

Theme: You! Yes, you!

“Who, me? Couldn’t be!?” Remember that song? “Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?”

Classic. It was such merriment to sing that as a kid of a certain age and get a chance to accuse someone of stealing the cookies right out of the jar! Excitement! Getting to deny that you stole the cookies when your name was thrown out by one of your friends, “No way!” Fun times. Anyone else? Anyway, point is, when we hear sections of God’s Word about how we’re to think of and live with others, God makes it clear that they’re being spoken directly to and are immediately applicable to us. “Who, me?” Yes! You! These instructions apply directly to you. These instructions from God tell us how to preserve and increase the peace, unity, and love we have with each other. So, because you’re a believer who loves Jesus tremendously, you’re eager to listen to and do everything he says. These words apply to you, yes, you.

God says, “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*” (**Ephesians 4:29**) In the way you communicate, there is no place for mockery, belittling, rumor, gossip, hate, slander or anything that is unwholesome. Because we’re sinners, these things pop up in our hearts reflexively. We fight against these impulses, but until we master them, the next best thing is to prevent them from coming out of our mouths or phones to the comments section. Keep them in check! Tall order, but it’s what the Holy Spirit calls and enables us to do in the Word. The Spirit causes us to be more mindful, not just of what we say, but the overall tone we use as we think of others and then when we interact with others, that each and everything we do be constructive to build them up according to their needs. So ask, “What is this person going through, what are their needs, and how can I meet them?” The extremely beneficial byproduct of this way of being is that others, who weren’t even centrally involved but heard, benefit because they have received grace from you.

Are we this way? How do we find out? We ask ourselves how we think of others, those we know personally and those we know very indirectly through various media, and examine the attitudes of our hearts which determines our thinking and speaking. “Do I always seek to build up and edify or can I be crude, tear down, and mock? Do others benefit, receive grace, from what I say and how I say it?” Consider your non-verbal communications. That exasperated sigh might have been louder than intended, the eye roll not so subtle. This is how we are with each other sometimes, but shouldn’t be any time since nothing but grief comes from it! Not just among us, grief with God too! *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Ephesians 4:30)* When unwholesome and corrupt communication goes out from your mouth, the Holy Spirit also, not only the other person, is offended and sinned against by it. He made you pure by washing you in Christ. Be pure, just as he made you. He is the thing that seals you in Christ for the day of redemption, don’t grieve him. Instead, rejoice that you are saved and live the holy life he gives! If there’s cause for bitterness against someone, kill it and bury it along with any feelings of hate and rage that might cause you to denigrate in your thinking or defame your neighbor in your speech. You can because that part of you has died with Christ but hasn’t been raised with him. *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” (Ephesians 4:31)* How many of us know this passage by heart? It’d be helpful in some major ways.

Imagine a place that’s free from bitterness, quarreling, and slander but filled with patience, grace, and an attitude, complete with follow through, of building others, all the others, not just the fellow believers, up according to their needs. What a place that is to be! What people to be around! You, yes, you, have been called by God to be this way, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)* Be the thing that makes another comfortable or do whatever you can to facilitate it! That’s service! When that’s a two way street, a state of true blessedness exists. Mutual tenderheartedness isn’t weakness, but the solid foundation of healthy Christian

relationships. It leads to quickness and generosity in forgiveness, which is never to be confused with an endorsement of sin. Forgiveness is not the same as saying, “It’s okay.” Forgiveness recognizes it was not okay at all and then just chooses to let the guilt of it go. Forgiveness is the most effective tool we have when it comes to living together in peace. There’s no limit to the forgiveness God gives you in Christ. Because you have received true generosity in forgiveness from the Lord Jesus, you give forgiveness with true generosity. Easy come, easy go. Not exactly, right? Jesus wouldn’t say your forgiveness was easy to accomplish! Sweat as blood, remember? Suffering all type of anguish: physical on the cross, spiritual and emotional in being mocked for his love, being forsaken by his own Father. Earning your forgiveness wasn’t easy, but Jesus gladly earned it because it meant your salvation.

This. This dying on the cross in place of another type love is what you imitate, no matter the situation, no matter the person. You live this way because you are beloved of God. *“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children.” (Ephesians 5:1)* You are a child of the Father, never stop, with the sincerest childlike admiration, looking up to him. Love him and learn from him to live. Consider the love the Father has lavished on you that you should, in Christ, be called children of God – and that’s EXACTLY what you are!! You, yes, you, imitate God by lavishing love on people.

What does the love of the Father look like? It looks like what Jesus did, how he did it, who he did it for, *“And walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:2)* Christ is your way of walking. You, yes you, live as Jesus lived. Jesus served everyone. Jesus handed himself over to death to pay for your sins because he loves you. What Jesus did, he did for your benefit. He knew what you deserved and endured your suffering so you would know only his righteousness and the Father’s everlasting love. Everything Jesus does pleases the Father perfectly because Jesus does everything perfectly. The Father said this at his baptism and transfiguration, then showed it on Good Friday by receiving his Son’s spirit when the

payment for the sin of the world was made and accepted, on Easter by raising him to life, and on Ascension by sitting Jesus at his right hand to rule all things for your good! Christ is the sacrifice, the offering and payment that makes you God's pleasing child. A great exchange indeed, unfair, but great and very true for you, yes, you. Let this knowledge comfort you because it means heaven for you. Let this knowledge empower you to love and build others up according to their needs with every confidence because Christ has taken away your sin. Amen.