

Note: Some of the material in this message was taken from class notes obtained from Clearcreek Chapel's Counseling Training program.

Have you heard the story about the little girl (told by David Jeremiah) who was sitting on her grandfather's lap one day? The girl looked up at his white hair and wrinkled skin and said, "Grandpa, did God make you?" "Yes, honey," he said, "He sure did." And then she looked at herself, and after examining her smooth skin, she asked again, "Grandpa, did God make me?" "Absolutely," said her grandfather. The little girl reflected for a few moments, and then she said, "Don't you think God is doing a better job now than He used to?"

Some of the funniest things are said in the home. So are some of the most lethal. This morning, the Word of God is doing to address a very critical topic for us--the topic of communication in the home. We are engaged in a series entitled "God's Design for the Family." In week #1, we went back to the basics on marriage (Genesis 2). In week two, we learned what God expects of husbands--As a husband, I must be a Learner, a Lover, and a Leader. Last week, from Gen 2, Eph 5, and 1 Pet 3, we considered two distinctives God has given to wives--a distinct role and a distinct responsibility. When it comes to marriage, God has designed the husband to be the head, and the wife to be the helper.

Now we're ready to address one of the topics I consider to be most critical in pre-marriage counseling--communication. Homes that truly honor God are homes that communicate in a godly way.

Proposition: This morning, we want to answer two key questions pertaining to communication in the home. Our text will be Ephesians 4:25-32.

I. Why is communication vital?

- A. Communication is vital because of who we are (4:1-16).
- B. Communication is vital because of what we were (4:17-19).
- C. Communication is vital because of what Christ is like (4:20-24).

II. How are we to communicate?

Four rules of communication...

- A. Rule #1: Be honest (25).
 - 1. Clamming up is sin.
 - 2. Blowing up is sin.
- B. Rule #2: Keep current (26-27).
 - 1. Deal with today's problems today.
 - 2. Deal with today's problems God's way.
- C. Rule #3: Attack problems, not people (29-30).
 - 1. I must avoid words that cut down.
 - 2. I must use words that build up.
- D. Rule #4: Act, don't react (31-32).
 - 1. We must put off six reactions (31).

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- Bitterness
 - Rage
 - Anger
 - Brawling
 - Slander
 - Malice
2. We must put on three actions (32).
- Be kind.
 - Be compassionate.
 - Be forgiving.

I. Why is communication vital?

Communication is vital for three reasons, as spelled out in Ephesians 4.

A. Communication is vital because of who we are (4:1-16).

You are familiar with the basic context of Ephesians (we spent over 6 months in it back in 1991). Paul wrote the letter. The first three chapters deal with doctrine--who we are in Christ. The final three chapters address duty--how we are to live as those who are in Christ. Paul exhorts us in 4:1, "Walk worthy of the vocation to which you are called."

We are to live in light of our position. We are not islands, however, for we live in community (which Paul explains in 4:2-16). We are to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:3). Maintaining unity involves communication. As Christians, we are called to live a distinct life. We are called to communicate in a distinct way, because of who we are. According to 4:15, we are to "speak the truth in love."

B. Communication is vital because of what we were (4:17-19).

Paul is writing to Christians. What USED to be true of them, and is still true of pagans, he describes in vv 17-19, "This I say, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk. What is true of unsaved people, of pagans? Notice their condition--their thinking is futile (17), their understanding is darkened, their hearts are hard and blind (18), and their behavior is sensual and impure (19).

This background is key to what we'll see in a moment. This is what we WERE. It may be what some here still ARE. The power to communicate in a godly way is not possible without a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. In fact, God's instruction which follows won't make sense to you if you don't know Christ, for you don't have the spiritual antenna to tune in on God's truth.

C. Communication is vital because of what Christ is like (4:20-24).

That's the point of vv 20-24. Listen to v 20, "But ye have not so learned Christ." What's amazing to me is that Paul says, when these Ephesians became Christians, they were disciplined in practical, down-to-earth terms about how to live for Christ. Notice v 21 says they were "taught" this. It doesn't come naturally. If you do what comes naturally, you'll blow it as a Christian.

There's a strong contrast in beginning in 4:22 through 5:5. I challenge you to take out a piece of paper, on your own, and make two columns. Over the first write, "Put off." Over the second jot down, "Put on." Then start listing in the proper column the things the apostle says we are to "put off" and "put on." We are to put off the old manner of life (22) and be made new in the attitude of our minds (23). In fact, the word "renewed" in v 23 does not mean "brand new" but "rejuvenate." And please notice that renewal starts in

the mind. We need to start thinking differently if we're going to live (and communicate) differently. Godly behavior begins with godly thinking. One leader has well said (MacArthur), "Our problem is America is not to get the world to live like Christians, but to get Christians to stop living like the world."

Notice v 24, "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The goal in the Christian life is righteousness and holiness. The aim is Christ-likeness. Communication is vital because of who we are, what we were, and what Christ is like. Now let's get down to the nitty-gritty question #2.

II. How are we to communicate?

In Paul's put off/put on list, he deals with some six areas which ought to be affected by the presence of Christ. Nearly each area touches on the subject of communication.

In that this is a very practical section, I want to be very practical. The Word of God gives us four rules of communication here. These are four practical guidelines for how Christians should communicate in the home. By the way, these rules apply in areas outside the home. We should practice these on the job, in church business meetings, wherever.

A. Rule #1: Be honest (25).

We derive rule #1 from v 25, "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another." Be honest.

I chuckled when I read a recent "Arlo and Janis" comic strip in the Sunday newspaper. In the first frame, Janis holds up a magazine and asks her husband, "Isn't the woman on this magazine cover pretty?" The next four frames show the husband, Arlo, as he thinks to himself about his options on how to respond to his wife's question. His first option to the question, "Isn't the woman on this magazine cover pretty?"--"Yes, that's why she's on the cover of a fashion magazine." Option two--"No, she's ugly." Option three--"She isn't as pretty as you." Option four--"What woman? What magazine?" The final frame shows which option he chose. Guess which one? Arlo picks safe option, #4, "What woman? What magazine?"

Rule #1 is be honest. Lest we think we've arrived in this area, allow me to probe a little. There are basically two types of people when it comes to communication. There are "blow-uppers" and "clam-uppers." Some people, like a volcano, blow up. Others, like a pressure cooker, clam up. Did you realize both short-circuit godly communication?

1. Clamming up is sin.

Notice the text of v 25 carefully. "Speak" is a command. People can't read our minds. If we don't speak, they can't be sure what we're thinking. What are we to speak? Speak the "truth." By the way, honesty is more than not lying. Some of us lie in subtle ways. When you say to his wife, "What bugs me is that you're always nagging at me!" Is that true? Does she ALWAYS nag? Has she NEVER in 20 years of marriage said one encouraging word?

Dads, when you come into the house hopping mad, slam the door, and throw your shoes on the floor, and your child says to you, "What's wrong?" And you respond, "Nothing!" Are you speaking the truth? Clamming up is sin.

2. Blowing up is sin.

Remember what 4:15 said? "Speaking the truth IN LOVE." My speech must always be marked by love. What is love? Love focuses on the good of the other person.

May I speak frankly? There are some "Christian" counselors and books that tell us we need to "ventilate." They tell me, "I've got a right to get this off of my chest. I've got a right to speak my mind." Is that what the Bible says?

Jay Adams is right on with this assessment (31-32), "In some psychological circles ventilation is thought to be therapeutic; so in group therapy sessions, in Encounter sessions, in T groups, and so forth, venting of anger and hostility is encouraged. Counselees are being told to get it out of their systems. They are urged, 'Do the here and now thing--whatever you feel like doing; just get it out. If there is something inside, just yell it out, scream at the next person across the table...Hit the pillow if it represents your mother--hit it until the feathers fly.' In all such advice, there seems to be concern only for the feelings of one person; certainly not for the feelings of the one on whom the wrath is poured. The other person doesn't count; at all cost ultimately (to him) the counselee is the one who has to feel better."

Ventilation is un-Christian. It's pure selfishness for me to blow up at you so I'll feel better. True, clamming up is sin. So is blowing up. Instead of either, we must speak the truth in love. We must be honest.

Honesty must start before a couple marries. For instance, the girl loves going to craft shows, and the guy hates it. She says, "I'd sure like to go to the craft show Saturday." He lies, "I'd like to, too." He takes her on a date to a craft show, and hates every minute of it, but never says so. Three months after they're married, she says, "Dear, let's go to the craft show." He retorts, "No way, I hate craft shows!"

Or, the girl hates fishing, but the guy loves it. While they're dating, the fellow says, "Would you like me to take you bass fishing this Saturday morning?" The gal blushes, "I'd love it." He picks her up at 4:30 a.m. and they spend 6 hours at the lake. Then they get married. Six months later, he says, "Honey, let's go fishing." She says, "Not me. I can't stand fishing." (see Swindoll, *Strike*, 101)

You get the idea. We must resolve to follow rule one--be honest.

B. Rule #2: Keep current (26-27).

Vv 26-27 "Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath; Neither give place to the devil." Jay Adams is right when he observes (35), "Few things are sapping the strength of the church of Jesus Christ more than the unreconciled state of so many believers." This problem is a sheer violation of rule #2--Keep current.

What does rule #2 mean practically? We have two responsibilities.

1. Deal with today's problems today.

"Don't let the sun go down on your wrath" is not saying, "Move to the North Pole where the sun stays in the sky for 24 hours!" The issue is clear. Don't let a day go by without addressing that day's interpersonal problems.

What happens when we fail to keep current? Four dangerous consequences. The first is guilt--for we have violated a command of God. Second, we open the way to resentment--unresolved conflicts become clutter in our lives that jam up our relationships. As the text says, unresolved anger leads to sin. Third, if we don't keep current, we give the devil a foothold in our lives. Just think of that. How many Christians right now are sitting in church with the devil's workboot stuck in their side? A fourth consequence--

unresolved problems tend to distort subsequent problems. A person who doesn't deal with today's problems today will make a mountain out of a molehill tomorrow.

What's the point? Simply this. God says don't go to bed angry. Husbands, don't put your head on the pillow until you've worked through the conflict with your wife. Teens, don't hit the hay until that bitterness towards your parents is removed.

2. Deal with today's problems God's way.

Listen. A Christian home is not a home that doesn't have problems. It's a home that deals with problems God's way. Not one family here today is exempt. Even Christian couples get their feelings hurt.

By the way, what makes a Christian home "Christian"? A big Bible on the coffee table? Attending church 3 times a week? Listen--the real test for whether your home is a "Christian" home is this. Do you deal with your problems God's way or your own way?

C. Rule #3: Attack problems, not people (29-30).

Notice v 29, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying..." Paul says to refrain from "corrupt communication." He's not talking about dirty jokes. The NIV catches the sense with "unwholesome talk." Literally, it means "cutting words."

The rule is this. Attack problems, not people. This means two things.

1. I must avoid words that cut down.

I'll never forget the words I heard my 7th grade friend hear his father yell at him, "You're a quitter. You'll never amount to anything." Those are cutting words. Those kind of words crush and maim and destroy.

When a husband says to his wife, "Why can't you be thin like you used to be?", he's attacking the person. When a child says to her brother, "I can't stand your freckles," she's using cutting words.

May I remind you what Jesus said about "cutting words" in Mt 5:21-22? "But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment...but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." There's no place for cutting words in a Christian's speech.

2. I must use words that build up.

V 29 tells us to use "good" words that "edify." Words that edify are words that minister grace--they build up. Instead of attacking people, attack the problem.

For instance, ladies, instead of saying to your husband, "You're a lousy leader!" It would be better to say, "Dear, it seems to me you've been leaving a lot of the heavy decisions up to me lately." What's the difference? The first attacked him as a person. The second attacked the problem. Watch out for sarcasm, too. It may generate a laugh on the outside, but cut deep in the heart.

D. Rule #4: Act, don't react (31-32).

In v 31, Paul tells us what to put off, and in v 32, what to put on.

1. We must put off six reactions (31).

The following six reactions flow naturally from our sinful hearts. Unless we take specific steps to implement the Spirit's help, these reactions will plague our communication. God says the following must go:

- Bitterness = long-standing resentment; a brooding, unwillingness to let go of the past; this must be put off.

- Rage = (KJV "wrath") flaring outbursts; loosing your cool
- Anger = the "slow burn"; being "mad"; settled indignation that seeks revenge
- Brawling = (KJV "clamor") harsh contention and strife; it's what happens when people get ticked off
- Slander = (KJV "evil speaking") speech that injures; abusive talk; I can speak the truth and still do this.
- Malice = the desire to harm others or see others suffer; a general word for "badness" or "bad feeling"

The point is this. These reactions have to go. They are circuit-jammers to godly communication. But don't stop there. Good communication involves more than getting rid of the bad reactions.

2. *We must put on three actions (32).*

- Be kind.

Kindness involves the idea of being benevolent, helpful, and courteous. Prov 15:1 states, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger."

- Be compassionate.

The Schofield uses the picturesque "tenderhearted." We should have big hearts when we talk. We should be sympathetic listeners.

- Be forgiving.

Don't miss this. God doesn't tell us to forgive and forget. That's impossible. What He calls us to do is forgive in order to forget. How's that? Forgiveness is a choice. It's a decision to pass over an offense and to free the offender from the consequences of it.

That's what God did for us, didn't He? When He forgave David of his sin with Bathsheba, He didn't forget it happened--In fact, He had it recorded permanently in the Scriptures. What did God do? He forgave David. He choose to pass over the offense, to free David from the consequences of the offense.

What makes it possible for a holy God to forgive us? The text answers that critical question, "Even as God, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, has forgiven you."

Let's apply this to our communication. God says instead of having speech that's marked by bitterness, wrath, and anger, we should be kind, compassionate, and forgiving in our words.

Listen. Arguments don't have to happen. It takes two people to react and argue. No matter how ungodly others are, I must communicate biblically. I offer this challenge--the next time you get in an argument in your home, ask yourself, "What's the most kind thing I could say now? What's the most compassionate word I could speak now? And what's the most forgiving word I could say now?" Act, don't react.

Conclusion: The bottom line is this. We ought to adorn Christ by the way we communicate in our homes. Our unsaved neighbors ought to be able to see that's something's different in us by listening to the way we talk to each other.

My challenge (and this morning's invitation) is this. Learn these four biblical rules of communication. Write them on a card and put them on your kitchen table, if need be. Make a decision today to be a godly communicator--starting on the ride home from church. Be honest. Keep current. Attack problems, not people. And act, don't react.

Homework: "Communication" exercise