiritual growth. We will not be making progress in holiness without walking over the bellies of our lust. He who does not kill sin along the way is making no progress in his journey” (Ibid., 10).
32. So as we look at verses 29-31 this morning, let’s not be fooled into thinking that we have arrived at dealing with sin or that these things we commit are not serious.
33. All sin is serious but not all see this.
34. That’s why no one is talking about it today like we use to.
35. That’s why it has almost totally vanished from our culture and churches.
36. Beginning at verse 29, Paul mentions along with lying, anger, and stealing, the sin of speech.
37. He terms verse 29 as “unwholesome words.”
38. Notice again what he says.

- I. Lying (v.25)**
- II. Anger (vv.26-27, 31)**
- III. Stealing (v.28)**
- IV. Unwholesome Words (vv.29-30)**

“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. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

A. We Are Not to Speak Unwholesome Words

“Unwholesome” (sapos) refers to “rank, foul, putrid, rotten, worthless, disgusting” words (Rienecker).

The word was “originally used of rotten fruit, vegetables, and other spoiled food” (MacArthur).

So “the “unwholesome” (sapos) talk belongs to the category of “rotten” fruit (Matt 12:33), “decayed” trees (Matt 7:17), and “spoiled” fish (Matt 13:48)...In the immediate context of this

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verse, “rotten words” are those which do not build up” (Kenneth L. Boles, Galatians & Ephesians, The College Press NIV commentary [Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1993]. Eph 4:29).

“Corrupt speech generally means conversation that is filthy and suggestive; this would include off-color jokes, profanity, and dirty stories.

But here it probably has the wider sense of any form of conversation that is frivolous, empty, idle, and worthless.

Kent Hughes says this word “includes obscene language, but the emphasis is on decay-spreading conversation which runs others down and delights in their weaknesses” (Ephesians : The Mystery of the Body of Christ, Preaching the Word [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990]. 152).

Paul deals with obscene and vile language in 5:4; here he is telling us to abandon profitless speech and substitute constructive

conversation” (MacDonald).

“Let no” or as the NIV says, “Do not let” could be well translated “Stop it from going on” (Kenneth L. Boles, Galatians & Ephesians, The College Press NIV commentary [Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1993]. Eph 4:29).

1. Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:18-20 that “the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 ‘For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 ‘These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.’”

Warren Wiersbe says, “Change the heart and you change the speech.”

2. Paul told the Colossians in 3:8 to “Put them all aside...abusive speech from your mouth.”

B. We Are to Speak Words that Edify

Paul says, “But only such a word as is good for edification.”

Our speech should build up by being helpful, constructive, encouraging, instructive, and uplifting” (MacArthur, 188).

1. Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim.2:14 “not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruins of the hearers.”
2. He said to the Colossians in 4:6 to “Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”

C. We Are to Speak Appropriate Words

Paul continues by telling them to speak “according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

1. We should choose our words carefully
 - a) Eccl.12:10 says that “the preacher

sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.”

- b) Prov.25:11 says, “ Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.”
- c) Prov.15:23 says, “A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word!”
- d) Prov.24:26 says, “He kisses the lips Who gives a right answer.”

2. Our words should be gracious

- a) This is how Jesus spoke

When Jesus was in Nazareth, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from the book of Isaiah (61:1). After He finished reading, He said “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk.4:21). And Luke 4:22 says, “And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering

at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, ‘Is this not Joseph's son?’”

b) We need to follow His example

(1) Solomon said in Eccl.10:12,
“Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him.”

(2) In Prov.22:11 it says, “He who loves purity of heart And whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.”

D. We Are to Put Aside Unwholesome Words So that We Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit (v.30)

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

The word “grieve” (lupeo, pres.act.imp.) means “to cause sorrow” (Rienecker).

“The Spirit who makes men attest to the truth is put to shame when the saints ‘lie’ to one another and utter ‘foul talk’ (Rienecker, 534).

We grieve the Holy Spirit with sinful words and deeds. We need to remember that our “body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor.6:19-20).

V. Bitterness (v.31)

Paul says, “Let all bitterness...be put away from you...be kind to one another.”

A. Bitterness is the Temper Which Cherishes Resentful Feelings

Fritz Rienecker says this is “a figurative term denoting that fretted and irritable state of mind that keeps a man in perpetual animosity—that inclines him to harsh and uncharitable opinions of men and things—that makes him sour, crabby and repulsive in his general

demeanor—that brings a scowl over his face and infuses venom into the words of his tongue” (The Linguistic Key to the Greek NT, 534).

It is a feeling of animosity or spite, nearly always in the NT in connection with speech.

Even David said in Psalm 64:1-3 says, “Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; Preserve my life from dread of the enemy. 2 Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, From the tumult of those who do iniquity, 3 Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed ***bitter speech*** as their arrow.”

“The Greeks defined this word as long-standing resentment, as the spirit which refuses to be reconciled” (The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976]. 159).

It could be described as a smoldering

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resentment, a brooding grudge-filled attitude or the spirit of irritability that keeps a person in perpetual animosity, making him sour and venomous, and again refusing reconciliation.”

Somebody does something we do not like, so we harbor ill will against him.

Charles Hodge says, “The word bitterness, in its figurative sense, means what is corroding, like grief, or anything which acts on the mind as poison does on the body, or on the minds of others as venom does on their bodies. The venom of the serpent lies harmless in his fang; but all evil feelings are poison to the subject of them, as well as being venom to their object. The command, therefore, to lay aside all bitterness is a command to lay aside everything which corrodes our own minds or wounds the feelings of others” (Ephesians, *The Crossway classic commentaries* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994]. Eph 4:32).

The word “bitterness” (pikria) occurs 4 times in the NT (Acts 8:23; Rom.3:14; Eph.4:31;

Heb.12:15).

1. Peter confronts Simon in Acts 8:20-23 after he tries to buy the power of Holy Spirit saying, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 ‘You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 ‘Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 ‘For I see that you are in the gall of **bitterness** and in the bondage of iniquity.’”

2. In Romans 3:14, Paul describes both Jews and Greeks under sin as being without righteousness, understanding, having turned aside and becoming useless and without goodness. “Their tongue is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and **bitterness**.”

3. The writer of Hebrews warns his readers of the root of bitterness springing up in Hebrews 12:15 when he said, “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.”
4. The last usage of this word occurs in our present passage in Ephesians 4:31
5. Another form of this word (pikros) occurs in James 3:11 speaking of undrinkable water and in Matthew 26:75 to speak of Peter weeping “bitterly” after he denied the Lord.

Here’s an important principle to remember when you’re bitter...

- B. When One is Bitter He Will Not Reconcile with Others

Instead...

1. He will be resentful

2. He will have harsh feelings (MacDonald)
3. He will have a bitter frame of mind (Vincent)
4. He will have an unwillingness to forgive (MacDonald)

Jay Adams says, “A person who has a heart that is filled with vengeance, bitterness, or resentment isn’t ready for forgiveness, because he is holding onto these sins, refusing to confess and forsake them” (From *Forgiven to Forgiving* [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989]. 43).

This is why you have to “Let every form of irritability, every inward resentful disposition against others, and hardness of spirit be put away from everyone of you” (KJV Bible Commentary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1994]. 2420).

- C. Forgiveness is the Only Positive Element that Can Overcome Bitterness

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Paul says in verse 32, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

R.C.H. Lenski says, “The moment a man wrongs me I must forgive him. Then my soul is free. If I hold the wrong against him I sin against God and against him and jeopardize my forgiveness with God. Whether the man repents, makes amends, asks my pardon or not, makes no difference. I have instantly forgiven him. He must face God with the wrong he has done; but that is his affair and God’s and not mine save that in the case he is a brother I should help him according to Matt. 18:15, etc. But whether this succeeds or not and before this even begins I must forgive him” (The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians [Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937]. 588).

John MacArthur writes in His book called *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, that forgiveness “involves a deliberate refusal to

hold the guilt over the head of the offender. It means ending the bitterness, laying aside anger, and refusing to dwell on the offense that has been forgiven. It is a complete letting go of any thought of retaliation or reprisal. It is, as nearly as possible, the human equivalent of what God promises' to remember the sin no more...Bitter emotions tell us to dwell on an offense. In contrast, forgiveness is a voluntary, rational decision to set the offense aside and desire only the best for the offender" (112, 136).

VI. Wrath And Anger (v.31)

Robert Jones in his book *Uprooting Anger*, wrote, "Anger is a universal problem, prevalent in every culture, experienced by every generation. No one is isolated from its presence or immune from its poison. It permeates each person and spoils our most intimate relationships. Anger is a given part of our fallen human fabric...Sadly this is true even in our Christian homes and churches."

Here Paul mentions "wrath" and "anger."

“Between wrath and anger there is little difference, except that the former denotes the power, and the latter the act” (John Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries: Ephesians, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries [Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998]. Eph 4:31).

A. Wrath

This would be the act.

The Stoics said that “wrath” (thumos) was “as an initial explosion of hot temper.” This would be “rage—the passion of the moment” (MacArthur) which would be displayed by “temper tantrums” (MacDonald).

William Barclay said “The Greeks defined thumos as the kind of anger which is like the flame which comes from straw; it quickly blazes up and just as quickly subsides” (The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976]. 159).

This word is translated in the LXX as “fury” (Gen.27:44), “hot anger” (Ex.11:8), and “enrages” (Prov.6:34).

In the NT it is also translated as “rage” (Lk.4:28) and “outbursts of anger” (Gal.5:20).

The next word...

B. Anger (v .31)

“Suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind, frequently with a view to taking revenge.

Orge is less sudden in its rise than thumos, but more lasting in its nature” (Jerome H. Smith, *The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge : The Most Complete Listing of Cross References Available Anywhere- Every Verse, Every Theme, Every Important Word* [Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992; Published in electronic form, 1996]. 1384).

It is a “more internal, deep hostility” (MacArthur) or “gnawing hostility” (Boles).

This is “the word used in 4:26 of legitimate anger, namely, righteous indignation. But here, Vincent says: ‘What is commanded in verse 26 is here forbidden, because viewed simply on the side of human passion’” (Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, c1984]. Eph 4:31).

James 1:19-20 says, “This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”

VII. Clamor (v.31)

Some translations have “brawling.” This is the Greek word *krauge*, which is “shouting out in anger.”

A. It is the Outcry of Strife Out of Control

This is “violent outburst of the person who has completely lost his temper and begins to yell

at others” (Hendriksen).

William MacDonald says this includes “angry bickering [and] shouting down opponents” (Believer’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians).

B. This Kind of Behavior is Characteristic of a Mob or Assembly that Covers up a Lack of Sober Arguments with its Loudness

1. We see this in Luke 23:23 where the crowds “were insistent, with loud voices asking that He [Jesus] be crucified. And their voices began to prevail.”

Or where the Ephesians, after hearing a silversmith named Demetrius, says they were in danger of their trade coming to disrepute because of the message Paul was preaching.

2. Acts 19:28 says, “When they heard this and were filled with rage [thumos], they began crying out, saying, ‘Great is Artemis of the

Ephesians!”

3. Proverbs 29:9 says, “When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, The foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest.”

C. Slander (v.31)

“Slander” (blasphemia), literally, “speaking against.”

“In reference to God it is ‘blasphemy’; in reference to man it is reviling and cursing, including the use of ominous and obscene words” (Kenneth L. Boles, Galatians & Ephesians, The College Press NIV commentary [Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1993]. Eph 4:31).

Slander takes on many forms.

Jerry Bridges says, “Closely related to the sin of gossip is the sin of slander. Slander is making a false statement or misrepresentation about another person that defames or damages the person’s reputation.”

He asks, “Do Christians slander?” What’s the answer? Yes!

He continues, “We slander when we ascribe the wrong motives to people, even though we can’t see their hearts or know their particular circumstances. We slander when we say another believer is ‘not committed’ when he or she does not practice the same spiritual disciplines we do or engage in the same Christian activities we engage in. We slander when we misrepresent another person’s position on a subject without first determining what that person’s position is. We slander when we blow out of proportion another person’s sin and make that person appear to be more sinful than he or she really is” (Respectable Sins, 160-61).

A. The Command Against Slander Appears Early in the Bible

Leviticus 19:16 says, “You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord.”

B. Slander is a Serious Sin

God says in Psalm 101:5, “Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy.”

Proverbs 6 tells us that this is one of the things God hates. Proverbs 6:19 says, “And one who spreads strife among brothers.”

C. If You Are One who Spreads Slander You Are A Fool

Proverbs 10:18 says, “He who spreads slander is a fool.”

D. If You Control Slander Contention will Stop

Proverbs 26:20 says, “For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.”

Charles Spurgeon said, “Do not be ready to receive such reports; there is as much wickedness in believing a lie as in telling it, if we are always ready to believe it.

There would be no slanderers if there were no

receivers and believers of slander; for when there is no demand for an article, there are no producers of it; and if we will not believe evil reports, the tale-bearer will be discouraged, and leave off his evil trade”

(http://www.spurgeon.us/mind_and_heart/quotes/s4.htm#slander).

IX. Malice (v.31)

“Malice” (kakia) is a general term for evil, the root of all vices, especially those just mentioned.

- A. This Attitude or Action Intends to Harm One’s Neighbor”

John Calvin says, “ The correction of all the rest will be greatly aided by the removal of malice” (Calvin's Commentaries: Ephesians, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries [Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998]. Eph 4:31).

- B. 1 Peter 2:1 Says this is to Be Put Away from You

“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”

“These particular sins involve conflict between person and person—believer and unbeliever and, worse still, between believer and believer. These are the sins that break fellowship and destroy relationships, that weaken the church and mar its testimony before the world. When an unbeliever sees Christians acting just like the rest of society, the church is blemished in his eyes and he is confirmed still further in resisting the claims of the gospel” (John MacArthur, *Ephesians* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, c1986]. 190).

R.C.H. Lenski says of “wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice” that they “form a climax. First, ‘bitterness,’ embitterment, is felt in the heart. The next step is ‘exasperation,’ which is still in the heart although hard to be restrained. The third step is ‘anger’ which blazes forth. The fourth, ‘yelling,’ is a violent outburst of words. The fifth is a cursing in words of ‘blasphemy’ against the opponent” (The

Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians [Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937]. 586).

CONCLUSION

1. As long as these sins persist in our lives, there will be no disappearance of sin.
2. You must “mortify the deeds of your body” as Colossians 3:5 says.
3. You must “reckon yourself dead to sin” as Romans 6:11 says.
4. Lying, anger, stealing, unwholesome words, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice must be put away from you once and for all.
5. As well as other “respectable sins” like, “jealousy, envy, and greed.”
6. In the words of Colossians 3:8-10 says, “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice,

slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”

7. If you're here today and have never received the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you can do so right now.
8. The Bible says in John 1:12-13, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”
9. Let's pray.