

Words That Differ

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Introduction

The NKJV rendition of Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” The NASB reads, “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.”

Speech That Tears Down

The Greek word translated “corrupt” or “unwholesome” signifies that which is rotten, putrid, and worthless. It is descriptive of that which is bad and of poor quality, unwholesome to the extent of being harmful. Occurring 8x in the NT, this word is used metaphorically of bad trees and their fruit (Matthew 7:15-20; 12:33-37; Luke 6:43-45), bad fish (Matthew 13:47-50), and also of corrupt and unwholesome words (Ephesians 4:29).

Obviously, the words of false prophets are corrupt. So also are words rooted in enmity and malice, envy and jealousy, pettiness and a paucity of love. Let us avoid all manifestations of gossip and slander. May we shun all speech that contributes to divisiveness, disputes and dissensions (Matthew 15:16-20; Mark 7:20-23; Galatians 5:19-21).

Speech That Builds Up

The Greek word translated “**necessary** edification” refers to that which should be supplied because it is lacking and needed. Every congregation has needs; let us focus on fulfilling such. Disciples must be devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honor, contributing to the needs of the saints (Romans 12:10-13). Let us learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so as not to become unfruitful (Titus 3:14). Eliminating the utterance of unwholesome words, may we speak only those words that are good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that they will give grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29).

The Greek word translated “edification” is used literally of the construction of a physical building and figuratively of the strengthening and upbuilding of God’s spiritual house. The Jerusalem temple was a physical building destined to destruction (Matthew 24:1-8, esp. vs. 1; Mark 13:1-8, esp. vs. 1-2). The church is a spiritual building of everlasting duration (1 Corinthians 3:5-9; Ephesians 2:19-22; cf. also 1 Peter 2:4-5) .

Disciples must seek the building up of one another: in the proper exercise of Christian liberty (Romans 14:16-21; 15:1-3), in the proper exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12, 26; cf. also Romans 12:3-8), in the proper exercise of spiritual authority (2 Corinthians 10:7-11; 12:19-21; 13:5-10), in the performing of every necessary function (Ephesians 4:11-16), and in the utterance of every spoken word (Ephesians 4:29-32).

Conclusion

By avoiding corrupt/unwholesome words, and speaking only that which is good for necessary edification, we impart grace to the hearers. The Greek word translated “grace” usually refers to God’s unmerited favor. Here it is descriptive of that “winning quality or attractiveness that invites a favorable reaction, graciousness, attractiveness, charm, winsomeness” [BDAG].

Avoiding speech that is harmful and hurtful, may our words be good and gracious (Luke 4:22; Colossians 4:5-6; Ecclesiastes 10:12-13).