

## Words for Christ

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Today the subject of our study is words, that wonderful gift of speech, and our responsibility for the way in which we use it. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue,” said the wise man in Proverbs 18:21.

Consider for a moment the miracle of speech. What a miracle it is! When something goes wrong in the body’s development before birth, or if there is an accident or illness that results in loss of speech, we begin to realize how great a miracle it is. There is a specific category that describes those who assist in the recover of the ability to talk, called “speech therapy.”

Maybe some of you saw the news item this week concerning Rom Houben of Belgium. He had been in a tragic car accident 23 years ago and was considered to be in a coma. No one realized that he was actually conscious, but unable to communicate. Dr. Steven Laureys, a neurological researcher discovered that Mr. Houben’s cerebral cortex was still active. He is now able to communicate through a special computer.

Because of the creative handiwork of God, we have the capability of forcing air from the lungs by means of the diaphragm through the passageways of trachea (the windpipe), larynx (the voice box), glottis, pharynx and vocal tract, and emitting it from our mouths, with the air being “shaped” by the combination of vocal cords, tongue, mouth and lips. The process actually begins in the brain as thoughts are formed and then signals are sent to the various components that make speech possible. Each person’s voice is distinct and unique, making a “fingerprint” in sound that can be measured and recorded. We hardly ever think about what is taking place, from a scientific or physics point of view, when we speak words.

The sounds that emerge from our lips travel by sound waves and reach the ear of the one to whom we are speaking. The special receptors God placed on the sides of our heads are engineered to receive the sound waves and convert them to electrical signals in the inner ear which are then transmitted to the brain to be received and interpreted as sound and language. Sense and meaning, through the reception of the words, take shape and communication is achieved.

What a miracle! And this miracle is going on billions of times each day, with very little thought as to how it is accomplished. If we had to think of how to shape our mouth, tongue and lips to enable them to create the sound of each letter of each word (for a moment, just think if the different shape of your mouth, position of your tongue and lips in making the letter “s” as compared with the letter “p”), how cumbersome it would be to talk! Because of God’s miraculous creatorship, thoughts can be converted to spoken words and received by another almost simultaneously, effortlessly. Praise God for the gift of speech!

Words are the link between minds. Words enable me to make a “bridge” between my mind and yours. How else would you be able to know exactly what is in my mind? How else would I be able to know exactly what is your mind? We hear the question often asked, “What’s on your mind?” What happens when that question is asked? Words are expressed that reveal what the other person was thinking about.

Thus words are the connectors, the ties between minds. This is one of the reasons that Jesus is called in the Bible the “Word of God.” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1-3, 14.

Because sin separated man from God, we would have had no way of knowing about Him and His ways if there weren’t some bridge, some connection made between God and man; some way that our minds could understand and appreciate His mind. Jesus is that Connection. He is the Bridge between man and God. Because of Him, God’s ways can be known and understood by us. He is the Link between heaven and earth. He is the “Ladder” of Jacob’s dream. He is the vocal Expression of the divine. He is the Word of God. He said, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared (or “explained”) Him.” John 1:18.

What a gift speech is! Do we appreciate it? Do we use it wisely? What does the Bible tell us about our responsibility regarding proper stewardship of this gift? I feel that as those who call ourselves Christians, there is something here to which we need to pay attention; there is something in which improvement can be made. We are told that we are to be held accountable for the words that come from our mouths. Jesus said, “I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified,

and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:36, 37. Paul warned against those who are “idle talkers.” Titus 1:10.

As Christians and sons and daughters of God, we need to be careful that our speech reflects our godly and royal heritage. We’ve been adopted through Christ into the family of heaven! All foolish talking, all jesting and senseless triviality are to be put aside as children of the King, as ambassadors of His government. Paul wrote, “Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” Ephesians 5:1-4.

Our minds are to be focused on the great realities which face us. Jesus is coming back! This earth and its way of life, are coming to a close just as He promised. Our we prepared? Are we doing all in our power to share His message to the world? These are solemn things to consider. This doesn’t mean that a Christian’s life is a life without joy! But it is a different way of thinking and living than what the world embraces.

The year was 1861. The United States was about to embark on a long and costly civil war. The Sabbath-keeping advent believers were about to embark on a course of official organization. Two short years later would find the group adopting the name “Seventh-day Adventist” for their church, and voting in their first “General Conference” many resolutions regarding their form of association.

But in the year 1861, while it was prior to their official coming into being, a conference (many such “conferences” were held during those early years) was convened in Battle Creek, Michigan, April 26-29 in which matters were discussed and resolutions were voted.

The need for a new publishing house was introduced and steps taken to make it reality. There was much discussion of the need for a more formal church organization, preparatory to what took place in 1863, and a motion was made by Pastor Moses Hull which called upon the ministers to “prepare an address to the church on the subject of church organization.”

In the context of these resolutions which shaped the form of the church in its very infancy, one motion that was made is most interesting. It passed without a

dissenting vote. I wonder if such a motion would be carried today, or even introduced. Here it is (I've not found who actually made the motion):

“*Whereas*, in our opinion, remarks calculated to excite mirthfulness tend to grieve the Holy Spirit from our midst, and thus deprive us of the guidance of heaven in our deliberations, therefore, *Resolved*, that we consider it a breach of order to indulge in such remarks, and we request the chairman to call to order any who may use them.

“*And whereas*, in view of the solemn time in which we are living, the *holy*, solemn message we profess, the importance of using ‘sound speech’ and ‘words that shall administer grace to the hearers,’ and in view of the fact that God’s Word condemns in the most unequivocal terms the use of trifling thoughts and words, even declaring that for ‘*every idle* word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment,’ therefore *Resolved*, 1. That this conference assembled, both preachers and lay members, covenant together to put away from us, whether in preaching or in social relations, all lightness and trifling. 2. That we recommend to our brethren scattered abroad to pursue a similar course, and rid themselves of this blighting sin which drives the Spirit of God from the hearts of His people.” Ellen G. White, by Arthur L. White, Vol. 1, p. 446 (*italics original*). That’s quite an amazing resolution, isn’t it!

Pleased with the results of the conference, Uriah Smith said, “The business meetings were characterized by promptness of action, and the utmost unanimity of sentiment, no dissenting vote being offered on a single question. The same Spirit that reigned through the other exercises of the conference seemed to pervade these meetings also, as may be seen by some of the resolutions offered. If the results and influence of this meeting do not prove as beneficial as those of any heretofore held in this place, our experience thus far has failed to qualify us to judge in this respect.” *Ibid.* p. 447.

Why such an emphasis on the sobriety of words? Why such condemnation of “lightness” and “trifling speech”? Was it an “extreme” position? Was that group 150 years ago out of touch with reality? Is it valid to consider today, or “outmoded”? Because it was recognized, from the very outset of our church, indeed before it was formally organized, that the ones who follow God are in the midst of a great battle, a conflict between the forces of Christ and Satan, good and evil. This battle is nearing its completion and every energy must be allocated toward the final goal.

The pastor or member who maintains a pattern of joking, jesting and trifling demonstrates that the seriousness of the battle has not engaged his thinking. It is demeanor not befitting the royal heritage into which he or she has been adopted. It is conduct not becoming of those who are inducted into the Lord's army. The crucial times in which we live demand sober contemplation and solemn words. I wasn't there, but it's hard to imagine that light, trifling jesting and joking characterized the conversations of those who descended the staircases of the World Trade Center buildings on September 11, 2001.

Beyond that, a credibility gap exists when one constantly converses on the level of light and trifling speech and then switches gears quickly to address topics of eternal consequence. How are the hearers to know that a change has been made from subjects of no worth to subjects of the greatest worth? Are jokes and jests the way to obtain attention so that hearers will then listen to godly themes? The approach of our dear Savior, in winning souls, was one of congeniality and love but absent of trifling and lightness. He had no time to engage in comedy while presenting the truths that opened the door to the way of life.

I must confess that this is an area in which the Lord has a lot of work to do in my life. I grew up with a mindset that attempted to turn everything into a joke. Every sentence contained a potential pun, some way to put a humorous spin on the words. Often, I'm ashamed to say, that humor was of the "off-color" variety. God forgive me for that! He has changed my mind, my way of thinking, and given me a new mind-set. It is not a life that is devoid of humor, but it is a way of thinking that focuses on the great issues before us now, even the final climax of all things.

The sentiment of the resolution that was passed by the conference in 1861 (which, by the way was brought to the floor because a minister, whose reputation was that of indulging in such trifling language, had been invited to join their ranks), rings true in my heart and I recognize that our Lord Jesus and the Apostles lived them out. When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and delivered a powerful sermon that resulted in people being "cut to the heart" and crying out, "What must we do to be saved," it was not spiced with humor nor introduced by a joke. It was saving speech. We need sermons like that today!

There are two pastors, whom most of you know, who exemplified this type of godliness. Pastor Branson Chrispens; what a Christian man he was, and what a gift to the Valley Center Church! After serving as a pastor and administrator, he and his dear wife Martha retired and moved here. I always thought that they both demonstrated Christ-likeness in their living. Loving, kind, hospitable, hard-

working, generous and thoughtful, but not ones who indulged in light, trifling and needless joking and jesting. Their conversation was on a higher plane than that. I believe Elder and Mrs. Chrispens demonstrated the type of living and talking to which the Bible invites us.

Another name that comes to mind is the name of Elder Robert Wieland. A more sincere and devout man I doubt you'd ever find. One who shows by his life and demeanor the importance and solemnity of the subjects he shares. I can't think of a time when a sermon delivered by him was lowered by humor. Never can I think of a time when my mind would have to make an adjustment and switch gears from the trifling and shallow to the lofty and sublime. A man who lives what he believes. A man in whom there is no contradiction between his life and his profession.

If one wishes to have credibility when sharing the truths that affect the vital issues involving one's soul and eternal life, he or she must bear the reputation of using words that are appropriate to that sphere of thinking.

Beside warning us of speech that is light and trifling, the Bible cautions us against other words. "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring can yield both salt water and fresh." James 3:2-12.

David wrote, "I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle." Psalm 39:1. He prayed, "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips." Psalm 141:3. His son King Solomon added, "He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his

lips shall have destruction.” Proverbs 13:3. “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.” Proverbs 21:23. “A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.” Proverbs 18:7, 8.

I’m confident that all of us would be able to recall words that were spoken to us in carelessness, in anger, in jealousy or in jest which were deposited in our memory bank forever. Those words were probably spoken by one who didn’t remember them minutes after they uttered them, but they penetrated deeply into the inner recesses of your soul. Hurtful words; painful words. How we must guard our mouths to prevent such careless words from being said!

Thankfully, the opposite can also be true. “Death *and life* are in the power of the tongue.” You might be able to sift through the files of former years and pause on a conversation that changed your life for good, brought by the words of another. I know I can think of a few times when someone encouraged me and their words had lasting impact.

Through the proper use of words, you may encourage another or bring a smile to someone’s face that will be as a cup of cool water to a desert wanderer. Someday up there, one will come up to you and say, “I was discouraged and had nearly given up, but your words lifted me up and pointed me to the Kingdom.” The mouth that expresses words of praise to our loving Savior and kindly directs others to His salvation will be blessed. “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” Daniel 12:3.

May God help us to properly use this most amazing gift of speech for His glory and for the blessing of those with whom we converse. Let us not employ this gift for a vain, empty or trifling use, but such as is fitting for those who live in these last solemn days of earth’s history, just before the time when God will bring to fulfillment His great plan. We pray with David, “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips.” “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”