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"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

The Art of Communication

Lesson Subject: Family members should be open and honest with one another.

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What is the most common problem between husband and wife? The lack of communication! So often marriage counselors hear marriage partners say, "He won't talk to me" or, "She does not understand me." The problem is a failure to communicate. Often, even when a couple talk, they do not communicate. When one talks the other does not listen but instead is thinking of his or her reply. Many family problems would be solved if the husband and wife (or the parent and child) would talk honestly to each other and listen to each other. That is the way to communicate.

The Bible gives guidelines which apply to all communication — in the home, in society, in the church, or in one's personal relationship with God. This study will seek to set out those principles from an exposition of Ephesians 4:17-32. No attempt will be made to give a psychological approach to the problem. We are interested in what the Bible says about it.

1. THE NECESSITY OF COMMUNICATION

A. Communication is the basis of all effective relationships. The prophet asked, "*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*" (Amos 3:3). Of course they cannot; they cannot agree unless they communicate. God communicated with "*the fathers by the prophets*" and now has "*in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*" (Hebrews 2:1). Do you see how important communication is in our spiritual life? It is just as essential in our family life. **B. Communication is a sign of loving concern.** What is a person

saying when he refuses to communicate? He is saying that he is unconcerned. Those who reject God by refusing His counsel and rejecting His reproof (Proverbs 1:25, 30) will certainly face His judgment. It is a high insult to ignore or reject Him. What does it mean when God hears our prayers and responds to our petitions? It means that He loves us and desires the best for us. Look on conversation (real communion, not just talking) with your family as a proof of your love to them.

C. Communication is vital to our spiritual lives. We speak to God in prayer. He speaks to us through the Bible and the impressions of the Holy Spirit. Are you communicating with God each day?

II. THE BASES FOR COMMUNICATION (Ephesians 4:17-21)

A. Be free from spiritual bondage (Ephesians 4:17-19). Those who have experienced freedom in Christ can communicate with each other much easier than unbelievers do. That may account for the divorce rate among dedicated Christians being much lower than it is among non-Christians.

1. Spiritual bondage brings emptiness. Those who walk in *"the vanity of their mind"* will follow a meaningless and frantic life-style.

2. Spiritual bondage causes ignorance. *"The understanding darkened"* is the way God describes it. *"The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble"* (Proverbs 4:19). No wonder they destroy their relationships.

3. Spiritual bondage produces alienation. Such people are *"alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them."* Satan has blinded their eyes (II Corinthians 4:4). They grope as if they had no eyes, stumbling at noon as in the night (Isaiah 59:10). What a pity when Jesus, the light of life, is so readily available.

4. Spiritual bondage accompanies sensuality. Paul described people who had *"given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."* Absence of spiritual sight causes one to corrupt what he knows by nature (Jude 10). *"Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled"* (Titus 1:15). How can two people truly communicate when they are in that condition?

B. Be free in Jesus (Ephesians 4:20, 21). Having *"learned Christ . . . heard him, and . . . been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus,"* you have a totally different spirit for communication with family and with friends. You do not have to live in emptiness, ignorance, alienation, sensuality, or uncleanness. Freedom in Christ gives you freedom in dealing with people.

C. Forsake sin (Ephesians 4:22). When you *"put off . . . the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,"* you have made a major step toward free communication. Put on the "new man" you have become in Christ, living in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24). Now you are ready to open your heart and share freely without fear that your real self will be found out.

III. THE ENEMIES OF COMMUNICATION (Ephesians 4:25-31)

A. Falsehood is an enemy of communication. *"Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another"* (Ephesians 4:25). Honesty is the basis of all good human relations. It is particularly important to family relationships. No good communication can be based on deception.

B. Bitterness is the enemy of communication. God says, *"Be ye angry, and sin not: . . . neither give place to the devil. . . . Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice"* (Ephesians 4:26, 27, 31). Husbands are to love their wives and not be bitter against them (Colossians 3:19). Parents are to love their children and not provoke them to break their spirits (Colossians 3:21). Bitterness cancels understanding and sympathy. It guarantees that communication will not take place.

C. Selfishness is the enemy of communication. That grasping spirit which seeks profit to self, whatever the cost to others, brings certain death to real communication (Ephesians 4:28). How much better is the spirit that is willing to give, even at personal cost and sacrifice, for the welfare of another (Genesis 50:21). The selfish person considers only his personal advantage. Real communication with him is almost impossible.

D. Bad speech is the enemy of communication. God says, *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers"* (Ephesians 4:29). What one says may defile the whole life when *"it is set on fire of hell"* (James 3:6). Cursing, lying, and accusing others are enemies of true communication. Keep the temper calm (by an act of the will) and the words pure when you share with any person.

E. Spiritual rebellion is the enemy of communication. Paul admonished believers to *"grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption"* (Ephesians 4:30). How a Christian wife married to a non-Christian husband should observe that principle! *"Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word,*

they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives" (1 Peter 3:1). We cannot accomplish the good of real communication if we are practicing the evil of spiritual rebellion.

IV. THE AIDS TO COMMUNICATION (Ephesians 4:32)

Ephesians 4:32 sets out five things which form the basis of our communication. Cultivate these graces and you will find your communication with God and man greatly improved.

A. Kindness aids communication. *"Be ye kind one to another."* If you approach your husband, or wife, or children *"with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love"* (Ephesians 4:2), what will be their response? You will find them responding in a like spirit to you. Communication is possible then.

B. Tenderness aids communication. There is no substitute for being *"tenderhearted,"* understanding, or tenderly affectionate. It is being *"kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another"* (Romans 12:10).

A family conversation must never include harshness, condemnation, or anger. Much more appropriate are mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering (Colossians 3:12). If one member becomes angry, an answer in humility and love will calm the waters and peace will prevail.

The practice of tenderness will help relations within the family, outside the family, and with God. Tenderness is not weakness. It is appropriate for the man as well as the woman.

C. Forgiveness aids communication. *"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"* is the divine principle. How did God forgive us? He forgave immediately, totally, freely, graciously, and eternally. How do you forgive a family member? Suppose a sharp word is spoken in family communication. Forgive it. Suppose a false accusation is made against you. Forgive it. Suppose a merit was given to another when it truly belonged to you. Forgive it. Keep on forgiving and peace will prevail.

D. Selflessness aids communication. Paul said, *"I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved"* (II Corinthians 12:15). Anyone with that attitude has the basic quality for settling problems and promoting peace. That is the essence of a selfless spirit. God's principle is, *"Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth"* (I Corinthians 10:24). That spirit will not make one a door mat over which people walk (though some may take advantage of such a spirit), but it is the way to show the example of Christ in our dealings with

others. Practice that grace.

E. Love aids communication. Remember that love is more than feeling; it is commitment. Love is the commitment to bring the greatest possible happiness and fulfillment to the life of the beloved one. Read Psalm 103:8-18 to see an example of God's love. Or read I John 4:7-21 to see God's love shown in Jesus Christ. What an example He has set!

Here is our challenge: *"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour"* (Ephesians 5:1, 2).

If you are having family problems, here is the place to begin to set them right. Look back over the outline of this lesson. Place it alongside your life as a measure. Put away anything that is wrong; cultivate anything that is right. Make your home a haven where understanding and love preside.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the most common husband-wife problem?
2. Why is that the most common problem?
3. Why is communication so important in the home?
4. In what ways can a husband and wife communicate better?
5. What spiritual bondage hinders communication?
6. What are some of the common enemies of communication?
7. How does a bad relationship with God produce a bad relationship with other people?
8. How do tenderness and forgiveness aid communication?
9. How does Ephesians 5:1, 2 relate to this study?
10. What principle have you found in this study that will help communication in your family?