

Real Change Part 3: Reforming Your Words and Putting Away Bitterness

Ephesians 4:29-32

Intro

We feel like we can't live without our smart phones and we can do so much with them – email, text, take pictures, play games, even make phone calls. And we don't get upset at things it doesn't do – hammer nails, take swimming, throw like a Frisbee – because we know it wasn't designed to do those things. It was designed by a team of engineers to do certain things and when we use it in those ways, it works. We can try to do other things with it, but it will break or will be a poor tool. When we get it, we learn how to use it – go to the brief owners manual. When it malfunctions, we send it back for repair (my gps) or it's loaded with a new operating system.

Likewise, we were created to live and act in certain ways in relationship to God and man. But sin broke all that so we don't function like we should. God loads a new operating system when he gives us a new heart and we can go to Him, in His Word, to see how to use it. Same broken world around us, but how do we relate. And when we relate to Him and others in the way He designed, it works.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 17 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf . . . ¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

All of these issues we discussed come down to change in orientation.

Away from self and to God and others.

Lying, anger, stealing are self-centered.

Truth telling, generosity, edifying words are looking outward and considering upward.

What do they need? What would please God?

1. Replace **unwholesome**, selfish words with **gracious**, edifying words. (4:29-30)
 - a. Let no **unwholesome** words proceed from your mouth.
 - i. What makes words unwholesome? Doesn't that sound like an old-fashioned term?
 1. Literally means rotten and was used of decaying fish or food that was no longer useful because of its decay.
 2. Used in Matthew 7:17 of the bad or diseased tree that bears bad fruit.
 - ii. This is speech that is corrupt. It can include off-color jokes, suggestive comments, swearing.
 1. **Ephesians 5:3-4** But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴ and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.
 - iii. You might say, "they're just words! Shouldn't we be more concerned with stealing, injustice, bitterness?"
 - iv. Spoken immorality never leads in the right direction (Chuck Lawless).
 1. Not that everyone who jokes about coarse things ends up doing them. But letting our guards down on one level makes it easier to let it down at the next.

- v. Our jokes betray our hearts. There's a saying, "What's down in the well will come up in the bucket."
 - 1. Our culture may be loaded with innuendo and crassness, but the reason it comes out of our mouths is not merely that it is in the culture. It's in our hearts.
 - 2. If we consume a steady diet of rotten food, our bodies will feel it. Likewise, if we consume a steady diet of rotten words and content, our hearts and minds will feel it. They'll be affected.
- vi. More than just 4-letter words and dirty jokes. The contrasting speech that we are to replace it with is others-focused and grace-filled. I think we can conclude then that this unwholesome speech is self-focused.
 - 1. I want to be seen as funny, I want to be seen as smart, as with it, as cool.
- b. Your words should be edifying, appropriate, and gracious.
 - i. Edifying words build up the other person.
 - 1. **Proverbs 12:18** There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.
 - 2. **Proverbs 10:11a** The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life
 - 3. **Proverbs 10:21a** The lips of the righteous feed many
 - a. There should be a tangible benefit from our words.
 - 4. In his classic book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie lays out principles for winning friends and influencing people. He actually has some good ideas for an 80 year old book. He includes six ways to make people like you.
 - a. Become genuinely interested in other people.
 - b. Smile.
 - c. Remember that a person's name is, to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language.
 - d. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves. Many times people don't want an entertaining conversation partner; they just want someone who will listen to them.
 - e. Talk in terms of the other person's interest. The royal road to a person's heart is to talk about the things he or she treasures most.
 - f. Make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely.
 - g. He is right that being other's focused in our speech makes people feel important and cared about. What's the problem? The end goal is still self-centered – make them like you!
 - 5. Edifying speech is focused on their good – serving them, encouraging them. Side effect might be that they think you're a great guy, but that's not the goal.
 - ii. Appropriate to the need of the moment
 - 1. **Proverbs 15:23** A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word!
 - 2. How do you know the need of the moment for people? Listen. Ask questions.

- iii. Gives grace to those who hear.
 - 1. God's grace in Ephesians
 - a. Redeemed according to the riches of His grace (1:7)
 - b. Saved by grace (2:5, 8)
 - c. We will eternally display the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ (2:7)
 - d. God's undeserved kindness toward us.
 - 2. Our everyday conversations can be means of grace.
 - a. Rather than rotten speech that deteriorates a person, gracious speech encourages them, directs their eyes and affections back on Christ.
 - b. You might say, they don't deserve my kindness! But that's the point! It's undeserved!
- c. Unwholesome words by Christians **grieve** the Holy Spirit.
 - i. Nature of the Spirit in this brief statement
 - 1. He is *Holy*
 - 2. He is *Spirit*
 - 3. He is *God*
 - 4. He is *a person with emotions*
 - ii. God is saddened by the sin of His people against one another.
 - iii. This is the difference between Dale Carnegie's approach and real Biblical change in speech.
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 5:9** Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.
 - 2. Notice that it isn't the omnipresent God waiting to smite you for a curse word that is depicted. Not pictured with His hammer of judgment about ready to throw it down at your speech infraction. Rather, it appeals to a relational desire to please rather than grieve God because I care about Him.
 - iv. Pulls back to our identity and standing – you were sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day your redemption is complete either when Jesus comes or you go to Him.
 - 1. A seal is a sign of ownership. From the moment you are sealed at your new birth you no longer belong to yourself. Neither do your words.
 - 2. **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.
- d. Y-Diagram/Heart Chart

Encourage people to draw it out

 - i. Heart
 - ii. Thinking

1. If you find your thinking to be critical, judgmental, arrogant, self-focused, eventually it will come out in your words.
- iii. Who am I pleasing?
- iv. Hard/easy
 1. Hard to control your words! Especially if you have a real knack for one-liners that get a good dig in there
- v. Commandment/feeling oriented
 1. Memorize some key passages – put them on the lock screen of your phone
 - a. Prov 12:18 – There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of the sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing
2. Replace **bitterness** with **kindness**, compassion, and **forgiveness**.
 - a. A bitter heart reveals unresolved inner **anger**.
 - i. Bitterness – an inner resentment for a perceived wrong done to you
 1. Test – can you recall details of a wrong done with incredible detail
 - ii. Wrath – basically synonymous with anger although with an emphasis on explosive rage where the word for anger is more internal and smoldering
 - iii. Clamor – outcry, shouting, speaking loudly at the same time
 1. If you're not sure what this looks like, turn on one of the news networks when they have multiple people on the screen trying to shout over each other to make their own points
 - iv. Slander – harmful, abusive speech against someone's reputation, whether true or not.
 1. **Proverbs 26:22** The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.
 2. **Proverbs 20:19** He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.
 - v. Malice – wishing evil on others, meanness, delights in inflicting injury on others.
 - b. A forgiven person should be **kind**, **compassionate**, and **forgiving** to others.
 - i. Kindness – thoughtful of the other person and desirous of their good. The opposite of clamor, slander, and malice.
 1. Kindness is a rare and greatly appreciated virtue in others.
 2. Desired in a man
 - a. **Proverbs 19:22** What is desirable in a man is his kindness, And *it is* better to be a poor man than a liar.
 3. Should be encouraged in a young woman
 - a. **Titus 2:4-5** so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ *to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.*

4. Should characterize God's servant
 - a. **2 Timothy 2:24** The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,
5. Is a quality of genuine love
 - a. **1 Corinthians 13:4** Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant,
6. God is kind to us
 - a. **Romans 2:4** Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?
 - b. **Ephesians 1:5** He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,
 - c. **Luke 6:35-36** "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*."

ii. Tender-hearted – compassionate

1. Men – this is for you, too. Has nothing to do with how much you can bench press or how fast you can field strip a handgun or how calloused your hands are. In fact, those cultural manifestations of manhood when combined with kindness and compassion make the kindness and compassion stand out all the more.
2. Contrast would be with the malice of heart that seeks to hurt and wound others with a tenderness of heart that seeks to help the weak.
3. No place for a Christian bully.

iii. Forgiveness

1. My forgiveness is **motivated** by God's forgiveness of me, **modeled** after God's forgiveness of me.
 - a. I forgive because I have been forgiven and I forgive as I have been forgiven.
 - b. God's forgiveness toward me and my forgiveness toward another are like the voice and the echo. (Matthew Linn and Dennis Linn)
 - i. God shouts "I forgive you!" and our echo comes back against those who have wronged us, "I forgive you."
 - c. A forgiven person is a forgiving person.
2. Might say, "but you don't know what they've done to me!" or "They haven't even acknowledged that they have done anything wrong!"
 - a. Judicial forgiveness vs. relational forgiveness (Paul Tripp)
 - b. Judicial forgiveness is a step of heart preparation. I covenant with God to let go of the offense the person has committed against me and entrust him or her to the Lord's work of conviction and justification.

- i. **1 Peter 2:21-23** For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an **example for you to follow in His steps**, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and **while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;**
 - ii. Trust in God moves my heart from thoughts of vengeance to thoughts of reconciliation, from plans of judgment to purposes of love. All this prepares me for the next step of forgiveness.
 - c. Relational forgiveness differs from judicial forgiveness in that it cannot be offered until the person asks for it. If we don't deal with the heart issue of judicial forgiveness we are unprepared to offer relational forgiveness.
 3. You are surrounded by sinners! And sinners sin against one another. Sinners tend to respond sinfully to being sinned against.
 4. Learn patterns of forgiveness in small offenses so you are prepared to offer forgiveness in large offenses.
 - c. Y-diagram/Heart chart
 - i. Heart
 1. I want them to hurt like I've been hurt vs. They hurt me but my sin hurts God. He forgave me so I can extend forgiveness to them.
 2. If I forgive them I'm acting as if it was ok what they did! Vs. Forgiveness means it was wrong but I won't take my own vengeance.
 3. I must be heard! (clamor) I must have comfort! Respect! Pain free life!
 - ii. Thinking
 1. Have you been stewing on the wrongs of others against you? Do you meditate on the things you think God hasn't given you?
 - iii. Easy/Hard
 1. Nursing bitterness is easier in the moment but it is destructive in the long run.
 - a. Classic quote – Bitterness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.
3. Conclusion
 - a. These aren't five principles to master for successful living
 - i. Although if you control your anger, are honest, speak kindly and well to people, and are generous with forgiveness you will obviously live a more successful life.
 - ii. That would be gutted from the perspective in this passage
 - b. Rather, tell the truth because we are members of one another in Christ, speak gracious and kindly so you don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God, forgive because you have been forgiven by God in Christ. To distill these down to principles for successful living is to deChristify (Powlison) the message of Ephesians.

c. Application

- i. Maybe you need a new operating system – a new heart
- ii. Maybe you need to go back to the owners manual and see how you were built to operate.