

# THE FOUR COMMANDMENTS OF COMMUNICATION (Ephesians 4:25-32)

Sociologists, world statesmen, marriage counselors - all sorts of people - seem to agree that one of our greatest needs today is genuine communication. Communication binds persons together. In fact, only by communicating can problems between persons be solved.

The basis for the restoration of communication is reconciliation with God. Restoration begins with the saving grace of Jesus Christ. For all significant communication of any depth must be communication in him. Truth which is held in common, shared, and believed by all of the parties who communicate, is the foundation for all significant communication. All definitions and rules of communication must issue from God in the Scriptures. When the credibility gap between God and man is closed, the gap between man and man may be closed as well.

Good relationships over any length of time do not come automatically! All of the story plots patterned after Goldilocks and Prince Charming who "ride off into the sunset and live happily ever after are purely fictional and absolutely unscriptural! Relationships simply never, ever, ever happen that way! They cannot! The reason why is that all men are sinners, and sinners are selfish and finite. The fact that we are selfish and finite means that **WE ARE GOING TO HAVE CONFLICTS!**

However, in Jesus Christ we may have complete hope! Good marriages and good relationships are not built upon an absence of problems. Problems **CAN** and **MUST** be solved! God commands it! And for what He has commanded He always gives the means and the strength to carry out. Problems, when resolved in accordance with God's Holy Word, allow us to grow *closer* to one another.

In Eph. 4:22-32, Paul talks about putting off old ways and putting on Christ's ways. In these verses he gives us four vital communication commandments to solve problems. These rules are to be used in all our relationships. Let's learn them!

**I. Rule One: Speak The Truth In Love! Eph. 4:15, 25** *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

Wayne Mack, in Strengthening Your Marriage, rightly says that one of the most basic requirements of good communications is mutual openness and honesty! There must be honest listening and speaking if problems are to be solved.

A. Thoughts of the Mind Are Only Known to Oneself.

To see why this is true, read I Cor. 2:11, *For who among men knows the Thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.* After reading this verse, write down why a person has to verbalize his thoughts to another.

**No person, only the Holy Spirit, knows the thoughts of another person.**

B. Non-Verbal Data Is Helpful But Can Never Be Conclusive.

We can never know each other by second guessing. Non-verbal indications language, notes, presence or absence, touches, pats, hugs, helpfulness, attentiveness, and sharing. However, facts can only really be known, and problems dealt with, through openness and honesty.

C. Honesty Is More Than Not lying.

According to Eph. 4:25, honesty and openness is more than avoiding a lie. It means **speaking truthfully.**

D. According to these passages, what happens when we do not listen and talk honestly?

1. Prov. 18:13 *He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame.* **It is folly to answer without listening.**
2. Amos 3:3 *Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?* **Then we don't walk together**
3. Matt. 5:23-26 *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.* **We may be taken to court and a third party (a judge? God?) will determine our fate.**
4. Matt. 5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.* **We are not at peace. When we make peace, we're children of God.**
5. I Cor. 14:8, 9, 33, 40 *Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.* **Unless you verbalize problems, no one can answer you**

## II. Rule Two: Never Let The Sun Go Down On Your Anger! Eph. 4:26-27

*"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."*

A. There Are Times to Hold the Tongue.

What do the following verses say regarding this?

1. I Pet. 4:8 *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.* **Love covers a multitude of sin.**
2. Jas. 1:19 *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.* **Be quick to listen, slow to speak or to become angry.**

We never have a right to expect people to live according to our preferences. We are to make righteous judgments.

*Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment." Jn. 7:24. Do not judge, or your too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Mt. 7:1-5.*

We are to have a forgiving spirit, *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Eph. 4:31-32.*

We are to receive our weaker brother and recognize that when a person is growing, God is teaching him, *You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. Rom. 14:10-13*

#### B. There Are Times When It Is Wrong to Hold the Tongue.

If sin is hindering growth or causing harm to the body of Christ, or the offender or situation is deteriorating rapidly, it is extremely unloving to fail to seek to resolve the problem.

1. According to Eph. 4:26, is anger sinful in itself? **No! (In your anger, do not sin).**
2. The energy called "anger" is given to attack problems; it is not given to attack and destroy people.
  - a. In Eph. 4:26-27, "clamming up" is destroying whom? (self, others)
  - b. In Prov. 25:28, *Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.* "blowing up" destroys others and means that the person doing this is (in; out of) control.
  - c. When we let the problem remain unsolved day after day, to whom are we giving a foothold (Eph. 4:26-27)?

#### C. Questions to Ask Yourself Before Bringing Up a Sticky Problem to Be Solved:

1. Do I have the facts right? *"He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame."* (Prov. 18:13)? **He who answers before listening that is his folly and his shame.** (If not, you need to admit that you are not sure.)

2. Should love hide it? *"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."* (1 Pet. 4:9)? **Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.**
3. Is my attitude right? *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."* (Eph. 4:15) **We must speak the truth in love.**
4. Is my timing right? *"-- and how good is a timely word!"* (Prov. 15:23b) **How good is a timely word.**
5. Are my words loving? *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."* (Eph. 4:15) **We must speak the truth in love.**
6. Have I prayed for God's help? *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding".* (Prov. 3:5b)? **Lean not on your own understanding.**

**III. Rule Three: Attack the Problem, Not the Person! Eph. 4:29** *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."*

#### A. Words Can Harm.

According to Jas. 3:5-8, *"Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."*

What is wrong with this statement: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me"? **The tongue is evil, full of deadly poison - words do harm!**

#### B. People Are Not to Be Attacked.

1. What did Christ say about "cutting people down," calling them "raca," or worthless, or fool? *"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell."* Matt. 5:22? **They are subject to judgment. They're in danger of the fire of hell.**
2. When we attack someone as a person, who are we really criticizing? Who created him? **God.**

3. What are some words, voice inflections and tones, and non-verbal actions that really say to others, "I do not think you are worthwhile as a person"? **disdainful voice, a smirk, a harsh stare.**

C. Instead, Choose Words That Will Help To Solve Problems: Words That Are Solution-Oriented.

*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Eph. 4:29.*

This describes these words and non-verbal actions as those that "build others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.. What does this mean? **Our speech should build up by being helpful, constructive, encouraging, instructive, and uplifting. Everything we say should be appropriate, according to the need of the moment. Everything we say should be gracious.**

**IV. Rule Four: Act, Don't React! Eph. 4:31-32** *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Eph. 4:31-32*

A. Don't React.

Our tendency from our Genesis 3 nature is to be defensive about dealing with our own sins and to deal with our own needs. We tend to defend, react rather than respond, blame shift, and run (*The man said, "The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."* Gen. 3:12).

How does Paul describe these Genesis 3-type actions in Eph. 4:31?

**bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, every form of malice.**

When someone loves us enough to approach us about an need in our life, we can always find fault with him; but we will never solve problems or grow by being a Genesis Three kind of person.

Reactions (v. 31) - attitudes and actions that must be "put off."

1. Definitions:

- a. **Bitterness:** the refusal to treat someone as if they never hurt you.
- b. **Rage:** flaring outbursts of anger (thumas).
- c. **Anger:** settled indignation or hostility that frequently seeks revenge; the "slow burn." (or'gay)
- d. **Brawling:** harsh contention and strife, public quarreling.
- e. **Slander:** speech that injures, abusive speech.
- f. **Malice:** desire to harm others or see them suffer.

2. The natural tendency of our Genesis 3 nature is to be **defensive** about dealing with our own sins (Eph. 4:31, Gen. 3:8-13).

B. Instead, We Are to Act. Eph. 4:32

*"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

Through Christ's Spirit, we must LEARN to be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving.

Changing habits is not easy, but it is much easier than the "way of the transgressor." Acting to change habits may not seem simple, but we have great promises in the following passages. What are they?

1. I Cor. 10:13 **No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.**

2. Phil. 4:13 **I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**

When we speak of ACTing to change habits, we mean LIST THE STEPS REQUIRED to put the Biblical principle in its place. This is what meditation is. This is being serious about loving obedience to Christ.

Actions (v. 32) - attitudes and actions you must "put on" to replace the reactions:

1. Definitions

a. **Kind:** benevolent, helpful, courteous.

b. **Compassionate:** lit. "of good heartedness," sympathetic.

c. **Forgiving:** to give up your right or claim to revenge, hold a grudge or get even.

2. You, through God's Spirit, must **learn** to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving.

## **CONFLICTS ARE POSSIBLE ONLY IF EACH PERSON REACTS!!!**

Conclusion:

1. Listening and lovingly desiring to communicate to solve problems goes with each rule.
2. A desire to be God's kind of person and to have a right relationship with Him is essential to applying His principles.
3. For additional reading:

Christian Living In the Home by Jay Adams (Chapter 3)

Strengthening Your Marriage by Wayne Mack (Unit 4)

Say It With Love by Howard Hendricks

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