

Series: A More Excellent Way**Today's Message: Principles for Good Communication; Ephesians 4:25-32**

One of the most productive studies I was privileged to participate in during my training for Biblical counseling was a study produced by Faith Baptist (Biblical) Counseling Ministries called "The Four Rules of Communication." This message is taken from the study notes I received from Faith Baptist Counseling Ministries.

For the next three weeks I want us to discover *A More Excellent Way* to live out a faith-filled Christian life by looking first at how to better communicate with our spouses, children, families and church family. Second, we will learn a biblical approach to handling fear and anxiety. And third, how to guard your heart.

It is important to face the reality that good relationships are not built because there is an absence of problems. Everyone has problems. We are all sinners and that is all it takes to set the stage for conflict.

Most of us lack the basic Biblical understanding of God's prescription for working through conflicts in a more excellent way. But take heart! If you know the Lord Jesus as your Savior you can learn to deal with communication problems Biblically. God shows us *a more excellent way!*

The Bible gives us a high view of unity among fellow Christians. Psalm 133:1 celebrates unity among believers by saying, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity." In John 17 Jesus prayed earnestly for believers to live in unity with one another. Unity doesn't just happen. And we don't always *just get along* with each other. So we have to look to the Word of God to teach us.

Ephesians 4:25-32 provides a concise outline for good communication. Hence, the Four Rules of Communication. These rules are good for preventing and solving communication problems. Applying these four principles will lead to unity and a better fulfillment of Jesus' command to love one another in John 13:34. Our efforts to love one another through conflicts will become a testimony to the world that we are Jesus' disciples. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples: that you love one another. Let's get started!

- I) **Ephesians 4:25: Rule One: Be honest.** "Therefore, each of you must **put off** falsehood and [**put on**] speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."
 - A) Not just put off lying but engage one another by speaking (telling) the truth.
 - 1) It is an imperative: A command. "You speak!" Do it. Speak truth.
 - (a) Failure to communicate when there is a conflict is often times the same as deceit.
 - (i) Avoidance of the truth. In Genesis 31:20 the Bible says that Jacob deceived Laban. "Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban by not telling him he was running away."
 - 2) People cannot read our minds.
 - (a) 1 Corinthians 2:11, "For who among men knows the thought of a man..."
 - (i) Expecting someone with whom you have a problem to *figure it out* is harsh and unkind.
 - 3) Honesty is more than not lying. Truthfulness does the hard thing and addresses the issues as we are taught in Ephesians 4:25.
 - (a) Slamming someone behind their back heats up the issue and drags others into it. See Ephesians 4:31. It is called "brawling" and is connected with "slander."
 - B) Speak the Truth.
 - 1) Problems can never be solved unless they are expressed. (we will look more at this later.)
 - C) Dishonesty has to be rejected. Here are some examples of dishonesty when there is conflict:
 - 1) Outright deceit. Denying that there is a problem when there is clearly a problem.
 - 2) Avoidance. Your words say "all is well" but you purposely avoid interaction; you **snub** the person.

- 3) Disguising the offense by using humor and sarcasm instead of plainly addressing the issue.
- II) **Ephesians 4:26,27: Rule Two: Keep Current.**
- A) Get angry, but don't sin. "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."
- 1) Lying is sin. Anger may not be.
 - 2) Anger is a God-given energy used to solve problems. Anger is not necessarily sinful.
 - 3) Anger is sinful when used to attack others, or you bottle it up and stew over the problem (4:26,27)
 - 4) The principle given in Ephesians 4 teaches us to try to address today's conflict *today!* (4:27)
 - (a) Failure to solve problems daily leads to disappointment, resentment, bitterness and hatred.
 - (b) Failure to keep current distorts subsequent problems. Mole hills can become mountains!
- B) Avoid cutting off communication. How we often cut off communication:
- 1) By crying, threatening to blow up, or giving subtle ultimatums ("All I have to say is...")
- C) Six good questions to ask and analyze before bringing up a sticky issue or an offense.
- 1) Do I have the facts right? Pr. 18:13: He who answers before listening brings folly and shame.
 - 2) Should love cover this offense? Is the offense sinful? Is it hindering our growth and maturity? 1 Peter 4:8, "Let love cover a multitude of sins." Can your blanket of love cover the offense?
 - 3) Is my timing right? Pr. 15:23b: "How good is a timely word!"
 - 4) Is my attitude right? Am I wanting to be right more than I want to help build unity? **Eph. 4:15**
 - 5) Are my words going to be loving or caustic? **Eph. 4:15**
 - 6) Have I asked God to help and rule my heart? Pr. 3:5b, "...lean not on your own understanding."
- III) **Ephesians 4:29,30; 4:15: Rule Three: Attack the Problem not the person.**
- A) Avoid unwholesome words [corrupt communication]: Gk: **venting your spleen.**
- 1) Refuse to use words that attack a person's character. No name calling. (See Matt. 5:21-22)
 - 2) Refuse to use words that tear down, are aimed at hurting, or that hinder maturity. (James 3:5-12).
 - 3) Refuse to use words that are aimed at intentionally provoking and upsetting the other person.
 - 4) Especially, refuse to use words that grieve the Holy Spirit. (**see Eph. 4:30; 5:18**)
- B) Use "edifying" communication, which encourages and/or builds up (**See Eph. 4:25, 29**)
- 1) From these two verses the Lord insists that our words are spoken in love, and to build up!
 - 2) Gracious words. Gracious words are words that embolden the desire to do God's will in us.
 - 3) Wisdom in addressing an issue: "A gentle question pricks the conscience; an accusation hardens the heart." Example, "Are you being honest with me?"
 - 4) Peacemakers are not wimps or pushovers. But they will do the hard thing to resolve the conflict.
- IV) Ephesians 4:31,32: Rule Four: Act, Don't React.
- A) Ephesians 4:31: Sinful reactions: Sinful attitudes and actions that must be "**put off.**"
- 1) Bitterness: The refusal to treat someone as if they never hurt you. Nursing the hurt.
 - 2) Rage/Wrath: Blowing up! Flaring outbursts of anger aimed at silencing the other person.
 - 3) Anger: slow burning contempt for the other person; Disdain for the other person.
 - 4) Brawling/Clamor: public quarreling; contentiousness aimed at distracting the other person.
 - 5) Slander: from speech aimed at tearing down the other person's reputation. Abusive speech.
 - 6) Malice: a real desire to see harm come to others or to see them suffer.
 - 7) Summary: We have a natural tendency to become defensive or deflective of our own sin (Gen. 3).
- B) Ephesians 4:32: Actions. The attitudes we must "**put on**" to replace the sinful reactions.
- 1) Be kind: benevolent, helpful, courteous, considering the state of mind of the other person.
 - 2) Be Compassionate/tenderhearted: a Christ-like "good heartedness" toward the other.
 - 3) Forgiving: Giving up your claim to revenge or wrath or of holding a grudge. "just as God..."
 - 4) Summary: These actions are only manifested through our dependence on the Holy Spirit!
- V) Conclusion: 1) Arguments are only possible if each person reacts sinfully. 2) Doing right is hard at first but gets easier as you obey the Lord. Proverbs 13:15b: "...The way of the transgressor is hard!" 3) You can't change the other person and determine their response. But you can change how you respond.