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Overcoming Poor Articulation

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DID YOU ever hear someone speak who sounded as though he were trying to talk through a mouthful of pebbles? Wasn't clear, was it? Either he couldn't articulate well or he didn't. When there is a serious speech impediment affecting the speech mechanism the problem is serious indeed—there may be no easy solution. But often muffled, mumbled, or sloppy speech may be the result of faulty speech habits.

According to Bernard P. McCabe, Jr., in his book *Communicative Voice and Articulation*:

Articulation is the way to clarity in speaking. The key to articulation is accurate production and correct use of consonants. . . .

Without consonants speech would probably resemble a howl with meaning dependent upon variations in quality of sound. Fortunately, such a situation need not exist. With the consonant there is articulation and speech becomes more efficient.—Page 79.

In other words, speech will not be clear unless the sounds called consonants are articulated properly. The consonants are generally arranged into four groups:

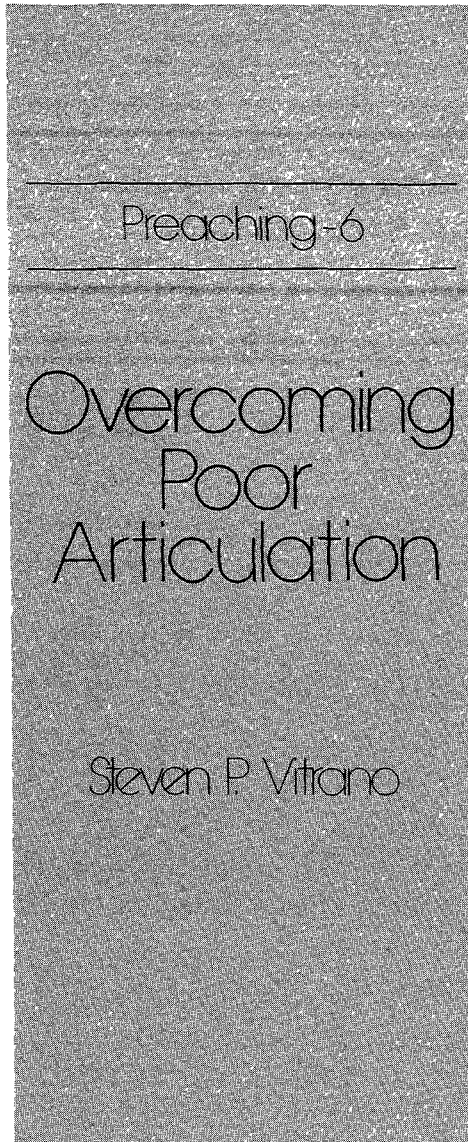
plosive: as the (p) in *poise*
 the (b) in *boss*
 the (t) in *fame*
 the (d) in *dance*
 the (c) in *cat*
 the (g) in *game*
 the (ch) in *check*
 the (j) in *just* or
 the (g) in *magic*

fricative: as the (f) in *fun*
 the (v) in *vain*
 the (th) in *think*
 the (s) in *sip*
 the (z) in *zippy*
 the (sh) in *should*
 the (s) in *vision* or
 the (g) in *garage*
 the (h) in *how*

nasal: as the (m) in *make*
 the (n) in *noise*
 the (ng) in *younger*

glide: as the (wh) in *white*
 the (w) in *wonder*
 the (r) in *road*
 the (y) in *you* or
 the (i) in *opinion*
 the (l) in *lip*

It can be readily seen that improper articulation of any of these sounds will make one's speech difficult to understand. How articulate are you in produc-



ing the sounds of speech—the sounds of the consonants?

There are many faults in articulation but three of the most common have to do with:

1. The final t as in *went*. The t is made silent (not articulated) and the result is "wen." Or as in *can't* the word becomes "can" (which could be a costly error).

2. The final ng as in *going*, and the word becomes "goin." Or as in *thinking*, and the word becomes "thinkin."

3. The initial th as in *them*. The th becomes a d and the word becomes "dem" or in the case of *those* it becomes "dose."

Breaking a bad habit is never easy; it takes patience and work. So it is in breaking poor speech habits. Fortunately, help is available. A good book like McCabe's (see above) contains many sug-

gestions and exercises whereby poor articulation can be corrected. If you do not speak clearly because of poor articulation, you can overcome the defect. Record your speech and then listen to yourself. If you don't like what you hear, do something about it. Practice until you speak clearly and distinctly.

Care should be taken that in an attempt to correct the defects you don't go to the other extreme and articulate overprecisely. It is annoying and sometimes humorous to listen to someone who overarticulates the t's and the d's and the p's.

Remember the counsel in *Gospel Workers*, page 91: "Ministers and teachers should discipline themselves to articulate clearly and distinctly, allowing the full sound to every word." The same applies to the church elder as preacher and spokesman for God.

Proper breathing, pitch, and articulation—these three factors are to be considered when striving for clarity in preaching. Will what you say be clearly understood the next time you preach?

But now we turn our attention to matters having to do with coherence. Along with making what we say clear, we are concerned that what we say makes sense. This is not to say that we can take all mystery from the gospel. There are some things we will never fully comprehend intellectually. But we need not multiply confusion by being incoherent when there is no reason for incoherence. The fact is, we should diligently study so that we may make the profound simple, that we may communicate the deep things of God so that all can say, "We see," when the truth can indeed be "seen." In such a study we will come to grips with the fundamental principles that make for good communication in preaching. This is the question you have perhaps been waiting for. Just how does one prepare a sermon?

You will probably begin by deciding what it is you are going to talk about—you will decide on a topic. What *should* you talk about next Sabbath? That is what I'm going to write about in the next article in this series on preaching. ✎