

Part 3: According to Code

NOTE: The following content is a raw transcript and has not been edited for grammar, punctuation, or word usage.

So, if you were here last time, we discovered that you are all very powerful people. Every single one of you. You are powerful people because words are powerful. And you know words are powerful because the words spoken about you, and over you, and to you growing up are words that have shaped you. They shape what you see in the mirror when you look in the mirror. Words are powerful, which makes you powerful. And our words actually determine, to some extent, the direction and the quality of our lives. As our words go, so go our lives. But here's the powerful part: Your words have the potential to direct the quality and the direction of somebody else's life as well.

And then last week, we left off with this kind of horrible thought, that basically, our mouths are so unpredictable. In fact, they are so predictably unpredictable, that if we don't set a guard, if we don't set basically a warden on our lips, we have the potential to undermine our own success, our own futures, and undermine our own relationships. Because as James, the brother of Jesus, who we looked at his words last week, he said that, "Your mouth and my mouth is untamable, it cannot be domesticated. It always needs a leash. It always needs a bridle. It always needs a guard." So, where we began this series is where we're gonna go throughout the series to this simple idea that James gave us, that for the rest of our lives every waking moment, every waking moment we should be quick to listen and slow to speak, quick to listen and slow to speak.

Now, in week one and two we looked at this ancient 1st century document written by James, the brother of Jesus, which was so cool. Today, we're gonna listen, we're gonna hear from someone else.

Today, we're gonna hear from the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul, as you may know, stepped on to the pages of history as Saul of Tarsus. That's how he was first known. And when he showed up, he was a Pharisee, he was a Jew, he lived way north of Jerusalem but he came to Jerusalem, and he was so disturbed by these Christians, this kind of knock-off Jewish religion that was blending the old with the new, he decided he was gonna get rid of it, basically put that fire out. So he goes to the high priest in Jerusalem, he gets permission to round up and to arrest Christians wherever he can find them, bring them to Jerusalem, have them tried and in some cases, executed for their faith. That's Saul of Tarsus. Some of you don't like Christians, Saul of Tarsus is your guy. He hated Christians; he wanted to stamp the church out.

Well, he has the original Damascus Road Experience. He's on his way to arrest some Christians, he's blinded by a light, he saw the light, suddenly he saw things as he's never seen them before and he becomes a Jesus follower, and instead of destroying the church, he starts creating churches all around the Mediterranean Basin, all around the edge of the Mediterranean, all these port cities. And

then he would plant churches, and then he would write them letters, and many of those letters have been preserved since antiquity, and they became part of our New Testament.

So I'm gonna read out of one of those letters. It's a 1st century document, it's called the Book of Ephesians, but it's really just a letter to Christians in Ephesus in the 1st century, and in this letter, he talks to these Christians about their mouth. And he gives us... James kinda left us hanging. James was like, "Gloom and doom, gloom and doom. See you, gotta go." That's kinda how James ends his talk. But the Apostle Paul gives us a way forward and he gives us one word picture that I want us to really think about, that really is gonna give us some leverage for how to use our words in a positive way to make sure we're accomplishing what we need to accomplish.

Now, one last thing before I look at this verse. If you're not a Christian, if you're not a Christian, I just wanna make sure you understand where I'm coming from. I have no right in the world to expect you to do anything based on anything I say or anything in the Bible so please don't hear me saying, "You ought to, you ought to, you ought to." This was written to Christians, but here's the good news. You can try this at home for free just because it's good advice. You don't need to be on the defensive. I'm not gonna ask you to do anything unusual, but I think you're gonna admit, "Wow, I don't know that everything in the Bible is true. I'm not sure I believe anything about the Bible, but that is some good advice when it comes to how I use my words."

So, I'm gonna read these verses to you, I'm gonna back up a few verses from the verse that Paul talks about our mouth to give you some context and hopefully you'll find this to be interesting. This is found in Ephesians, Chapter 4. If you brought a Bible or if you have a Bible, here's what the Apostle Paul says, he starts with this, he says, "So..." Again, he's writing to Gentiles who've become Christians, they've left a pagan worldview and they're trying to sort through, "How do I follow Jesus based on the way I was raised as a Gentile pagan?" Here's what he says, "So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer..." He's talking to Christians. "That you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking." And Gentile here, he's talking about the group of people he's writing to used to be. He's saying, "When you've identified outside of the church, when you identified outside of Christianity, you were a Gentile and you had a worldview that matched the worldview of your culture." It was a pagan worldview where they believed in multiple gods, they were all polytheists. A completely different worldview and that worldview was reflected in their behavior, just like your worldview is reflected in your behavior as well.

He says, "They..." That group that you used to be just like. "They are darkened in their understanding." That is, they don't get it. "And they're separated from the life of God." And then he tells us why, and this seems a little offensive, but hang on, "Because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts." Now, this sounds like an insult, it is not an insult. He's basically saying this is just my observation. "The people that you deal with in culture, they don't know any better because they can't see what you see and they don't see the world the way you see the world." Let me explain why this is a big deal.

In the culture of Ephesus, the culture of the Greek culture, they believed in a pantheon of gods;

many, many, many gods. And the gods, you may remember this from high school or from college. The gods, the Greek gods and the Roman gods were all about themselves. They did all kind of crazy stuff, they toyed with people, they slept with each other, they had all kind of baby gods that had baby gods that did all kind of crazy stuff, and cut each other in half and created the world. It was just crazy, but the whole thing of the gods, the gods were all about themselves. So polytheism was about being like the gods which meant it was an every man for himself, and it wasn't much in every woman for herself because women didn't have any rights. That's how their gods operated.

So the Apostle Paul is talking to some ex-pagans, some ex-polytheists saying, "Okay, the world that you came from is very different than the world I'm introducing you to as a Christian. And your friends who still live in that world, they have a different worldview." He continues, he says, "Having... " Talking about this group, "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality." In other words, it's an anything-goes world morally, which was true in the pagan world because there was no religious morality associated with paganism.

So the Apostle Paul is saying, "No wonder the people in your culture behave the way they do, the reason they don't live the way I'm asking you to live is because they don't have the rules you've decided to live by." So it's not a criticism, it's more of an observation. So they've given themselves over to every kind of impurity and every kind of greed. Again, it's a winner-take-all world, He continues, "That however... " Contrast. "That however, is not the way of life you learned." That greedy, do whatever you need to do to get whatever you get, treat people any way you wanna treat 'em, take advantage of people if you're the powerful, he said, "That's the world you live in, but that's not the life you have been invited to and this is not the life you learned about when you were introduced to Christ, and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus."

He continues, "You are taught with regard to your former way of life," when you were a polytheist worshiping all the gods and acting as crazy as the gods, "to put your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires." He said, "When I first came to you and visited you in Ephesus, remember I told you, 'You've got to take off your old self, that old way of thinking, that old way of behaving is like a big heavy coat. You've gotta take it off so that you will no longer be fooled by your deceitful desires.'"

Do you know what a deceitful desire is? A deceitful desire is a desire that you have that promises you one thing and then it doesn't fulfill the promise. Have you ever chased a desire like that? You had a desire, you chased the desire because there was a promise on the other end of the desire, you got what you wanted, you got who you wanted and then the desire didn't keep its promise. That's a deceitful desire. And then when you didn't get what you want, that desire whispered to you, and you know what that desire whispered to you and whispered to me? "Next time, next time, next time. It didn't work out this time, but that was his fault. It didn't work out this time it was her fault, it didn't work out this time it was their fault. But next time, next time, next time." The Apostle Paul says, "Those are the deceitful desires." And he says, "As a Christian, as a Jesus follower, you have been called to take all of that off and live a completely different kind of life and think a completely different kind of way."

And then he says this, "And once you take it off, you'll be made new in the attitude of your mind," you're gonna think differently, "and you're gonna put on the new self created to be like God." He says, "You'll be like God in true righteousness and holiness, not the kind of holiness that pulls back and withdraws, the kind of holiness that engages with people, engages with people who are like you, engages with people who aren't like you and engages with people who don't like you." He says, "It's a brand new world, it's a brand new day, and he invites them into it."

Then after this, he begins to give his audience specific applications. And he talks about all kinds of different behaviors and one of the behaviors he talks about in this context is our mouth, is our words. So here's how he applies this big picture that you've taken off one worldview, you've taken off a way of thinking that's all about, "me, me, me, me, me. My greed, my desires, my satisfaction," and you've begun to view the world the way that your Heavenly Father views it. He said, when that happens, here's what it's gonna look like in real time. "Do not..." He said, here's our first specific command: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth," which is our topic. He says, "Once you've put on this new worldview, this new way of thinking then one way that's gonna manifest itself, do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth." the most interesting word in this phrase is this word right here, unwholesome. The little Greek word translated unwholesome in our English Bible is what's actually used to describe the smell of spoiled and rotting fish, or the smell of rotting fruit, or the smell of deteriorating and smelly sandals. It's anything that's distasteful.

So the Apostle Paul says, "When you think about your words as a Jesus follower, as someone who views everyone in the world as someone whom God loves, do not let any distasteful word come out of your mouth." Now, I love the imagery of the smelly rotting fish so I say it this way, avoid fishmouth. This is what I've been sitting on all week long. Avoid fish mouth. In other words, don't be this guy. Don't be this guy. It's like, I think in our families, maybe even just around here, we should start using this phrase and when somebody says something distasteful or somebody's critical of someone else unnecessarily or somebody starts losing it, we could just look at 'em and say, "Fishmouth. Fishmouth. You have a bad case of fishmouth." I want you to guard your mouth so that nothing distasteful comes out of your mouth."

And then kind of echoing what we learned from James last week. Look at this, he says, "Don't let any unwholesome word." In other words, you are in charge, I'm in charge, that my mouth is like a gate and I am the gatekeeper. That I am to stand guard over my mouth and when distasteful words rush the gate, he says, "Don't let 'em out. Don't let 'em out. Don't let 'em out." And they're gonna rush the gate every single day. In my case, a week ago, distasteful words rushed the gate, what did I do? I let 'em out. So to avoid fishmouth, to avoid words that are distasteful and harmful and hurtful to other people, he says, "You need to avoid fish mouth, you've gotta put a guard on your mouth, you have to guard your mouth."

Now, that's kind of the negative. That's Paul's way of saying, "Here's what not to do." But next up, he gives us a brilliant, brilliant word picture of what we are supposed to do. So he turns the corner, he says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs."

Now, I'll be honest with you about this verse. This sounds so nice, and so soft, so gentle, and so Christian, and so unproductive. Can you really live like that in our world? "Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth only such as good for helping others and building others up." Can you raise kids that way? "You know, honey, it's not nice to see how many raisins you can cram in baby's mouth." Don't you need to be a little bit more urgent over something like that? Or would this work at work? Can you imagine a performance review, "Hey, listen, would you mind coming to work occasionally?"

[laughter]

But here's what I wanna make sure you don't miss because it's easier to write this off. The Apostle Paul's point is not, "Be nice." The Apostle Paul's point, in fact, it's in the verse, the Apostle Paul's point is, "I want you to be helpful." And sometimes being helpful means saying hard things. So while some of you need to dial it down and dial it back, others of you need to step up and say what needs to be said. But then he gives us what I think is the most helpful word of all, he gives us a construction word. He says, not let any unwholesome word come out of our mouth, only what is helpful for building others up. It's as if Paul is saying this, and I love this and maybe this just helps me. He says, "I want you to imagine that every conversation is like a construction site and your words are building material and your responsibility as a Christian, your responsibility for it because you're interfacing with people that God loves, is to consider every single word something that you could use to build that other person up. So that when you leave the construction site, when you leave the conversation, they are better off for having been with you."

And at the end of the day he says, "When you get this right, they are gonna be better for it." He says, "Because the point is, you're building others up so that they will be better for it. That they will be built up because of the words that you said, because it's gonna be according to their needs."

Now, this is challenging for me because oftentimes I'm talking based on what I wanna talk about, based on getting my needs met. The Apostle Paul says, "You know what? That's not the way of Jesus, that's not the way of the gospel, that's not the way of Christianity." For God So loved the world that he gave, and in conversations with other people you should look for opportunities to use your words to give them what they need that it might benefit them, that it might benefit them, that it might benefit those who... Listen, it is for their benefit, Andy, not yours.

And then he says this. He kinda gets a little all spiritual on us, but this is so practical, he says, "And, while we're talking about it, when it comes to your words don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God, this simply means don't say something to someone that makes God go, "I can't believe, here I am trying to build this person up and you use your words to undermine what I'm trying to do in their life. You're not building, you're demolishing." And then it's like the Apostle Paul pauses and thinks, "You know what? I think some of the folks in my audience are really gonna struggle with this, and I think they're gonna struggle with this because of things they don't have any control over."

And then he gets way up in our business and goes to the root cause as to why many of us have such a hard time with this. It looks like and it sounds like he's changing the subject, but he's really going to the heart of the matter. Why is it that you allow things to escalate sometimes? Why is it that you say things and you walk away and you think, "Why in the world? Where did that come from?" And he says, "By the way, if you're gonna get this right, if you're gonna be a builder instead of a demolisher, there's something you're gonna have to deal with." And so, he says it, "And get rid of all bitterness."

It's like, "Wait a minute, we were just talking about words." Paul says, "This is all about your words. Get rid of all bitterness." The little Greek phrase, "get rid of" does not mean stop. It means to pack it all up, put it in a bag, take it out to the street and leave it. He said, "I want you to pack everything up that has anything to do with your bitterness and I want you to take it to the street and I want you to leave it there. Because your bitterness shows up not only in what you say, but more importantly, how you say it, and oftentimes, who you say it to." You can't be a builder if you are bitter because your bitterness will seep through your words, your volume, your tone, and your attitude. It affects the content and the intent of everything you say. It's like, "Ugh."

And the thing is about bitterness, you know this, you're smart, the antidote or the solution for bitterness is what? It's forgiveness, right? Bitterness requires forgiveness, because where does bitterness come from? For most of us, do you know where our bitterness came from? It came from word spoken to us, about us, or over us. You grew up in a home where you never got a positive remark or comment from your mom or your dad, or when they were positive there was always a hook, there was always a barb, there was always that sarcasm.

And we bring that wound and we bring that hurt into our current relationships. And let's be honest, we know this. It affects what we say, how we say it, the tone, the words we choose. It also affects what we refuse to say because of our pride. Because people wrestling with bitterness are trying to pay people back that never did anything to them because they can't pay the person back who wounded them. So the Apostle Paul says, "I hate to get all up in your business, and I hate to get personal." And he would say to us, "And no, I don't know your story, but I'll tell you this, you can't be a builder as long as you're bitter. Forgiveness is the decision to give someone from the past what they don't deserve so that you can give to those around you what they do deserve."

You see, if you're a parent, you gotta deal with your bitterness. Even if you're in a second marriage or you're a single parent, you gotta deal with your bitterness because if you're not careful, what was taken from you by someone else you will pay back in the relationships you're in now, including your relationships maybe with your kids or your grandkids. The Apostle Paul says, "This is a big deal. You can't be a builder if you're bitter. So get rid of bitterness." But he's not done. Get rid of rage. Get rid of anger. Get rid of brawling, all that yelling and screaming and allowing things to escalate. He says, "You gotta take all of that, put it in a big bag, take it to the street, get rid of it, you have to leave it there." And he goes on, "And slander, and slander along with every form, every single form of malice."

To put this in terms that we use in our conversation, maybe he would say it this way, "Get rid of any

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

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word. Get rid of all words that demean, degrade, and disrespect." Do you know what it means to demean someone? It means to communicate, "You don't really matter. You don't really matter," to which your Heavenly Father would say, "Wait a minute. He matters to me, she matters to me, and if he matters to me and she matters to me, then he should matter and she should matter to you." Do you know what degrade means? It means you don't make the grade. It means you get graded down. It means you don't measure up. And the moment we start treating people like they don't measure up, maybe our Heavenly Father says, "Can I ask you a question, Andy?" "Yeah, what's that?" "Did you measure up to my standard?" "Well, no." "Well, how did I respond, Andy, when you didn't measure up to my standard?" "You forgave me and did for me what I couldn't do for myself." "That's right, Andy. Now I want you to go do that for him. I want you to go do that for her."

And disrespect? Disrespect communicates, "You're not worthy of my respect," to which again our Heavenly Father would say, "Wait, wait, wait. You may not think she's worthy of your respect, but she's worthy of mine. She's my daughter. You don't think he's worthy of your respect. He's worthy of my respect. He's my son."

So the Apostle Paul says, "You see, this is a different way of thinking. This is a different worldview. So Paul, exactly what does that look like? What does it mean to build? He said, "Let me give you some words you understand. Be kind. Be kind. Be kind." This isn't avoid the hard things, it's say the hard things the right way. Be kind. How kind? And compassionate to one another.

In other words, it's not just what you say, it's dialing into the emotion of the person that you're talking to. And make sure that you forgive each other, because if you don't forgive, it's gonna impact the way that you talk to each other. And we say, "Okay, but Paul, how far do we have to take this forgiveness thing?" And Paul would say, "You may be sorry you asked." "Well, do we take it as far as I forgive them as much as they've forgiven me?" He said, "No, I want you to forgive each other just as. Just as." "But just as what?" "Just as God in Christ forgave you." That you are to do for others in terms of forgiveness exactly what your Father in heaven did for you. We call this the Platinum Rule around here, to do for others what God in Christ has done for you.

But when we put it in the context of our words, it looks more like this: Speak unto others as God in Christ has spoken over you. Can you imagine what would happen in your family if you did this? Can you imagine what would happen in our relationships if this was what we normally did? If this became normal and then when we messed up we took ownership of it? Paul is saying, "Look, allow God's grace to you to shape and inform your words toward others."

Now, here's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go back through the whole passage. I'm gonna read straight through it without splitting it up like I just did. And as I do, I want you to ask yourself two questions, and here are the two questions: Where do I have work to do? Or where do you have work to do? [chuckle] And the second question is, the more painful, who hopes you'll get to work soon? [laughter] Where do you have work to do as it relates to your words, and who hopes you'll get to work soon? And do you know what's so sad about this question? Isn't this just so strange? It's the people closest to us that we tend to hurt the most with our words, which makes no sense. Which means it's your problem, not theirs. It's my problem, not hers.

And if you're someone who is easily critical, if you're someone who for you sarcasm is just a way of talking, can I let you know that that never builds anyone? No one has ever been made better, no one has ever been built stronger through just pure criticism and sarcasm. And can I just be super direct to you dads for just a moment? Dad? Sarcasm doesn't build anything but resentment. Dads, sarcasm will not make your sons tougher. It will just make it tougher for you to connect with your sons. Moms, sarcasm will not make your daughters tougher. It'll just make it more difficult for you to connect with your daughter.

So, here's the passage all put together. Here's what he says, "Do not let any unwholesome word come out of your mouth." No fishmouth. "Only what is helpful for building others up." You're on a construction site. "According to their needs, not your needs, that it may benefit those who listen, not those who are talking. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Don't make God go, "Oh, I can't believe you said that to her." "With whom you are sealed for the day of redemption." In other words, God has made an unconditional promise to you. He has pledged his unconditional love. Why would you make your love and commitment to other people so conditional? And then he says, "And if this is gonna be tough for you, here's one of the reasons it may be tough for you. You're gonna have to get rid of all that bitterness. You're gonna have to put it in a bag and leave it on the street. And rage and anger and brawling and slander along with every form of malice. And start here," he would say. "Just be kind. Just decide that as you guard your mouth if they aren't kind words, you're just not gonna say 'em. And be compassionate, dial into the emotion of the person you're talking to. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another. And how far should we take it? Just as, just as in Christ, God forgave you.

Now, here's what I would suggest as a homework assignment for today's message, I would suggest, I would highly recommend, I wish I could bribe you to do this if I could, is to commit this part of the passage to memory. But I wanna encourage you to find this, write it somewhere, or print it somewhere, and commit this part of the passage to memory because here's what I know: This will make your life better, it will make you better at life, it will make you a better father, it'll make you a better mother, it'll make you a better student, it'll make you a better friend, it will make you a better boss, it will make you a better employee.

And then as you're memorizing this verse and you're trying to get your mind and your heart around this message, if you find that it's just too difficult, it may be that you need to take some things to the street.

And if you say, "Andy that's too much to ask. You don't know my story." Then I wanna encourage you as much as I can encourage you to be here next week for part four of this series. Because if the story of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins is the greatest story ever told, the story that I'm gonna tell you next week from the Old Testament might be the second greatest story ever told. And it will create a context for you to perhaps deal with the words that hurt you the most in such a way that you will be free to move forward and love the people that you love better than you've ever loved them before. But we're gonna have to be quick to listen and slow to speak.

MeAndMyBigMouth-Pt3

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma