

“BETTER USE OF WORDS”
Colossians 4:2-6

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INTRODUCTION:

1) Wisdom from observation: Long time ago, I read an article about the wisdom of using words. It said something like this: “There is a good purpose that God had created us with two ears, that he wants us to listen more; two eyes, that we need to see more, but only one mouth and one tongue, God wants us to talk less.” We don't have to grow older to know this wisdom: It is always better to listen more, see more, understand more than talk more. But less talking isn't the only problem we need to watch out for, we also need to watch out what we say and how we say things. Proverbs 10:19 says, “Sin is not ended by multiply words, but the prudent hold their tongues.”

2) Wisdom from the Bible: The Bible has so much to teach us on the use of words. James advised us, “Take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” (1:19) Then in 3:1-12, he wants us to know that even though the tongue is a small part of our body, it could inflict huge damages on things and wounds on people.

But both the tongue and words or languages were created by God (Gen 11:1-9) and He saw that all his creation was good, (Gen 1:31) shouldn't we be lot more

careful in the use of His gifts? The text today offers us some simple but important guidelines on how to better use of words we all can and need to learn and practice.

USING WORDS FOR PRAYERS: (4:2-4)

1) Words of prayer to God: “Devote yourself to prayer.” (4:2) In these 3 verses, Paul repeatedly encouraged the early Christians to pray. If we are honest, we need to confess that we talk nonsense so much, but pray so little. No wonder our spiritual life is shallow, fragile and weak. Ask ourselves how much time we do talking and how much we do praying, and we can see we are far away from what God intended us to do. Both in the Old and New Testaments, many good examples of using words to pray to God, to praise God, to beseech God's mercy and seeking his guidance and blessing. In seminary days, we were taught to spend more time in prayer for all things we do. Many of us talk too much and pray too little, particularly those of us given positions of teaching and leadership. How can we say the right thing, or make the right decision without seeking God's wisdom through prayers?

2) Words of prayer for others: “And pray for us.” (4:3) Paul, the most faithful and effective servant of the Lord in history, asked the church to pray for him. If Paul needed prayer support from fellow believers, how much more do we need that from fellow brothers and sister

today?

a) Pray for the leaders: I am sure all of us want to see better growth of our church, more spiritual wisdom for church leaders, then pray for the pastors and all the teachers, the leaders, those who make decisions for the church.

b) Pray for family: All families have their special needs. Everyone in your family has his/her spiritual, emotional and other needs. Relationship in the family is sometimes an important issue we need to pray for.

c) Pray for friends: Friends at school, at work, people you know near and far away. Remember them in your prayers.

d) Pray for enemies: We may not have real enemies, but all of us surely have people whom we don't like that much. Instead of holding grudges or criticize them, spend some time to pray for them. We all know that prayer can do lot more than criticism. Prayer may not change those people, but it certain can change how we react to them.

3) Word of pray for self: I don't think anyone needs any encouragement to pray for oneself: We all know we need to pray for ourselves. It is biblical to pray for ourselves as Jesus taught his disciples to do. We need to pray for discernment of temptations, and power to overcome them. We need to pray for spiritual power to live our lives the way God wants us to live. For those

who are serving God in church positions, we need to pray lot more so we will say things, do things, make decisions according to God's will for His purpose and glory. We also need to pray for strength to face challenges, setbacks, and mistreatment from all sides. We always need to seek shelter under God's wings through prayers so we will be safe to face everyday life challenges.

USING WORDS TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL: (4:3-4)

Probably this is the area most of us are guilty of: We talk a lot of many things, except about the gospel. We all have our own interest in our talking: Some talk about family, others about children, still others like to talk politics or sports or money. How many of us like to talk about the gospel, the Bible, to witness to the unsaved? In this few verses, Paul encourage the Colossian Christians, including us, to use their words of prayer to expand his ministry of spreading the gospel. Since we all love to talk, why not talk more about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1) Make best use of opportunities: “Pray at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word.” (4:3) “Door” here means more opportunity. This is something we all need to pray for and to get hold of when it comes our way. Essentially, Paul was encouraging us to make the best of any and all

opportunities to use our word to spread the gospel so souls may be saved. We all love to make the best use of opportunities like buy things on great discount or on sale; get the best TV or tech gadgets on black Friday or maximize any opportunity for the greatest benefits for ourselves. Paul wants us to make the best opportunity when the door is open, we need to talk about the gospel, about Jesus, about salvation of souls. This is one area we all can and need to do better in our use of words and speech.

2) Make best use of presentation: “So we may speak forth the mystery of Christ.” (4:3) “The mystery of Christ” is the gospel message, hidden for centuries until the birth of the Savior, Jesus. Paul said, Christians should make use of every opportunity to speak forth that gospel message. “Speak forth” means to speak with power and confidence. This is so because we have the best message of redeeming the sin-sick souls of the world. There is no room to be timid, to feel ashamed, or to be reluctant in presenting the most important message of Christianity: Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This is one of the most important stands we Christians need to take: To speak forth the gospel message without any apology. But the fact is many of us are so weak, so timid and so afraid to speak about this message. Most of us are so daring speaking many subjects whether they are knowledgeable or not. But when it comes to speak

about the gospel, they are all silent and shy away.

3) Make best use of the commission: “I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.” (4:4) “Ought to speak”, *dei me lalesai*, means two things:

a) This is about the compulsion one must do, in this case, Christians must speak the gospel to the dying world without any excuses. Paul talks about his mission to present the gospel: “If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion, for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” (1 Cor 9:16) We have been commissioned or called to bring the gospel to the uttermost part of the world, there is no way to retreat from our duties.

b) This is about the contents we must speak, that is the only thing we ought to speak. The fact that many churches, denominations and individual Christians have diluted, watered down or abandoned the core of the gospel message by the influence of the worldly culture is a violation of the commission of Jesus. Anyone who presents the false gospel robs of salvation of souls through faith in Jesus Christ, and should be condemned. (Gal 1:8-9)

GUIDELINES ON USE OF SPEECH: (4:6)

1) Speak from a graceful heart: “Let your speech always be with grace.” (4:6) Few people can see our hearts, but everyone can hear our words. Speech here isn't

preaching or delivering a message, but carry a conversation (NIV). Our words should show our life on the inside. If we are saved in our life, we need to show it in our mouths. Whether we are under persecution, stress, difficulty, injustice; whether with our spouse, children, coworkers, church members, to believers or unbelievers, in all circumstances, we are to use words graciously as a habit. To speak in grace means being spiritual, wholesome, appropriate, sensitive to the listeners, and to reflect the nature of our Lord. Paul wrote in Eph. 4:29, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.” “Edification” means to build up, not to tear down those who hear us. In order to do this, we have to swallow anger and forfeit our pride or right to retaliate. Just look at how Jesus said his last seven words while he on the cross, we can learn from him a lot.

2) Speak with a higher purpose: “Let your speech be seasoned with salt.” (4:6b) Most of us are common people, we usually speak to carry our thoughts without considering higher purpose. But Paul encouraged us to use speech with higher purpose, the purpose God wants to see us do. Being gracious in speech is about our heart, to season our speech with salt is about the higher purpose of our speech. In ancient time, salt was used to

preserve food from getting rotten, to prevent wounds from getting infected, and to enhance the flavor of food. These are the keys of our speech: to keep character from being corrupted, to prevent people from getting hurt and to build relationship with extra portion of flavor. If we are honest, we often use our words restlessly that corrupt and hurt the hearers and turn good relationship sour.

3) Speak with wisdom and prudence: “You may know how to respond to each person.” (4:6c) This is something most of us are guilty of: We rush to speak and regret later. Paul warned us the danger of making inappropriate speech, to inappropriate person, at an inappropriate time. Learning to speak the right thing to the right person at the right time and the right place is something we never learn enough to master. Many of us regret many times the wrong things we said, to the wrong person at the wrong time and place that had caused us so much trouble and injuries on others. Unlike the ungodly who says, “Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?” (Psalm 12:4) We as believers of the Lord should echo the prayer of King David in Psalm 141:3, “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch the door of my lips.”

PROPER USE OF SPEECH:

1) Do not misuse the gift: Words or speech is a vital gift

of God to us for many good reasons and benefits. Just imagine how life would be like if there were no words or speech among us. Like all other gifts God has graciously given us, we need to treasure and make use of this one with care and wisdom. Words and speeches had been used to distort truth, to lie, to curse and to do harm to others everywhere in the world, sometimes in our circle of life. We are to be very careful when we use this God given tool to communicate truth, to build relationship, to promote harmony and peace, to convey love and forgiveness and to create a better world for all of us. Watching the speech by President Obama at the State of the Union and the response from Nikki Haley made me see the worst kind of use of words: dishonesty, spinning facts, empty promises, self-promotion, mean-spirit attacks and plain lies. But that is in politics and all bad things happened there. But we are God's children, we are to use God's gift in ways to accomplish God's purposes of creating words and language. Any violation of God's purpose is a sin we should not commit.

2) Here are better ways: Besides using words to pray and to spread the gospel message, we can also use words to build each other up, to encourage one another, to convey love and kindness, to help the weak and the helpless, to promote peace and harmony, to demonstrate Christian character and humility. In today's world with hi-tech communication convenience, we can use words

to send messages of love, of friendship, of care and comfort. Some have done research on the volume of words in the Bible and the conclusion is: Less than 10% of the words in the Bible is about God, Jesus, and the gospel which is the core of the Bible. The other 90% words in the Bible is about applications of the gospel in human daily life. The relationship is this: The effectiveness of the gospel depends by large on the demonstration of its power by those who have believed in it and have been recreated by it into new men. How do we use words is a big part of that demonstration of the new life in us.