

**DO ACTIONS
REALLY SPEAK
“LOUDER”
THAN WORDS??!!**

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Introduction

In one of the Christian Fellowship meetings which dealt with a lot of Christian doctrines and the heresies prevailing in the Christian communities, I heard a person who was showing us all why a particular group of people were a cult group and how they had deviated from the Scriptures in their teachings. Now what this cult group is and their refutation is not necessary here. At the end of the session, I asked him a question, "I know a person in my class who belongs to this group. Now, how do I confront him regarding this and how do I correct him about this?" Though this incident is true, I'll be paraphrasing them so as to convey what I want to. Guess what the reply was. "You make friends with him, share God's love to him through your actions, and live an exemplary life before him, and of course before others and God also, and then he'll be convinced that your God is the true God and will leave his old ways."

I would also like to mention another incident. I asked one Christian doctor on how to share the Gospel with our patients. He admitted that it's not feasible to tell the Gospel to each and every patient in the short time available. But he also added that it's possible to show Christ's love in our lives through our actions, non-verbal means (he did specify this verbatim) and give them God's healing touch through our treatment, to all patients. Through these non-verbal means of communication the patient finds something different in us and some of them come & ask us why this is so. Then we tell them the Gospel in words.

Now, what is wrong with these statements? All the statements are true in the sense that we are supposed to live an exemplary life in front of others and of course we are supposed to show love in our actions and etc. etc. But is this the biblical way of preaching the Gospel or refuting an unbeliever?

In contemporary Christian circles it is very common to hear quotes like

"Actions speak louder than words"

"Preach the Gospel everyday, if necessary use words"

"Your life is the only gospel that many people may read"

But are these quotes biblical? Do these quotes arise from a careful biblical exegesis?

Sufficiency of Verbal Message

In this chapter I would like to establish that a verbal message of God alone is sufficient to produce a moral obligation on the part of the sinner (hearer, listener). By this statement I would also like to imply that the holiness or righteousness of the preacher has no logical relevance for the sinner to accept or not accept the gospel message.

This is because the gospel message is a message from God and not from the preacher. In [Galatians 1:11-12](#), Paul writes that “the gospel I preached is not something that man made up..... I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ”. Moreover we read in [Acts 17:30](#) that God “commands all people everywhere to repent”. In that context Paul is speaking in Areopagus to the philosophers of that age and is presenting the Gospel to them. So the message of the Gospel is not the preacher’s own cooked-up gospel but it’s God’s command to the listeners.

In [Romans 1-3](#), we read that those who have NEVER heard the gospel are obligated and held accountable because of the innate knowledge of God that has been given to them. So those who hear the gospel ought to obey it and repent of their sins. This holds true even if the preacher does not practice what he preaches. That is why Paul could relax in jail ([Philippians 1:15-18](#)) and be happy that the Gospel is being preached even by those who preached out of selfish ambition. In fact these people preached the Gospel hoping to stir up a few problems for Paul when he was in chains. But Paul rejoiced over the fact that Christ was being preached.

Now this does not mean that the preacher can live a wayward life and go on preaching the gospel and still hope that he’d enter heaven. No, not at all! Read the following verses. [Matthew 5:48](#), [James 3:1](#), [Matthew 23](#). We are exhorted to be perfect since God is perfect. We are warned that teachers will be judged more strictly and that the Pharisees were cursed by Jesus for being hypocrites and for not practicing what they preached. These verses prove beyond doubt that the preachers will never in anyway be excused for their hypocritical lives.

Moreover the content of the Gospel is as important as the act of preaching ([Galatians 1:7-9](#), [Romans 10:14](#)). Romans 10:14 says that the preaching or the verbal proclamation of the Gospel is the prerequisite for people believing in Christ so that they can be saved. Whereas the passage in Galatians states that if somebody perverts the Gospel or presents a pseudo-gospel (which is no gospel at all) then that person would be eternally condemned. So the pivotal issue in evangelism is not the holy life or the moral example of the preacher, but rather

the act of preaching, the content & clarity of the spoken words and the Biblical fidelity of the words spoken.

From all these things I would like to conclude the following:

1. That the Gospel is a message from God to the sinner
2. It is God's command for him to repent of his sins.
3. The holy life of the preacher is not a prerequisite for the sinner to accept the Gospel
4. The hypocrisy of the preacher is by no means an excuse for the sinner to reject the Gospel, since it is God's command for the sinner.
5. But the above conclusion does not allow the preacher to be hypocritical because of the relevant verses speaking about them.
6. The verbal proclamation of the Gospel and the content & clarity of the words spoken in the verbal presentation of the Gospel is the most important aspect of evangelism

Actions and their (mis) Interpretations

Now that we have established that the verbal proclamation of the Gospel (as mentioned in the Bible) is itself sufficient to produce a moral obligation on the part of the sinners (irrespective of the preacher's spiritual condition), we will go on to see the scriptural examples where the actions had been misinterpreted or interpreted in different ways, by the on-lookers. The point that I would like to drive toward in this post is that actions don't speak at all, and that they are always interpreted according to the presuppositions which the people hold. And that this interpretation might be totally different from what we might have wanted to get across to them.

The first set of passages is from [Matthew 12:22-24](#) and [Matthew 9:32-34](#). In both these instances, Jesus drives out a demon from a demon-possessed man. The people are astonished saying "nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel" and wonder "could this be the Son of David?". But the Pharisees in both the instances maintain that Jesus drove the demons out using the help of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Now you see that there has been only one action that had been performed: driving out of demon. But people had come up with two different kinds of interpretations. And both these interpretations are contradictory to each other. Now it is possible that both the interpretations could have been right. Now don't misinterpret me into saying that two contradictory propositions could be right. What I'm saying is that both the interpretations would have explained the action, but only one of them has to be right. And which is the right one, neither the interpretations themselves nor the action indicate to it. Jesus had to explain it to them which one was right.

The next passage is from [Acts 2](#). This was when the Holy Spirit comes at the Pentecost. The believers filled with the spirit begin to talk in tongues. What is the crowd's response? One group is astonished and amazed, and are asking how is this happening. But another group comes up with an interpretation that the people have had too much wine. Now again their interpretation of the action was wrong and Peter had to stand up and explain it to the people that it was not because of wine but because of the pouring of the Holy Spirit.

The last passage I'd like to quote is from [Acts 14:8-19](#). Here again Paul performs a miracle by God's power. But the people look at it and think that their gods have come down in human form and they named Paul as Hermes and Barnabas as Zeus. They also wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. Later on Paul had to explain to them about the God who made the heaven and the earth. This is how bad unbelievers can interpret us based on their own presuppositions. Even though it was through God's power that Paul was able to

do the miracle, the people, deeply entrenched in their Greek philosophies, could only interpret it as the work of the Greek gods and not as the God of the Bible.

We could give more examples but I think it is beyond the scope of this post. I think these three examples provide ample evidence that well-meant actions could be interpreted in many ways, even contradictory to what was actually meant by it. Unbelievers don't think Christianly and they will interpret our actions by their own unbiblical presuppositions. You may as a Christian show compassion, but they might infer nosiness. You may demonstrate humility, but they might infer humility. You may value the exclusivity of your religion, but they'll infer intolerance and arrogance towards other religions. I may add on more examples *ad boredom*.

Frequently Abused Passages

In this chapter, I'll be dealing with a few verses which might give the idea of "actions speaking louder than words".

First [1Peter 3:1](#) which says "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives." From this verse, people tend to infer that "actions speak louder than words" because it says "they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives." But on careful analysis of the verse one might find that the husbands "do not believe in word". This implies that a verbal presentation of the Gospel has already been done and that the husbands have not believed in "the word". So now the wife keeps her actions in accordance to what her husband has already heard about, so that her actions don't contradict her faith. So the verse is not saying "don't preach but live it out" but rather "practice what you've preached".

Next we'll go on to the word "witness". The greek word for witness is "martus" pronounced as *mar'-toos* from which we get the English word "Martyr". [The word witness has been used in the bible in 3 ways](#) (click on the link to see more). One is in a legal sense, as in where a person is called to a courtroom to testify (in words not actions) what he has seen or heard. The other way is in the manner of seeing some event (I witnessed the race, etc.). The third form in which it is used is in an ethical sense as in a person who undergoes a violent death because of what he had believed. In the above three ways, the first and the third usage use the word as a noun whereas the second is a verb.

So when Jesus said "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." he meant verbal proclamation of the Gospel (first usage) and that you will have to die for me (third usage), because the usage is a noun here. There is no indication whatsoever to say that Jesus wanted the disciples to use non-verbal means of communication to proclaim the Gospel.

One may quote [Matthew 5:16](#) where Jesus says "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" to say that people may look at our deeds and come to accept the Gospel, that is, without preaching it with words. Now such an interpretation has some problems. One is that the inference is not a necessary implication of the verse. That is, whether these deeds were preceded by verbal proclamation or not is not mentioned in this context. So we cannot conclude that preaching is necessary (or not necessary) from this passage alone.

Since we affirm the coherence of the Scriptures, we turn to other scriptural passages for the answer. Reading [Romans 10:14 and 17](#) it is evident that people cannot believe if they have not heard and they cannot hear if someone has not preached to them and also that faith comes by hearing the message. Now we cannot infer that the preaching mentioned here is non-verbal means of communication (actions) because, then the passage would have read "seen" instead of "heard". Since we can "hear" only words (or sounds), it necessarily follows that the preach in this context refers to preaching with words (verbal proclamation) and not non-verbal means.

Therefore we can conclude that the people in Matthew 5:16 were able to praise God because they have already heard (by verbal proclamation) about Him. Moreover considering the depraved nature of man ([Romans 1](#)) because of which

1)he "doesn't glorify God nor gives thanks to God" for what is plainly revealed in nature about God

2)he suppresses the truth about God by his wickedness

it only makes sense to suggest that unbelievers will do the same to the "righteous deeds of men", and if at all they can glorify God for their actions, it presupposes a verbal proclamation of Gospel in conjunction with a convicting work of the Holy Spirit as stated in Romans 10.

Philosophical Aspects and Conclusion

Now that we have looked at the theological perspective of this popular quotation and have established that it is unbiblical, we will delve in to the philosophical aspects of such a stance. I hope it would be of use in defending the gospel as an adjuvant. This quotation may appear in any form during the debate. It is the duty of the apologist to be shrewd enough to discern it.

One important pitfall of the philosophy that “actions speak louder than words” is that it is a self-refuting stance. It makes the person who says it to be an inconsistent person and the philosophy itself self-destructs. This can be understood from the very fact that the person who affirms that “actions do indeed speak louder than words”, had to verbally proclaim the very same sentence to us. If he is consistent he should have shown that very sentence to us by his actions instead of reciting it to us. So, such a person can be asked to continue the debate with us using only actions and with no words!! Since, according to him, the actions are better than words, why should he use a lesser effective tool such as “verbal proclamation” to convey his thoughts to us rather than a more effective tool “actions” !!! That should be a sufficient reason to end the debate, at least verbally !!!

Moreover the philosophy (that actions speak louder than words) itself should not be put into words (!!!) because its claim is that actions are much more effective than words.

In a Christian context it may appear in the form of “The greatest part of our witness is through our life”. It would contain a hidden implication that words are not an important part of our witness. This again is self-refuting and self-destructing. I say this because the person who says such a statement to me unfortunately could not witness his very statement through his life. He had to verbally proclaim it to me !!! Why take a support of something that is not so important (words) when the greatest (actions or witnessing through life) is available to him.

If actions do indeed speak louder than words, why spend time teaching a language to a child, or have lectures where a professor has to come and “speak”, etc. etc. Why write articles and publish in journals, and why write books (and that to on the topic that actions speak louder than words) ??? Why not have a universal language of actions and have lectures on theory of relativity or calculus as a mime ???

My point is that words are inevitable and are still the most effective form of communication. This is because God has providentially fore-ordained it in

such a way. The very nature of the Bible gives enough support to this. The Bible is written in words and the law was given to Moses as written words on a stone tablet. It did not come with any imagery (though there are verbal descriptions of images) or with any actions. God appeared to Moses in a bush and spoke with him (by words) and did not dance or make any actions to convey His plan to him. One can add on and on and on.

Some may say that if we don't live up to our actions then the words we preach won't be effective. Now it may be agreed that if we don't practice what we preach then some unbelievers (and weak believers) would stumble. But that doesn't refute Christianity or the Gospel that was preached. An illustration would be helpful here. If I teach that $2+2=4$ and when i go out into the market and add $2\text{kg}+2\text{kg}=5\text{kg}$, how does that prove Mathematics wrong. It can only prove that I'm inconsistent and that I don't know how to apply mathematics in daily life. If somebody has to cease learning mathematics because I, a teacher, could not apply it correctly then that person has to be insane, isn't it ? So if an unbeliever rejects the gospel or if a believer ceases to walk in the faith because of some Christian being inconsistent in his life, then, both the unbeliever and apostasizing believer are insane, isn't it ? So we should allow these irrational arguments to torment us or let the unbeliever live his own way.

So this is my conclusion from all these posts and this is what I urge all Christians to know. That 1) Actions don't speak louder than words 2) The greatest part of our witness is not through our lives but through the faithful verbal preaching of the Gospel 3) Our actions are important because God says it is important for our sanctification and not because it can somehow bring people to Christ even without words. So the bottom line of all these is that "PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH" (rather than "preach everyday, if necessary use words).