

**Whatever Happens, Walk Worthy**  
**Opening of School Convention**  
**September 3, 1998, 7:15 p.m.**  
**Whatever Happens... Watch Our Words**  
**Ephesians 4:1-3, 29-30**

Introduction

- Chorus - "In our words, Lord, be glorified..."
- The Feb. 8, 1993 issue of Newsweek had as its cover article: The Power of Talk -- and the article focused on how call-in shows are shaking up politics.
  - a. Larry King Live continues to be one of the highest rated program on CNN.
  - b. Rush Limbaugh and Dr. Laura continue to talk on radio each day.
  - c. It seems that during the past several years the nation is recognizing the power of talk.
- But, the subject of our speech and power of our words is addressed by Paul in the New Testament, and what we hear from Paul about our words is very different from what is heard today.
  - a. Read Ephesians 4:1-3, 29
  - b. Paul encouraged members of the body to use their speech for the help of others, for their upbuilding as the occasion may offer.
  - c. In so doing, Satan will not get a foothold in our lives (4:26-27).

**Three biblical principles regarding the words we speak.**

**I. Principle #1: Our speech should be sacramental (grace giving)**

- A. In the New Testament perspective, dialog is a sacrament.
  - 1. We are to converse with each other within the fellowship in such a way that the words become a vehicle and demonstration of the very grace of God.
  - 2. In all conversation usage of language and subject matter has to be such that the upbuilding and edification is for the purpose of "ministering grace" to the bearer.
- B. For Paul, there is no room for words that degrade another person.
  - 1. "Do not let any corrupt or unwholesome talk come from your mouth."
    - a. corrupt talk is foul talk
    - b. Col. 4:6 - "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt.."
- C. In biblical anthropology -- the mouth is representative of the whole body and reveals the whole person.
  - 1. Matt. 12:34 - Jesus said, "out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."
  - 2. Paul -- one's speech reveals the quality of his/her relationship with Christ
- D. We are not talking about a technique, but an attitude
  - 1. I need you (you have gifts and strengths that I don't have to affirm, disciple, correct and upbuild)
  - 2. I love you (you are my brother/sister in Christ)

3. I accept you (you are being changed by Christ as I am being changed)
4. I trust you (you desire to serve the same Christ as I)
5. I respect you (you are different, yet we are one in Christ)
6. I serve you (I want to minister grace to you)

... **an attitude** ...

E. It is also a matter of the focus of our words

1. "...only helpful in building others up, according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."
2. There must be a focus beyond ourselves, beyond self-serving comments  
-- our focus must be on the upbuilding of others.

**Our speech should be sacramental -- grace giving**

## **II. Principle #2: Our speech can be destructive**

A. Listen to this quote from the book, "The Power to Bless"

"All who have influence and weight with others have the power to bless and to withhold blessing,

to cause to grow or to wither,

to help or to hinder,

to heal or to hurt."

B. Do you/Is use some of the following unfair communication techniques?

1. Silence, ignoring, "pouting"
2. Sarcasm and ridicule
3. Unfavorable comparison

4. Exposing "dirty linen" in public
  5. Blaming the person for something which he cannot help or cannot do anything about
  6. Intimidating, yelling, exploding
  7. Bragging
  8. Nagging, whining
- C. Consider these questions regarding the use of our words:
1. Does what I say build up or tear down the other person?
  2. Would I say what I am saying directly to the person involved?
  3. Do I know all the facts or am I responding on the basis of half-truths or partial facts?
  4. Is my response triggered more by emotion than by reason?
  5. Is the issue really deserving of the attention and energy I am giving it?
  6. Have I tried to accept the feelings of the other person, and understand why the other person feels the way I do?
    - a. Someone has said, "The man beside you is different only until you get to know him."
    - b. Another has said, "If it doesn't make a difference, don't let it make a difference."
- D. Sometimes being emotionally honest requires criticism of another in an appropriate manner
1. For every criticism, however, find 8 reasons to praise the person (we find what we look for)

2. It cannot be superficial -- it must be honest

Thank you

I appreciate you

You were helpful

You affirmed me

I am grateful for you

- E. Review with me Eph. 4:26-27 regarding conflict within the body of Christ

*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. Be immediate in dealing with conflict.
2. Do not delay... In delaying Satan gets a foothold in our lives.
3. Personal illustration: Pastor, forgive me”

**If we are not careful, our speech can be destructive.**

### **III. Principle #3: Our speech must be devotional (Spirit-inspired)**

- A. Verse 30 -- "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God"

1. Refers back to verse 29, “Do not let any unwholesome talk...”
2. We grieve God when we tear others down and we don’t deal with our conflict in a Christianly way.
3. God is intimately concerned about the speech of His people.

- B. Illustration: Talking Past Each Other

Several summers ago, while visiting friends in a nearby state I had a very vivid dream. For some reason I was in an inner city, somewhere in the

United States. I was traveling with a friend, and the two of us had just witnessed a violent argument between two persons in a store. One individual was from the inner city and was selling merchandise to another person who was not from the inner city. For some reason, a violent argument erupted which I witnessed.

I cannot remember the cause of the argument, but I remember the person "from" the inner city saying to the other who was not, "You will never understand, you are not from here."

I remember listening very intently at both sides of the argument and believing parts of what each was saying.

The two people arguing finally separated. I remember being so moved by what I had just experienced that, for some reason, I had the courage to speak to the inner city person who did not leave the scene. I said to him, "I really do not know who is right and who is wrong. I don't know what should be done in this situation." And then I continued, "What bothers me more is that what I have just experienced is a small picture of our society at large. We speak, and argue vehemently from our perspective, always assuming that we are right." But what jolted me out of my dream was a statement I made to him with intense passion, "It seems like you were just talking past one another."

At that moment I awakened from my dream. Literally, my heart was pounding. The time was about 5:45 a.m. I began to think about the dream and its implications. I couldn't get away from the words, "I really don't know

who is right or wrong, but it seems like you were talking right past each other."

By this time I was wide awake, and I began to think of the implications of my dream for MVNC. I was so moved and shaken by the dream that I moved out of bed to the next room where I had my portable computer set up and I recorded my dream on the computer.

"I really don't know who is right or wrong, but it seems like we often just talk right past one another." How often this scenario is played out in real life. And how painful--even at Mount Vernon Nazarene College.

Scripture verses flooded my thoughts like the verse from Ephesians 2:22: "And in Him you too are being built together to come a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit."

- C. God the Holy Spirit is intensely interested in our "talking" and our relationships.
  - 1. He will enable us to hear what we should hear, see what we should see, speak what we should speak.
  - 2. If we ask -- if we believe it is of vital importance to him -- He can/will speak His very words through us.
- D. The book of James gives us some excellent guidance.

*James 1:26, If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*

*James 3:17, But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

James tells us that wisdom that comes from the Lord “is shown by deeds done in humility.”

- E. Do you really believe that in Christ you and those with whom you differ--you too--by God's plan are being built together--really--to become a dwelling in which god lives--right here at MVNC--by His Spirit? That's the key--by **His** Spirit.
- F. All of the potential for misunderstanding on a Christian college campus should drive us to our knees with the prayer of "Lord, teach us to pray."
1. By Your Spirit, teach me to pray ... for my roommate.
  2. By Your Spirit, teach me to pray ... for my teachers, or students, or colleagues.
  3. By Your Spirit, teach me to pray ... for those in the dorm, apartment, office, or class.
  4. By Your Spirit, teach me to pray ... for staff and administrators whom I do not understand or even appreciate.
  5. By Your Spirit, teach me to pray ... for our chaplain who may lead the chapel services or preach in ways I do not like or understand.
  6. By Your Spirit, teach me to pray ... for the school president who tries to balance all of the expectations on campus--many of them conflicting expectations between students, faculty, staff, parents, trustees, and administration--while keeping a vision for the institution before the faculty, staff, and trustees.



7. By Your Spirit, teach me to pray ... for myself, in ways that are pleasing to God.
  - a. from give me, to make me--"Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace" (shalom);
  - b. from "my" way, to "your" will--"I'll say yes, Lord, yes to Your will and to Your way;"
  - c. from a focus on God's gifts to me, to a passion for his blessing on me--"Lord, make me a blessing to someone...today."

## Conclusion

- Paul is concerned with the role of words exchanged between individuals within the body.
- In the midst of everyday dialog, God's grace and power should flow through words used.
- Back to my dream. I don't want to forget the key statements in the dream.
  - "You will never understand, you are not from here."
  - "It seems like you were just talking past one another."
- These statements can and will characterize us at MVNC if:
  - a. We stay in our own little world.
  - b. We stay with our own little circle of friends.
  - c. We stay in our rooms.
  - d. We stay in our own little comfort zone.
- These statements can and will characterize us at MVNC...

- a. ...if we fail to work consistently at putting our Christian faith to work at the daily pressure points.
  - b. ...if we fail to listen, to try to understand, to strive for win/win solutions.
  - c. ...if we fail to pray daily for those "who are just different from us."
  - d. ...if we fail to believe that "in Him (Christ) you and I...are being built together (only God knows how) to become a dwelling--a beautiful, diverse Christian community--in which God--God Himself--lives by His Spirit--His very own presence."
- I want to leave the presence of other people with them...
    - a. feeling better about themselves
    - b. thinking clearer about their situation
    - c. growing stronger in their faith
  - I want to be remembered as one who...
    - a. accepts others (warts & all), not rejects them
    - b. encourages them, not discourages them
    - c. uplifts individuals, not undermines them
    - d. is positive rather than negative
    - e. is supportive rather than destructive
  - I really want to be focused on the future, not the past
    - a. on the other person, not on myself
    - b. on possibilities, not problems
    - c. on dreams and visions, not on limitations and liabilities
  - Because You are pleased, O God, when I reflect Jesus in the words I speak...

In my life, Lord, be glorified...

In my words, Lord, be glorified...

In our school, Lord, be glorified...