

RUMOR ALLEGE  
SLANDER UNDERSTAND SAY  
CONVERSE DECIDE RECALL INTRIGUE PROCLAIM  
CHITCHAT WHISPER VOCALIZE CHAT SHOUT HEAR

# THE POWER OF WORDS: TALKING & LISTENING

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DISCOURSE UTTER DECLARE MURMUR EXPRESS  
GOSSIP LISTEN VERBALIZE CHATTERBOX MUTTER  
CONVEY SECRET DISCUSS ARTICULATE

# Introduction

In our initial exploration of Paul's text about language and speech, we became more aware and sensitized to the power of words and internalized his exhortation to the church at Ephesus about using unwholesome words (we recorded thirteen categories) in our conversations with others (Eph. 4:29). Using the picturesque and imaginative language of the Greek text, as well as the memory of our own painful, personal experiences with others, we concluded that "unwholesome words are invisible bombs that explode in the soul, creating gaping wounds and lasting pain." Damaging words can become lodged in our hearts and become foundational for the way we think about ourselves, God, life, and others – for years and years.

# *The Wrecker*

I watched them tearing a building down,  
    A gang of men in a busy town;  
With a ho-heave-ho and a lusty yell  
    They swung a beam and a side wall fell.

I asked the foreman, “Are these men skilled  
    And the men you’d hire if you had to build?”  
He gave a laugh and said, “No, indeed!  
    Just common labor is all I need.”

“I can easily wreck in a day or two  
    What builders have taken a year to do!”  
I thought to myself as I went my way,  
    Which of these roles have I tried to play?

Am I a builder who works with care  
    Measuring life by tools and square?  
Am I shaping my deeds by a well-made plan,  
    Patiently doing the best I can?  
Or am I a wrecker that walks the town  
    Content with the labor of tearing down?

# Introduction

Thankfully, there is a better way forward. The possibility of using words that build up, strengthen, heal, and encourage our family members, friends, colleagues, and even strangers becomes a new reality for us when we understand the second half of Paul's instruction on the use of the tongue. I do not mean to suggest that once we "see" what he is teaching that our mouths will immediately bring forth only sweet water. The more likely scenario is that we will struggle with our hearts, and therefore with our tongues, for the remainder of our lives. But, by God's grace, we can improve by the power of the Holy Spirit and learn new ways of speaking and listening that honor God and treat others with the dignity which He gave to all of His image-bearers.

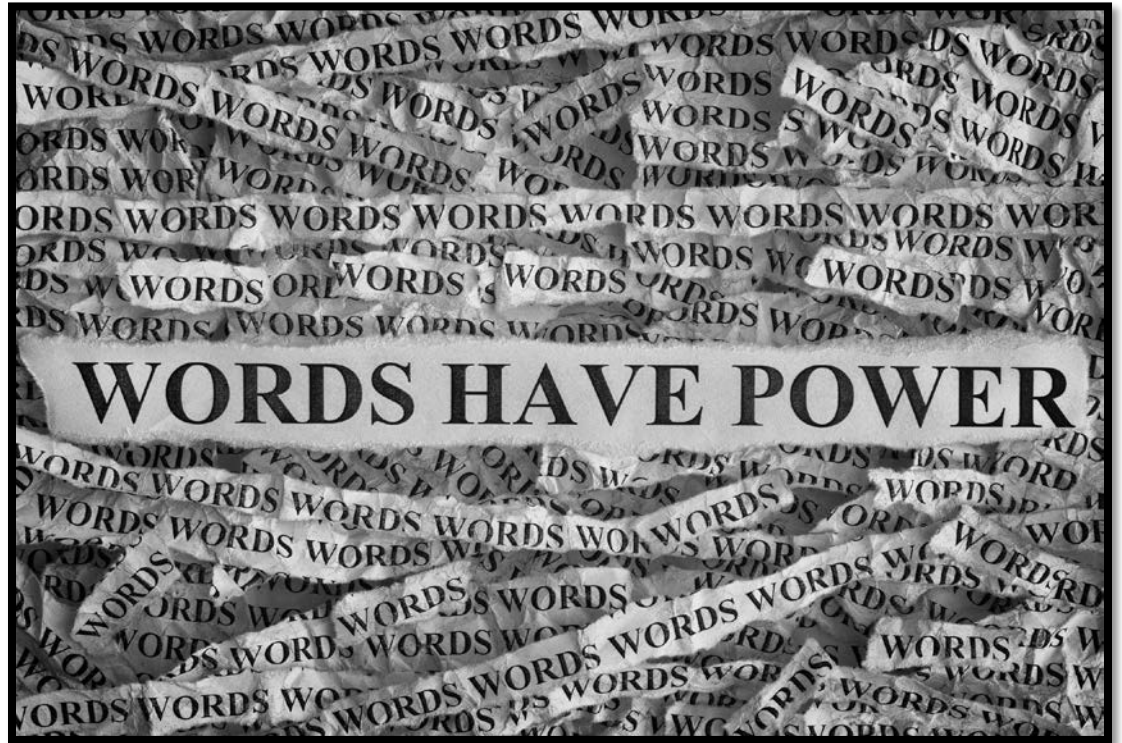


# Introduction

Those who have studied language and the use of words acknowledge that people's communication patterns can be complex and difficult to discover, especially in those who are not inclined to self-examination. No two people communicate in the same way. Richard Weaver, the University of Chicago scholar, intellectual historian and political philosopher who wrote the influential book, *Ideas Have Consequences*, offered this hope to anyone eager to learn a new way: "Facility with words bespeaks a capacity to learn relations and grasp concepts; it is a means of access to the complex reality." So, while our subject matter is challenging, you and I can learn to feed others with life-giving words that are starkly different from the poisonous barbs that others employ.

# The Origin & Effects of Words

The words we speak are complex, meaningful sounds that originate in the heart, proceed to our tongues, leap into listening ears, and produce powerful effects in the hearts of those who hear.



# Reviewing Our Text

- “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29).
- In Part 1 of this series, we considered the meaning of the phrase, “**Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth.**”
- Today, in Part 2, we will seek to understand what Paul meant when he wrote “**but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.**”

# The N.T. Concept of *Edification*

- **Edification**, (oikodomé), *n.*, in religious use, after the Greek: the building up of the church, of the soul, in faith and holiness; the imparting of moral and spiritual stability and strength by suitable instruction and exhortation (OED).
- The word comes from *oikos* (house) + *demo* (to build) = *a building, structure, an edifice*. The verbal form means *to build a house*, or simply *to build*.
- One of the clearest ways to understand the biblical use is to begin with Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in which he uses a metaphor to describe believers: "We are...**God's building**" (1 Cor. 3:9).



# The Biblical Case for Edification

- “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual **edification**” (Rom. 14:19).
- “Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to **build him up**” (Rom. 15:2).
- “All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking to Christ; and all for your **upbuilding**, beloved” (II Cor. 12:19).
- “Therefore encourage one another, and **build up one another**, just as you also are doing” (I Thess. 5:11).

# Each Part Working Properly

“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it **builds** itself up in love” (Eph. 4:15-16).

# Living Stones in God's Building

We are “living stones in the Heavenly Temple perfectly joined together with the vermilion (bright red or scarlet) cement of Christ's blood.”

“So then you are no longer stranger and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's **household**, having been **built** upon the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the **cornerstone**, in whom the whole **building**, being fitted together is growing into a holy **temple** in the Lord; in whom you also are being **built** together into a **dwelling** of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).



Charles H. Spurgeon  
1834-1892

# Invisible Builders and Healers

Unlike unwholesome words, good words are invisible builders that leap into listening ears and go to work on the soul, making repairs (healing), reinforcing (strengthening), and putting on new additions (developing).



# Preserving the Beauty of God's Stones



**Mobile Stone & Rock Crusher**

Pulverize, v., "to reduce to powder or dust; to grind, crush, break down" (OED)

- If every person is a stone in God's holy temple, it is our duty to do our part to ensure that that stone is not cracked, broken, crushed, or pulverized.
- The figurative meaning of *pulverize* is "to demolish, destroy, defeat; to break down utterly." Do you know anyone who has ever been "pulverized" with words?
- It takes the whole body of Christ to build up one another in love.

# The Word *Build* in I Corinthians 3:10-15

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise masterbuilder (*architect*) I laid a foundation, and another is **building** upon it. But let each man be careful how he **builds** upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man **builds** upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has **built** upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (I Cor. 3:10-15).

# *The Builders* by Longfellow (1807-1882)

All are architects of Fate,  
Working in these walls of Time;  
Some with massive deeds and great,  
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;  
Each thing in its place is best;  
And what seems but idle show  
Strengthens and supports the rest.

For the structure that we raise,  
Time is with materials filled;  
Our to-days and yesterdays  
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these;  
Leave no yawning gaps between;  
Think not, because no man sees,  
Such things will remain unseen.

In the elder days of Art,  
Builders wrought with greatest care  
Each minute an unseen part;  
For the Gods see everywhere.

Let us do our work as well,  
Both the unseen and the seen!  
Make the house, where Gods may dwell,  
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

Else our lives are incomplete.  
Standing in these walls of Time,  
Broken stairways, where the feet  
Stumble as they seek to climb.

Build to-day, then, strong and sure,  
With a firm and ample base;  
And ascending and secure  
Shall to-morrow find its place.

Thus alone can we attain  
To those turrets, where the dye  
Sees the world as one vast plain.  
And one boundless reach of sky.



# A Biblical Catalogue of Good Words

- 1. Words That Heal:** Words that are used with benevolent intent to produce a sense of well-being and health in those who hear them. “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, **sweetness to the soul and health to the body**” (Prov. 16:24). “A gentle tongue is a **tree of life** (“a source of vitality to others”), but perverseness in it breaks the spirit” (Prov. 15:4). “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings **healing**” (Prov. 12:18).
- 2. Words That Bless:** “To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a **blessing** (a wish for good) instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing” (1 Pt. 3:8-9).



# A Biblical Catalogue of Good Words

- 3. Pure Words:** Words that are palatable to those to whom they are addressed and have a therapeutic value for them. “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but **gracious** words are **pure**” (Prov. 15:26). “The words of the Lord are **pure** words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, **purified** seven times” (Ps. 12:6). “Let your speech always be with **grace**, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person” (Col. 4:6).
- 4. Gentle Words:** Words that are instruments of understanding and conciliation. “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

# A Biblical Catalogue of Good Words

- 5. Words That Strengthen:** Words of encouragement that are used to support those who are suffering, troubled, struggling, disappointed, persecuted, or burdened. In the Greek, the main sense is “to support; to fix something so that it stands upright and immovable” (e.g., a vine on a stake). “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, **strengthen** your brothers.’ But he replied, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me’” (Lk. 22:31-34).

# A Biblical Catalogue of Good Words

- 6. Timely Words:** Words that are spoken in the right season for the right reason at the right moment. “To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a **word in season**, how good it is!” (Prov. 15:23). “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Prov. 25:11).
- 7. Truthful Words:** Words acknowledging the correspondence theory of truth – that there is truth corresponding to reality – and used for correcting error and building up the life of the one who hears them. “For my mouth will utter **truth**; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them” (Prov. 8:7-8). “**Truthful lips** endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (Prov. 12:19).

# A Biblical Catalogue of Good Words

- 8. Words of Wisdom:** Words demonstrating discernment and good judgment. “On the lips of him who has understanding, **wisdom** is found” (Prov. 10:13). “He who restrains his lips is **wise**” (Prov. 10:19). “The lips of the **wise** spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools” (Prov. 15:7). “The heart of the **wise** makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips” (Prov. 16:23). “She opens her mouth with **wisdom**, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” (Prov. 31:26).



# Words For *The Need of the Moment*

- The word *need* in our text means *lack, want, difficulty, necessity*.
- The second half of verse 29 is best translated as “that which is good for the edification of the need” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones).
- Our talk must fit the occasion – the need in the other person.
- “Our task as stewards of the word begins and ends in love. Loving language means cherishing it for its beauty, precision, power to enhance understanding, power to name, power to heal. And it means using words as instruments of love” (Marilyn Chandler McEntyre).



# Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“We do not just talk and talk and talk; we do not merely make our correct statements. We have to learn to understand other people and their needs. And we should be so anxious to help them that we take time, we meditate, we think, we feel our way, we see the position and then we apply the necessary and the appropriate word. It demands great wisdom, great understanding, great patience. Do not be unfair to people, do not expect them to be what they are not. Our business is to take people as they are and to try to bring them from that one position to another. So let us be careful that our word, our good word of edification, shall always fit the occasion and be appropriate for whatever circumstances apply in each individual case.”



# Words Accompanied With Grace

- **“That it may give grace to those who hear.”**
- God accompanies every edifying word we speak with His grace and uses it to prepare his children for eternity.
- John Calvin’s insight: By the word *grace*, Paul means “comfort, admonition, and everything that aids salvation.”
- “Paul does not say that *we* are to give grace, nor even that *our* word is to do so, but ‘if there is any word good for edification,’ it is to give grace, edifying grace, and thus certainly divine grace. Our mouth is merely to be the channel” (Lenski).

# The Stewardship of Words

“I was talking recently about stewardship of resources with a young man who is hoping to make a career in environmental law. We considered the fate of water, soil, animal and plant species, and food systems. In the wake of that invigorating conversation, I found myself musing on the similar problems that beset another precious shared resource: words. Like any other life-sustaining resource, language can be depleted, polluted, contaminated, eroded, and filled with artificial stimulants. Like any other resource, it needs the



**Marilyn Chandler McEntyre**  
Professor of English  
Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA





# The Stewardship of Words

protection of those who recognize its value and commit themselves to good stewardship....To call upon another analogy, if language is to retain its power to nourish and sustain our common life, we have to care for it in something like the way good farmers care for the life of the soil, knowing nothing worth eating can be grown in soil that has been used up, overfertilized, or exposed to too many toxic chemicals. The comparison, I believe, is pertinent, timely, and precise – and urgent.”

- Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

# The Exactness of Language

“Whatever the thing you wish to say, there is but one word to express it, but one verb to give it movement, but one adjective to qualify it; you must seek until you find this noun, this verb, this adjective...When you pass a grocer sitting in his doorway, a porter smoking a pipe, or a cab stand, show me that grocer and that porter...in such a way that I could never mistake them for any other grocer or porter, and by a single word give me to understand wherein the cab horse differs from fifty others before or behind it.”

- Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880)

# A Summary of Paul's Teaching

- We are likened to a building – God's building (the Church).
- As a wise architect, Paul laid the foundation for the building.
- We stand on Paul's shoulders, continuing to build on his foundation.
- Everyone who adds to the building (another person's life) is exhorted to be careful and wise as he/she builds upon it – to build up, to edify, others according to their needs.
- The quality of every person's work will be tested with fire.
- A person's lasting work done by the power of the Holy Spirit will receive a reward, but all works done in the flesh will be burned with fire leading to severe loss, even though the person will be saved.

“And whatever you do in **word or deed**, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Col. 3:17).

