

Ephesians 4:25-32

Be Angry!

Sunday January 17th 2016

Today we are talking about Christian Speech and anger. I would submit to you we live in an angry age where words are used to divide us and set us on each other. In our wider culture we hear things about “Free speech”, “Hate Speech”, “Politically Correct Speech”, but how about “Christian Speech?”

Have you ever thought that there is and should be a category or type of speech called “Christian Speech”? Well there is and our scripture today addresses it by contrasting it with speech that is not Christian in nature. It contrasts Christian speech with non-Christian speech mostly by avoiding anger, but yet it says in the midst of this all “**Be angry**”. I will help to unfold this mystery for the edification or building up of us all.

I want to start by saying that Christian speech is first thoughtful speech. It is wise speech. We think before we speak. We listen before we speak. In fact James 1:19-20 says about speech and listening and anger, “**You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;**

for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.”

Speaking of Christian Speech being thoughtful in nature; a man told the following story to his friend.

“My wife asked me one of those impossible to answer right questions yesterday and now I am in real trouble.”

Friend said, “What did she ask?”

Man replied, “She asked, ‘Will you love me when I am old, fat and wrinkled?’”

Friend said, "Oh that's an easy question to answer. You just say, "I will."

Man replied, "Yeah I know. But I said, "I do."

Christian speech is thoughtful, and wise.



Now in our verses today there are 4 major contrasts between Christian Speech and non-Christian Speech; the first of which is **Christian Speech is truthful**. The man in the above story may have been "truthful" but his speech was not thoughtful, nor was it loving. It would have been more helpful if he said, "I love you and I always will." (Let us practice that.)

Earlier in this same Chapter Paul had written that we must speak the truth in love, **"But speaking the TRUTH IN LOVE, we must GROW UP in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,..."**

Truth is not an excuse for thoughtless or unkind words, and as we grow as Christians we grow more capable of telling the truth in love. Our speech is guided by wisdom.

Now back to the most confusing verse here in terms of speech and anger. Verses 26 and 27 say, **"Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil."**

Anger is simply an emotion that we all have. It is neither good nor evil but it is very dangerous and very few have enough control over it for it to do any of us any good especially when talking to one another.

Jesus certainly displayed anger. He dressed down the Pharisees on several occasions. He drove the money changers out of the Temple.



But we are not Jesus; so there are many warnings and cautions about anger, like the above and, “**your anger does not produce God's righteousness.**”

Dr. Barclay reminds us, “There must be anger in the Christian life, but it must be the right kind of anger. Bad temper and irritability are indefensible;..” He goes on to talk about the God given anger that William Wilberforce had that helped end slavery in the British Empire.

But for us in our speech our talking with one another anger does not have a place and if it does take place it has **a time limit: sundown.**

My wife and I spent many late nights sorting things out in our relationship earlier in our marriage. We tried to practice this phrase by not going to sleep mad. Sometimes we did, though, out of sheer exhaustion, but the attempt was always made, and through time and practice we grew.

“Paul’s advice is sound, because the longer we postpone putting right a quarrel, the less likely we are ever to sort things out. The best way to deal with trouble in a church or family or society is immediately”
Barclay p. 181 Now this has been very hard for me to learn, because in my family of origin most fights were just eventually ignored, not settled in any way so things would reoccur and reoccur especially with my older brother. We learned though. We’ve grown up into the Head which is Christ.

When we don’t settle arguments they fester, they lead to bitterness. **Bitterness leads to evil speculation** which is attributing lesser motives and actions to people even though you cannot see what they are doing much less thinking. Evil speculation is the foundation for gossip and slander. Did you know the Greek word for devil is

“diabolos”? And did you know that same word is also the normal Greek word for “slanderer”?

Angry bitter words and thoughts lead to evil speculation which opens the door for slander and the Slanderer to do its work of destruction within a family, or church, or society. Listen to the evil speculation on TV news shows of politicians’ motivations. Listen to most election advertisement and I would swear whoever we elected; is if not the devil’s brother, than his sister. **There is a desperate need in our Society for Christian Speech!!!**

Again to deal with the anger that wells up within us, to control it and not let it spill out in unhealthy destructive ways it takes time and maturity and self awareness. I want to lift up to you a profound truth to think about. **“No one can make you angry”**. Your anger is a choice. I read a joke recently that said, “I don’t need anger management. I need people to stop making me mad!” Now that is a joke because we know it’s not true.

My older brother and I used to get into massive fights. And when we were teens, fist fights. We could and did fight over nothing. It took years for us to recognize and control what was going on with each other and a good thing. We go hunting yearly with each other with high powered rifles.

But we both had to recognize our own “buttons” that “made us mad” and then have chosen to not be controlled by our feelings but our thoughts. “Buttons” are words or tones of voice that would set us off until we recognized them and decided not to be controlled by them. God can and does mature us, but it’s a choice and here Paul is saying choose wisely. Remember, **self-control is one of the “Fruits of the Spirit”** we’ve been given in our baptism and need to grow in.

Now about verse 28 “working so that you can help the poor” is sorta outta place in the discussion of speech and anger, but is part of the wider discussion in Ephesians 4 and I encourage you to go back and

read the whole chapter if not book for it is only 5 chapters long. But that one verse is your stewardship sermon for the day.

Anyway, **Christian Speech is Thoughtful, Truthful, Controlled, and Edifying**. In other words, Christian Speech builds others up. As verse 29 says, **“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for BUILDING UP, as there is need,**

so that your words may give grace to those who hear.” The meaning of the word edify is to build others up. Edifying speech gives grace, portrays grace, and is grace to those who hear it. Remember, “I love you and always will.”

The opposite of edifying speech, Christian Speech is verse 31, **“Put away from you all bitterness and rage and anger and brawling and slander, together with all malice,..”**

Note Paul says, **“Put away...”** if we were slaves to our angers we would not be able to put them away or control them. No one can make you mad. It is a choice.

Now we’ve already dealt with bitterness. Next is **“rage”**. In the Greek this is “thumos”. It is an **outbreak of anger that blazes up quickly and then subsides**. This is simply followed by the word **“anger”**. In Greek this is “orge”. **It is a long lived anger**. For a Christian and Christian speech both are forbidden: the burst of temper and anger which is nursed of which bitterness is often a part.

“Brawling” is interesting. It is also translated as **“loud talking and insulting anger”**. It is the same as raising your voice in an argument and addressing someone in words or body language that is dismissive or condescending. Imagine an argument with an angry, dismissive teenager.



It is eye rolling, or an aggressive stance, or sneering, or sighing in a disgusted manner.

Why is none of this Christian Speech? Aren't we supposed to "Be Angry"??

Well basically God has made us so that we have two parts of our brain to deal with angry threatening situations. There are technical terms for these two parts but I like to call them our "Lizard brain"



and our "Thinking Brain."



When threatened in an angry situation we are hardwired to go back into our Lizard Brain to protect ourselves.

When we are in our Lizard Brain we automatically, instinctually either:

Fight
Flee
Freeze or
Nurture

Anger, angry words can push us into these basic stances and while there we really can't think things through. We are not kind, or tenderhearted or forgiving or graceful to one another.

We either argue back (fight). We leave the room (flee). We freeze (not a thought or word comes to us until later and we think, “I should have said, “...”) Or we try to nurture in the midst of the attack. Not many do that, but we’ve all probably heard a mom say, as their spoiled child verbally attacks them, “There, there, you’ve had a bad day. What can I do to fix it.” They can’t and you are probably thinking just smack em.

In families, churches, businesses and other human gatherings we see these things taking place and those who are bullies or who try to control people by intimidation will eventually leave the fighters alone. The nurturers confuse them and they leave them alone; but the “fleers” and the “freezers” are fair game. Bullies and control freaks who understand this human dynamic take advantage of them.

So, the solution within the Church and family and other places you have influence over is to practice Christian Speech and action. What is that again? Verse 32 tells us, **“be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”**

And again, **“You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;..”**

We are reminded we are growing up in Christ. It takes years and today is not too late to choose to grow. To choose to address one another with **Christian speech, which is thoughtful, truthful, controlled, kind, tenderhearted, quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. It is speech that is edifying.** It builds others up. It comes in word and in deed.

A story is told of a dad who had a three-year-old son named Brandon.

One day, Brandon saw his dad eating chocolate chip cookies in the living room and said to himself, “Daddy loves chocolate chip cookies with milk. So I’m going to get Daddy a glass of milk.” With that thought

Brandon went into the dining room and drug a chair from the dining room into the kitchen, leaving a trail of scratch marks on the wood floor.



Brandon climbed up on the chair and onto the counter to pull open the cabinet door. Wham! It smashed against the adjacent cabinet door, leaving a gash where the handle hit it.



Brandon reached for a glass, accidentally knocking two others off the shelf. Crash! But Brandon is determined, thinking, “I’m going to get Daddy some milk!”

Meanwhile, Brandon’s dad was watching all this, wondering if he should step in and save the rest of his kitchen. But he decided, for the moment, to watch a little more as Brandon scrambled off the chair, dodged the broken glass, and headed for the refrigerator.

Pulling violently on the refrigerator door, Brandon flung it wide open—and it stayed open. Brandon then put the glass on the floor and grabbed the big gallon container that was full of milk. He ripped open the top, poured it in the vicinity of the glass, and even managed to get some milk in the glass. The rest went all over the floor.



Finally, Brandon put the milk carton on the floor and picked up the glass yelling, “Daddy, I got something for you!” He ran into the living room, tripped, and spilled the milk all over the place—the floor, the sofa, his dad.

Brandon then stood up and looked around. He finally saw the broken glass, milk everywhere, cabinets open, his dad with milk from his eyebrows to his toes, and started to cry. Through his tears, he looked up at his dad with a pained expression and asked, "What are you going to do to me?"

His dad only smiled. He didn't see a kid that had just destroyed his house. Instead he saw a beautiful, heartbroken little boy whom he loved very much. It didn't matter what he'd done. Brandon's dad stretched his arms out to hold his little boy tight and said, "You are my son, my beloved son!"

My friends, desperate, desperate people come to church seeking that word of grace, that word of forgiveness. Are our words and actions toward each other kind, full of grace, tenderhearted and forgiving; so that people can see and find Jesus in them?

Your Christian Speech is the most important, life changing, powerful words people will ever hear. So remember, "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

In Jesus' name. Amen