

Lord of Our Speech



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 9; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Eph. 4:15, 29; Col. 4:6; James 3:5-13; 4:11.*

Memory Text: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (*Colossians 4:6, NKJV*).

Key Thought: We are called to use our speech for the glory of our Lord and the blessing of others.

The gift of speech can be a tremendous blessing or a terrible curse. When we enter into a newness of life under the lordship of Christ, Jesus invites us to let Him be the Lord of our speech. Used wisely, our speech can bring glory to God and blessing to those around us. Misused, our speech can wreak havoc. Corrupt communication causes pain to the heart of God and damage to the lives of those within our circle of influence.

Ellen White reminds us that “the faculty of speech is a precious gift, and if the noblest of our faculties, reason, is set to the task of knowing God, then the gift of speech may become a means of grace to others, a channel through which the knowledge of God may be communicated.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, p. 277.

In this week's study, we will explore some practical ways in which we can use our speech for the glory of God and the blessing of others. The same appeal that the apostle Paul gave to young Timothy is given to each one of us today: “[Be] an example in speech” (*1 Tim. 4:12, NRSV*).

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.

Speaking Words of Praise to the Lord

It is the highest privilege for members of the human family to speak words of praise to the Lord. The psalms are full of exhortations to praise the Lord. In Psalm 9 the psalmist David declares, “I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High” (*Ps. 9:1, 2, NKJV*).

As much as possible, read the last five psalms. What was it about the Lord that caused the psalmist to utter so much praise?

Throughout the Scriptures, we find the testimonies of individuals who used their gift of speech to express praises to God. For example, when the secret of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was revealed to Daniel, the young prophet was quick to offer praise to the Lord (*see Dan. 2:20-23*). This is seen over and over again in the Bible.

What spiritual advantages come to us by taking time to praise the Lord, whether verbally or in writing?

There’s power in words that impacts not only those who hear or read those words but those who speak or write them. Through our own acts of praising the Lord for His goodness, His mercy, His divine acts in our behalf, we only strengthen our faith and appreciation of the Lord’s goodness, mercy, and divine acts in our behalf. Thinking about these things is also important, but there’s something about expressing them, either through spoken or written words, that increases their impact on us. No wonder, then, that the Scriptures have whole sections praising the Lord.

Write your own psalm of praise to the Lord for whatever you feel impressed to praise Him for, and then read it aloud. See for yourself how such expressions can impact you only for the good.

Key Text: *Psalm 19:14*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that our speech should glorify God and bless others.
2. To show how words impact the speaker and the listener.
3. To show that our words should be used for edification.

Lesson Outline:

I. Words of Praise and Blessings (*Ps. 9:1, 2*).

- A. If Christ is truly our Lord, how will our speech be affected?
- B. How can our speech point others to Christ?
- C. Explain how our speech is an example of who or what controls our life.

II. The Influence of Speech.

- A. How do words of praise and edification strengthen faith and build character in the speaker?
- B. Why is it important for us to speak the truth with love and grace?

III. Guided by the Holy Spirit (*Gal. 5:22, 23*).

- A. When guided by the Holy Spirit, how can our daily speech be a powerful tool for winning souls?
- B. How will a sincere, personal relationship with Jesus affect someone's preaching?
- C. What would our speech be like if it reflected the fruit of the Spirit?

Summary: Because words have a powerful influence for good or evil, we should use our speech to benefit those with whom we speak. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can speak words that will build character, bless others, and give honor to God.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Speech.

In the beginning, God's word created our world and made us in His image. Most of us understand that being made in God's image means being part of God's creative process by bearing children. Yet, there is also creative power in our words. As creatures made in His image, we, too, exercise our words to "create" our worlds. When we speak, where nothing was, something becomes. Our vows, our promises, our encouragement, and our commands create the reality of the inhabitants of our world. Good words, habitually spoken, create a world where the inhabitants find safety and love. Well-chosen words create a place where life and love can thrive. Life needs such a place to develop. When the place created is protecting and nurturing, growth readily occurs. God's Word creates such a place in

Speaking With Grace (*Col. 4:6*).

Study the apostle Paul's counsel to the believers in Colosse, as recorded in Colossians 4:6. What does it mean to "let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (*NKJV*)? Keeping in mind, too, that salt back then was used as a preservative, what do you think "seasoned with salt" means in this context?

Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find the suggestion that grace can originate in the hearts of human beings. Grace always originates in the heart of God. Grace cannot be worked up. It must be prayed down from heaven. We can speak with grace only if our lives are filled with grace. How does that happen? Through a daily living connection with the Source of all grace, through understanding how grace has been poured out upon us. When we keep this great truth before us, that we have been recipients of grace, that we have received from God, through Christ, what we absolutely do not deserve—then we can begin to speak with grace to others.

Read the story in John 8:1-11 of the adulterous woman who was cast at the feet of Jesus. How does the interaction of Jesus with the woman and with her accusers illustrate one way by which one can speak with grace?

We often face situations where the natural tendency would be to speak sharp words, words that don't reflect grace but anger, judgment, or retaliation. Oftentimes, we might be in a position where a firm word is needed, but even then it's how we say it, the manner and the tone in which we say it, that can either reflect grace or our own selfish nature. Even when we have been mistreated, the Lord desires that we respond with words of grace rather than words of rebuke or retaliation. Christ's whole passion provides us with a perfect example of speaking words of grace, even to those who mistreat us.

Think about the last time your words were graceless. Though all you can do is ask for forgiveness for that past act, what can you do now to help prevent yourself from making a similar mistake next time?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

our minds; and in that place, the mind of Christ grows.

When we, as God's children, have the mind of Christ, our words can do what the word of God in Jesus did. Our words can enter into the midst of fallen humanity to heal, inspire, give hope, and create peace. Carefully selected and disciplined words can help the untamed and untrained. The right words can give life where there is death; and with the right words, your church family can become a community of support, sharing a vision of love and Christian growth.

God always delivers His words with love to build up, not destroy. There are times when we use words to destroy what we imagine to be bad. Like sticks of dynamite, we imagine our explosive words will level battlefields of contention. Such impulses are rarely from God. Hastily spoken, harsh words more frequently destroy new growth than nurture it.

We often exhibit our tendency to use such words in our intimate relationships, because we trust that in these relationships it is safe to vent. However, we must recall God formed those we are close to; and we must respect that. Venting can erode what God has formed, causing a landslide. In such relationships, our words should show respect. Our words should create places where freedom to disagree is allowed and separateness is valued. Love respects the differences in individual uniqueness. Communication about troublesome spots in relationships ought to allow each person abundant time to mentally and emotionally process what it would mean to see things as the other person sees them.

We grow the ability to speak God's words. Be patient with, and think positively about, your own growth. You did not know how to speak on the day you were born. You cried and screamed in an attempt to communicate your feelings. In a way, your cry created your world. It was a stimulus you placed into the environment to get a reaction. Words, too, create worlds. As Christians, we desire to participate in the creation of a world made new. We want to be part of a world where love and harmony, peace and justice, hope and kindness create new life. Creating such a world means developing a language that is mutually acceptable to all God's community. In itself, this language will need to promote harmony, peace, justice, and kindness in order for all parties to experience love and respect. Loving communication requires that we learn to understand the effect our words have on others.

Speaking the Truth in Love (*Eph. 4:15*).

As we suggested yesterday, there are times when we might need to speak words of rebuke, counsel, or admonition to others.

Read the following texts: Matthew 16:23; 23:13-39; John 14:8, 9; John 18:19-23. What kind of tone do you think Jesus used when speaking these words? How would that tone reflect the principles of love and grace He Himself embodied?

“Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, that refused to receive Him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. They rejected Him, the Saviour, but He regarded them with pitying tenderness, and sorrow so deep that it broke His heart. Every soul was precious in His eyes. While He always bore Himself with divine dignity, He bowed with tenderest regard to every member of the family of God. In all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

Read Ephesians 4:15. How do you understand what it means to speak the “truth” in love? Is “truth” still “truth” if spoken in any other way but love?

Unfortunately, there are times when we fail to speak the truth in love. We seem to easily fall into one of two traps. Some are quick to speak the truth but fail to speak it in love. Others replace love with a sentimentalism that hinders their ability to speak the truth at all.

So often it's not what we say but how we say it that can make all the difference in the world. Stand before a mirror, or before others, and practice saying the same words, once in a loving tone, once in a harsh, unkind tone. You will be shocked that, though the words themselves are the same, their meanings will seem so different. There's a powerful lesson here for us, if we will learn it.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Psalm 9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 13; James 3:5-13; 4:11

- ❶ Who does not warm to a compliment sincerely delivered? God does not need our praise, but His heart is warmed when we recognize His activity in our behalf and praise Him for His divine attributes. Take a few moments to list all the things about God for which you are grateful. How many can you come up with?
- ❷ “Be gracious in your speech,” wrote Paul (*Col. 4:6, The Message*). Share examples from your experience when barriers were broken down or tensions relieved when someone spoke graciously. Share at least one example when someone intended well but spoke unadvisedly. What was the result? How does one guard against speaking ill-advisedly?
- ❸ Most of us are not professional communicators. Yet, we communicate every day with people whose only source of information about Christianity is what they see and hear in us. Read Mark 5:1-20. What is the most important thing to communicate with others (*notice especially vss. 19, 20*). If you had to summarize what the Lord has done for you, what would you say?
- ❹ In Ephesians 4:29-32, Paul urged believers to be careful how they communicate with one another. We are not just to avoid “unwholesome talk” and all that such talk involves; we are to communicate messages that edify one another and “benefit those who listen” (*vs. 29, NIV*). What are some examples of edifying and beneficial communication? What are some settings where such communication would be especially useful?
- ❺ One of Solomon’s proverbs states: “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue” (*Prov. 17:28, NIV*). Should a Christian spend more time listening or talking? Explain.

Speaking in the Power of the Spirit

(Acts 1:8, 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

When someone refers to speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit, we generally think of preaching. The testimony of Scripture is clear: It is God's intention that all preaching be delivered in the power of the Spirit.

Study the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:8 and the testimony of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. What is the secret of powerful preaching?

Powerful preaching is not the product of human wisdom or eloquence. Rather, it is the testimony of one who has entered into a personal, intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Holy Spirit who placed His seal of approval upon the preaching of Paul will also enable humble servants of Christ in our generation to speak with a demonstration of divine power.

Speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit, however, is not limited to preaching. God intends that all our speech be delivered with a demonstration of divine power. Indeed, each one of us who lives in newness of life under the lordship of Christ is given the privilege and responsibility of speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit. Divine power, however, doesn't necessarily mean just eloquence (*see Exod. 4:10, 1 Cor. 2:1*). If we are speaking in the Spirit, our words, our tone, our message will reflect the attributes of the Spirit that are made manifest in lives touched by the Spirit. Our words will reflect the kind of people we are; they will reflect whether we are walking after the flesh or after the Spirit.

Also, we must never confuse grand elocution with speaking in the Spirit. Many of history's worst tyrants were men whose speech was very powerful and very effective; one, though, would hardly say they were speaking in the Spirit.

What principles do the following texts give us that help us know whether we, or someone else, is speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit? 1 Cor. 12:1, 2; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9, 10; 6:17-19. How can you apply these principles in your own life and speech?

Witnessing

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.”

Perhaps we feel if we repeat this to our children enough times, *someone* may believe it someday. The reality, however, is that a few harsh words can hurt far more than sticks or stones.

We are called to be witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (*Acts 1:8, NIV*). The order is of great significance: Witness first to those in our immediate surroundings, then broaden to neighboring areas, and then to corners unknown. How often are we polite to strangers but lack simple courtesy with those closest to us?

If those who know you best were asked to judge simply on your speech and everyday conversation, would they be able to identify you as a follower of Christ?

Much is said in the Bible regarding both malicious and uplifting speech. Unfortunately, many do not practice the kind of discipline James warns is necessary in his numerous analogies regarding the tongue (*James 3:1-10*).

How well do we know Barnabas? He was the one who recommended Saul (later known as Paul) to the disciples. He also went with Paul and later with John Mark on their journeys. His name means “son of encouragement,” and that was precisely his role.

Speaking uplifting words may not gain you a position of prominence, but often those who are the greatest blessings in our lives are those who are least conscious of their being a blessing.

We are told the world will know us by our love. Let us determine to be sons and daughters of encouragement, speaking the truth in love, and harnessing our God-given gift of speech to His honor and glory so others may see Him through us.

Avoiding Corrupt Communication (*Eph. 4:29*).

The apostle Paul admonished the believers in Ephesus to avoid corrupt communication. Unfortunately, many of us live in a social environment where corrupt communication is considered normal. People frequently take the name of the Lord in vain, use profane language, and make rude or suggestive comments. Even as Christians, if we allow ourselves to be exposed continuously to this kind of language, sooner or later it will influence us to where we, ourselves, are more likely to use these words. We must constantly be on guard.

In the light of Paul's comment in *Ephesians 4:29*, how would you define "corrupt communication"? Why is it not limited only to what is known as profanity? Consider also *Exod. 20:16, Prov. 10:18, Eph. 4:31, James 3:5-13, 4:11*.

Corrupt communication tears down. The Greek word used in 1 Timothy 3:11, translated "slanderers" (*KJV*) or "malicious talkers" (*NIV*), is *diabolos*, one of the names used for the enemy, Satan. When people use corrupt communication, they are actually doing Satan's work. What a testimony to the power that is inherent in our words!

In contrast, the apostle Paul appeals to believers to use speech that is "good for necessary edification" (*Eph. 4:29, NKJV*). The word used here literally means "building up." One translation puts it this way: "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" (*Eph. 4:29, NIV*).

Our words, then, have a powerful influence, either for good or for evil, for either building up others in faith or for tearing them down. Who hasn't experienced themselves the power of words, either for good or for evil, either for edification or for creating doubt? How crucial that we watch not just our words but the tone and manner in which we express them. Indeed, even the right words in the wrong spirit also can be considered "corrupt communication."

How much "corrupt communication" emanates from your own lips? We're not talking just about curse words; we're talking about untruths, slander, exaggeration, being judgmental, and so forth. Take a hard look at yourself: What things might you need to change regarding your speech?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Can you remember when you gave your first speech? It may have been at “Show and Tell” time in kindergarten or later in an actual speech class. What were the results of your message? Share your story with your Sabbath School class. As you look back on that experience and its consequences, consider how God invites us to look forward. How does He want to use your voice so others’ “faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (*1 Cor. 2:5, NIV*)?

Thought Questions:

- ❶ Have you ever tamed anything? To *tame* is to be “taken from the wild state and made obedient: a tame bear”; “gentle”; or “tone down; subdue.”—E. L. Thorndike and C. L. Barnhart, *Thorndike/Barnhart High School Dictionary* (Scott, Foresman and Company, 1965), p. 965. It is much easier to tame something other than ourselves. Consider James 3:5-12. Try to make a list of how God wants to tame our tongues and then use the words we speak to His glory. Why is silence sometimes the best use of our tongues?
- ❷ The gift of speech can be a tremendous blessing. To speak with authority draws and compels listeners (consider our Savior’s impact on listeners). Peter, in the context of the end time, declares, “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God” (*1 Pet. 4:11, NIV*). How does the power and conviction of your testimony affect your witness? Why is it necessary to use words, as well as how you live your lives, to share the good news of God’s grace? How will the Holy Spirit make your witness powerful and effective?

Application Question:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love” (*1 Cor. 13:1, NIV*), I end up making a lot of useless and, sometimes, hurtful noise. Why is it important, wise, and helpful to use our mouths for “building others up according to their needs” (*Eph. 4:29, NIV*)? How might this apply to our method and approach of sharing the gospel? During this coming week, practice using your voice to encourage someone specific. Share the results in class next week.

Further Study: The gift of silence. The wise man Solomon reminds us that there is a time to speak and also “a time to keep silence” (*Eccles. 3:7, NKJV*). When Jesus Christ is Lord of your speech, you will not only speak for the glory of God and the blessing of others; you will also discern when it is time to keep silent.

Note: In the light of this week’s study, consider to what extent you are allowing Jesus Christ to be Lord of your speech. Spend time reading Scripture with the intention to be more attentive to God’s words than to your own. Use a journal to record your thoughts. When you conclude your time of silence, you might find that you are more aware of the gift of speech.

“I wish we could have a pledge in our hearts that we would not utter one word against a brother or a sister. . . . Do not gossip about them and make remarks about their character, but go to them in the love of Jesus and the love of the truth and try to help them.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 289.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Jesus was described as a speaker of “gracious words” (*Luke 4:22, NKJV*). This may be a reference to both the content of His speech and also the way He spoke. What narratives in the Gospels illustrate the gracious speech of Jesus? What can we learn from these examples?
- ❷ We tend to think of speech as only an individual thing. But what about us as a church? How do we, as a church, use the power of speech? Why, in many ways, is our responsibility as a church regarding our words more important than as individuals?
- ❸ What counsel would you give to an individual who works in an environment where corrupt communication is considered normal? When should a person stay to be salt and light? When is it wise to leave?