



## **A CHRISTIAN'S COMMUNICATION**

One of the most frequently heard complaints when couples come for marriage counseling is “we are having trouble with our communication.” Behind that statement lays the reality that they are not having a problem communicating, they are having a problem communicating biblically. Unbiblical communication results in hurt, anger, ignorance, and disunity in the body of Christ. In marriages, unbiblical communication is a wedge used by Satan to disrupt the one-flesh relationship God establishes.

How do you rate yourself as a communicator? Do you self-consciously try to communicate according to Biblical guidelines? What do your relationships reveal about your communication habits? Are your relationships stable and growing? Principles for godly communication are found throughout the Scriptures. Foundational to all the rest are the *heart attitudes* of the communicator. The way you communicate will reflect what you treasure in your heart (Matthew 6:21, 12:34-37). Ephesians 4:1-6 cites several underlying concerns that should govern Christian communication within the body of Christ.

### **1. Your concern must be to set a good example of Christ to others (vs. 1)**

Ephesians 4:1 – “Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” If a professing believer is not primarily concerned about the honor of Christ’s name, then more often than not his fleshly desires will find both verbal and behavioral expression in his life. The basic tenant of Christianity is this: your life is not your own.

### **2. Your concern must grow out of humility (vs. 2)**

Biblically, humility can be defined as a willingness to sacrifice any of my desires that stand in the way of God’s desires being fulfilled. Jesus insists that his readers repent of self-centered desires. Unless a believer is willing to sacrifice his own interests so that Christ’s kingdom purposes are furthered, his communication will be controlled by a self-centeredness that creates a chasm between himself and others.

### **3. Your concern must include gentleness (vs. 2)**

Gentleness is the opposite of harshness, being rude, or domineering. A gentle person tenderly watches out for others with whom he has contact, taking care not to insult, belittle, or demean

them. When confronting sin in a fellow believer, the gentle Christian will be firm, but never attacking, in his approach.

#### **4. Your concern is patience, bearing with one another in love (vs. 2)**

One of the characteristics of biblical love is the willingness to do good for others in spite of their shortcomings and sins. This kind of love was demonstrated by God, when He sent His son to die for us “while we were yet sinners.” In terms of communication, patience translates into not being curt, caustic, or cynical in speaking with others whose sins are evident. Patience with others grows in direct proportion to our awareness of how enticing habitual sin is for them.

#### **5. Your concern should be about harmony in the church (vs. 3-6)**

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” A godly communicator is one who sees harmony as primary. A study of Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians reinforces how important unity is in the church. Thus, it should be a concern to His children too. This is not to say that harmony is preserved at the expense of truth (Ephesians 4:15). But whenever possible, unity in the body of Christ must be sought, even at the expense of personal preferences, so that His kingdom purposes are furthered.

### **A GODLY LISTENER**

Proverbs 18:2 says, “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding, but delights in airing his own opinions.” This verse introduces us to a key character in Proverbs – the fool. The fool is irresponsible, often irrational, and careless. He is headstrong in his folly, yet blind to it as well. He wants to live life on his terms without much regard for God or others.

Fools do not listen in order to understand others. If a fool shuts up at all, it is not because he is looking for understanding. His real delight is in hearing himself speak. Paul’s advice in Philippians 2:3 is foreign to the fool, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself.” Proverbs 18:13 adds, “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and shame.”

### **How to be an attentive listener**

The most needful thing to becoming an attentive listener is patience. Most of us have trained ourselves to try to accomplish several things at one time. To reduce the temptation when someone is speaking to you, maintain eye contact with the speaker. Proverbs 18:15 says, “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.” To be an attentive listener, you must probe for accurate and adequate knowledge of what the other person is trying to communicate.

Sometimes it helps to process two questions in your mind: (1) Where is the speaker headed with this train of thought? Follow their reasoning as closely as possible. (2) How does the speaker feel about what they are saying? What emotional impact is this subject having on the speaker?

### **Four Rules of Verbal Communication**

Once you have learned to listen, you have earned the right to speak. This brings us back to Ephesians 4. Our primary focus is Ephesians 4:25-32, but it is important to understand the context. In verses 17-24, Paul makes the following points: (1) Paul's audience was once subject to evil desires because they had hearts that were hardened toward God. (2) Because of the gospel, they were introduced to a radically different lifestyle. (3) Gradually, they had to "put off" their pagan lifestyle and "put on" their gospel life.

Having explained this, Paul gives several examples of this "put on/put off" dynamic in verses 25-32. In this framework, we find the four rules of verbal communication.

#### **1. Falsehood versus truth**

In verse 25 the "put off" is falsehood. The "put on" is speaking the truth. Perhaps you have witnessed "Masked deception" in others or in yourself; that is, intentionally misrepresenting the truth because of a self-serving motive. In some cases, the words spoken might not be technically wrong, but the listener is led to believe something that serves your purposes instead of the Lord's.

#### **2. Bitterness versus Reconciliation**

This is seen in verses 26 and 27. Paul says put off bitterness by putting on quick resolution to conflict. God does not want delay in resolving differences that break fellowship. Notice that Paul does not condemn anger, but sinful anger. This is anger that gives the devil a foothold. We need one another to accomplish God's purposes. As with masked deception, many Christians do not even acknowledge bitterness. *Here the problem of communication is not in the choice of words but in the **absence of words needed for resolution.***

When you find yourself offended by another believer's words or actions, you must seek resolution of the offense as quickly as possible.

#### **3. Unwholesome versus Edifying Speech**

Verse 29 tells us we must put off unwholesome speech and put on edifying speech. Any choice of words that tears down an individual qualifies as unwholesome. This is especially important to watch during conflict resolution. Anytime we are crossed, it is all too easy to lash out. If you blow this (and you will), take the opportunity to replace what you did say with what you should have said in the beginning. In non-conflict situations, edification helps the other person to see how the Bible breaks down the imprisonment and sets them free from thinking the lies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Your speech is helping them to see God.

#### **4. Malicious versus Gracious Speech**

See verses 31 and 32. Included under malicious speech is rage and anger, clamor (loud protests), and slander. In all these verbal sins is the desire to hurt the other person. Are you prone to these verbal sins? When you disagree with someone, do you say whatever it takes to push your views? A good question to ask relatives or friends (if you dare) is "Do you feel like you are walking on eggshells around me?"

Gracious, thoughtful speech is characterized by kindness and compassion and forgiveness. You must keep impulsive, selfish, and malicious desires in check. On the basis of Christ's death and resurrection, God promises never to hold your sin against you. To honor Him, you must also extend such a pardon to others so they can see His grace in your life and be drawn to Him because of it. That is really what a Christian's communication is all about.