

# “Four Characteristics of Sound Speech”

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by Whitney V. Myers



Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver - 123RF Photo - Proverbs 25:11

***"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." (Ephesians 4:29)***

"Good men will be cautious what they say." -- John Gill (1697-1771) (Ref. 1, Ref. 2)

This article is the second in the series, "Biblical Principles of Sound Speech." Today's lesson focuses on the *attributes* of sound speech, that is, the *essential characteristics* that our speech should have.

**Consider.** Think for a moment. What do you think the positive qualities of speech should be? If someone asked you to describe what the Bible says our speech should be like, what would you say in reply?

Today's lesson describes the four characteristics of sound speech in Ephesians 4:29. Today's verse is part of the Apostle Paul's letter to Christian believers at the church in Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1).

**Wholesome.** The first characteristic of sound speech in Ephesians 4:29 is that it should be *wholesome*. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *wholesome* as *promoting health and well being, sound in mind and morals, prudent, and safe* (Ref. 3). Our wholesome speech should promote the well-being of others, as we will see in the discussion below.

Paul begins Ephesians 4:29 with the phrase, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth." The Greek word for *unwholesome* is *sapros*. *Sapros* means *rotten, worthless, bad, corrupt* and is applied to putrid vegetable or animal substances (Ref. 4, Ref. 5 below, Ref. 6). Matthew 7:17-18 use the same word. Jesus said, "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt [*sapros*] tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matthew 7:17, brackets added). In Ephesians 4:29, Paul instructs us to restrain our mouths so we do not let any unwholesome (bad, rotten, corrupt) words go forth. Bad language not only reflects the corruptness of the "heart of a speaker," but also tends "to corrupt the minds or manners of hearers" (Ref. 7).

If you would like to read more on what the Bible says about avoiding cursing and profanity, please go to the page, "Bible Verses About Sound Speech" and read the last section (Ref. 8).

**Good for Edification.** The second characteristic of sound speech in Ephesians 4:29 is that our speech should be *good for edification*. That is, our speech should *build others up, not tear them down*. The Greek word for *edification* is *oikodomé*. The short definition of *oikodomé* is *a building or edifice* (Ref. 9). However, edification of people means more than building an architectural structure. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *oikodomé* as "the

act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness" (Ref. 9).

***According to the need of the moment.*** The third characteristic of sound speech in Ephesians 4:29 is that our speech should be *according to the need* and that it should be *timely*. The Greek word for *need* is *chreia*, which means *need, necessity, business, occasion* (Ref. 10). The English Standard Version (ESV) translates this phrase, "as fits the occasion" (Ref. 11). Our speech should edify (build up) our hearers according to the particular need of their spiritual state (Ref. 12).

The phrase, "According to the need of the moment," suggests to me that in our roles (for example, authors, teachers, parents, spouses, co-workers, team members, friends) we need always to pray and seek the Holy Spirit's guidance about what to say to our hearers and *when* to speak. Sometimes when we have a good idea, it may not be the right occasion or the right time to blurt it out. Our hearers will "hear" better when the Holy Spirit has prepared them to receive what we have to say. We should pray about *when* we should share our idea, inspiration, request, or constructive criticism. As an example from Scripture, God provided the occasion for Nehemiah to speak his request to King Artaxerxes approximately four months after Nehemiah had prayed to God about the condition of Jerusalem's wall (Nehemiah 1:1, Nehemiah 1:11, Nehemiah 2:1, Nehemiah 2:4).

King Solomon addressed the importance of *timeliness* in Proverbs 25:11. "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances." Our speech not only should be sensitive to the circumstances, but also should be spoken at the right time. We should look to God to guide as to when that time will be.

***Grace-giving.*** The fourth characteristic of sound speech in Ephesians 4:29 is that our speech should "give grace to those who hear." The Greek word for *grace* is *charis*, which means *grace, kindness, favor*, and especially, *God's divine influence upon the heart* (Ref. 13, Ref. 5 below). Our speech should minister the grace of God to others.

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouths: but that which

is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29 - 1599 Geneva Bible).

**Summary.** As Christians, and as instructed by the Bible in Ephesians 4:29, our speech should exhibit four essential qualities. Our speech should be wholesome, good for edification (building up others), appropriate for the occasion and timely, and grace-giving.

To see additional attributes of sound speech from the Bible, please refer to the separate page, "Bible Verses About Sound Speech" (Ref. 8).

**Apply.** I suggest that you memorize Ephesians 4:29 so you will always have this verse and these four essential qualities of sound speech in mind. If you would like to see this verse in other translations, please click on the link to Ephesians 4:29 on biblegateway.com and then select the translation of your choice.

## References

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