

“Speaking from the Heart”

Lesson 7: Taming the Profane Tongue

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🔑 “(M)ake a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean” (Leviticus 10:10).

United Press International’s archives has this interesting news item regarding profane communication:

🔑 June 9, 1981 “Paul White, founder and director of ‘Curseaholics Anonymous,’ wants Congress to make public profanity a felony. White, 22, of Cambridge, Mass., says Americans utter 1 billion curse words daily and swear more than 700,000 times a second. He defined cursing as ‘a vulgar language which is used as an alternative language in our society to insult someone’.”

The vision of this anti-profanity organization began in Massachusetts to help people stop using profanity in their communications. They even offered a 24-hour hotline service for those needing instant support. The pushback was unexpected. The initial media release was followed by another in a week’s time. The mission was revamped to replace a full 24/7/365 halt on cursing with “a national anti-cursing day.”

🔑 June 17, 1981 “The founder of ‘Curseaholics Anonymous’ admits he may have ‘jumped the gun’ last week when he called for making public profanity a felony. Now Paul White Jr, 22, proposes that President Reagan proclaim a national anti-cursing day. White, a Cambridge, Mass., car salesman, hopes to get profanity ‘out of the schools, homes and ballparks’.”

🔑 However, the organization received so many foul-mouthed calls from irate swearers they disbanded within a month’s time! It seems that in 1981 our nation was not convinced that profanity was a communication form that needed correction!

Mrs. Hoyle was my 11th grade “Current Events” Civics class. It was one of my most memorable classes covering the scope of civilization’s past and present history. One comment that was etched into my mind: 🔑 “Cursing shows a lack of vocabulary skills. Only ignorant people curse.” And, she was correct. Not only does such language reveal ignorance but it reveals unkindness, devotion to vulgarity instead of God, and a refusal to allow God to control the language from our heart.

🔑 Profanity makes a person “word-lazy”!

In times past, a child using disrespectful language and especially profanity, had his mouth washed out with soap! 🔑 (Remember how Ralphie got his mouth washed out with soap for using a curse word that he heard his father use! His mother, upon hearing it, forces him to taste soap. Ralphie initially tries to avoid punishment by blaming his friend Schwartz, but his mother calls Schwartz’s mother, leading to Schwartz being punished as well. Ralphie then faces the consequence of having soap in his mouth.).

The increased use of profanity is troubling. 🔑 It is characteristic of a devolving culture. It is 🔑 characteristic of a pagan culture whose standards of speech and behavior are based on mortality and not divinity. It is 🔑 characteristic of a culture that disrespects the value of others. The user of profanity shows neither respect for God nor fellowman.

🔑 Language that was never once spoken in public is now commonly used. Politicians seem to have removed all decorum in Congressional speeches and media interviews. The entertainment venues once had harsh ratings for vulgarity and profanity, but now only a subtle line of “harsh language” is posted (and that could refer to an animal being corrected!).

The devolution of our culture follows the decline of Judah in Jeremiah’s time. 🔑 “Were they ashamed because of the abomination they had done? They were not ashamed at all, nor did they know even how to blush (be ashamed; embarrassed)” Jeremiah 6:15.

The inevitable end to a nation that loses its sensitivity and cannot blush at vulgarity and ungodliness is stated by Jeremiah, 🔑 “Therefore they will fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they will collapse, says the Lord.”

The use of profanity is troubling. The obscenities of yesterday's locker rooms are now blasted on today's elementary playgrounds! Commercials are filled with vulgarities and sporting interviews recognize no boundaries in their speech.

What is "Profane"

The term 🕊️ literally refers to that which is "before the Temple." This refers to what is not sacred or revered; something that has no acceptance inside the Temple.

🕊️ To "profane" is to treat the holy with an unholy attitude. It is a total disrespect to what is proper.

This is a constant sin. Mankind decides that he can replace the "holy" requirements of the Lord God Almighty with the "unholy" modifications that man thinks are acceptable.

🕊️ "Her priests have done violence to My Law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have closed their eyes ... and I am defiled among them" (Ezekiel 22:26).

Profane words arise from the 🕊️ areas of human living that are most sacred and intimate. The focus is on these areas because profaning these cherished areas makes the strongest impact. These areas generally include religion, sexuality, and body functions.

🕊️ The terms are phrased to show total disrespect for the person targeted. 🕊️ That which is highly valued is attacked with verbal profanity to devalue it.

🕊️ No word or expression is profane by itself. A word is a combination of sounds. 🕊️ But people assign words meaning and significance. 🕊️ Certain words are used to degrade, insult, assault and injure. Culture assigns specific terms as profanity. 🕊️ BUT profanity can come 🕊️ from "innocent words" that are used in an unholy speaking because of anger, contempt or racism. 🕊️ The sin of profanity originates in our hearts when devotion to God is replaced by devotion to ME.

Jesus on Profanity

🕊️ Christ emphasizes that profane speaking is a heart problem.

Profane speaking is not restricted to speaking "curse words." It refers to our speaking words that are "careless" (Such words "do not work" to accent our speech as God's People. Matthew 12:36-37).

"You have heard... 'You shall not murder,' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be answerable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be answerable to the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be answerable to the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell" (Matthew 5:21-22).

- "Raca" is an Aramaic term of insult and contempt. They imply stupidity and inferiority. Even the word verbalized is harsh sounding.
- "You fool" is a Greek expression insulting not only one's intelligence but criticizes God's creation.

These types of words and the spirit that prompt them have 🕊️ no place in the Kingdom's vocabulary! Those who use profane speech are in real danger of God's 🕊️ eternal Judgment. Please consider that it is not only the vulgarities of cussing BUT it includes using 🕊️ common words to communicate a disrespectful message!

What is "Profanity"?

🕊️ Most want to restrict profanity to "four letter words." Every civilization, nation, language, and culture has its own "four letter words" and expressions. 🕊️ Many have been "righteous" and never used any of the "four letter words," BUT they have developed their own vocabulary of profanity! And they 🕊️ commend themselves while "cursing" those using cultural profanity. Consistency is never equal when it comes to self-righteous attitude!

🕊️ Do we really need profanity to communicate? Do we need language terms and accents that communicate disrespect toward others and depreciate their personal value? Why do people use profanity? Here are a few reasons...

☞ *To communicate disdain for authority.* Social protest movements strive to make an impact and use profane words and expressions to reach that objective. Profanity is used to communicate defiance to parents, teachers, government, or God.

☞ *To Blow Off Steam.* Amazingly some psychologists consider swearing/cursing/profanity to be safety valves for releasing pent-up hostilities. They teach, “Translate your ugly feelings into ugly words.”

☞ *To Punctuate Conversation.* Profanity is used as an effective attention tool and a means to add “color” (or better “off-color”) and punch to the conversation. Profanity did have shock-value because it was generally not acceptable, but cultural shifts in language have changed this purpose.

☞ *To Retaliate Against Others.* Profane words are verbal missiles; dangerous swords wielded with evil intentions. When a person’s pride is wounded or his efforts frustrated, he will seek to retaliate with the closest weapon. Oftentimes this will be profanity. Profane speaking is both potent and punitive. It communicates disrespect, criticism and condemnation.

☞ *To Gain Social Acceptance.* Children begin using profanity because they listen to parents. Many foolish thinking people equate profanity with power. In breakrooms some will speak profanely so they will not feel ostracized.

Major Categories of Profanity

☞ *Taking God’s Name in vain—Blasphemy* (Revelation 4:8, “And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come’.”)

Holiness is the most pronounced attribute of the Almighty. Man’s response is to recognize God’s holiness and stand in awe and reverence (Psalm 96:9, “Worship the Lord in holy attire; tremble before Him, all the earth”).

Profanity dishonors and mocks the holiness of God. The profane speaker uses God’s Holy Name in a disrespectful manner. (Exodus 20:7, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain”). The Hebrews honored God’s Name so much and were so fearful of profaning it, they refused to even verbalize His Name!

The prohibition of “taking the Lord’s Name in vain” emphasized the damning practice of using God’s Name for evil purpose, curses, perjured testimony, or even magical incantations! This speech rejects God’s authority. It is speech that totally dismisses God. This is evident in today’s cultural profanities using “God” in speech (“OMG,” “Golly,” “Gee,” etc). Notice how people use God’s name (“God”) as nothing. It is a trite, meaningless expression. The name of our holy God is used as nothing! His majesty, glory, awesome power, unspeakable love—all are degraded to a meaningless worldly profanity! God is trivialized.

☞ *Designed to offend deliberately—Vulgarity*

The word “vulgar” simply means “common.” Today the term has come to refer to crude, distasteful, or offensive speech. These are words typically referring to sexuality and body functions. These are offensive because they depreciate and demean.

“But now you also, rid yourselves of all of them: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene speech (filthy language) from your mouth” (Colossians 3:8). The Greek term translated “obscene” refers to speaking that is impure.

The words in our language referring to bodily functions, body parts and sexuality are not intrinsically obscene. But if society recognizes such as offensive then we must not use them in our speech.

Vulgar speech is sinful because it intends to be offensive. The aim is to shock, offend and disgust others. If one uses vulgarities without thinking, then he should be taken aside and taught better. He should become aware of how his vulgar speech makes a negative impact upon others.

☞ *Calling people unclean—Racial Slurs*

Often racial slurs are not considered profanity. But they are profane speech. Why are certain "four letter words" sinful but then we wink at language demeaning a person because of his race or we laugh at a joke whose humor ridicules a certain ethnic group? Where is our consistency?

Speaking from the heart means that we refuse to speak and listen to racial slurs that are loaded with contempt and arrogance. The vocabulary of racial slurs is built upon the arrogance that "we" (the one speaking) are inherently better than "they."

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3).

Jesus Christ's sacrifice removed racial barriers to fellowship and established a Kingdom where race, geography, social status, etc., unite all into One Body!

Any slanderous, profane words that make distinctions based on race, gender, language, etc., is to be removed immediately!

"(T)he tongue ... is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way." (James 3:8-10).

🔔 Words of Disrespect.

Although disrespect can be visualized or spoken, there are some specific spoken words that should not be used by the Christian who is speaking from the heart.

🔔 Sarcasm and Insults. Winston Churchill responded to Lady Astor with one of the more renowned insults. Lady Astor said, Winston, if you were my husband, I should flavor your coffee with poison." Churchill retorted, "Madam, if I were your husband, I would drink it!" Sarcasm may begin with a joke but its objective is to put-down another person or group. Insults aim for the sensitive areas where one is weak, fearful and insecure. The weakness of others should be targeted by Christians not for manipulation but to strengthen.

"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification" (Romans 15:1-2).

🔔 Insensitive Humor. This is devilish communication! Good jokes are wonderful. A good bellyaching laugh is delightful. But vicious humor at the expense of another is not speaking from the heart. Ridicule is often thrust and followed afterwards by the "Oh I was just kidding!" This evil communication is addressed in Ephesians 5:3-4 where Inspiration condemns "coarse jesting." The Greek term was first used to describe a quick-witted, clever humorist. But later the term devolved into an unkind, offensive joke that is very cruel to the subject. Humor is a wonderful emotion. However, we must be careful that our humor does not ridicule others.

🔔 Labels. Christians must guard against profiling people with labels. Profiling is not wrong because it identifies groups with specific actions. BUT when one is profiled without any investigation, it is not speaking from the heart! Just because one belongs to a certain group, does not mean that person maintains the traits of the group. Truthfully some labels are true but one must not render a verdict based on the label. Such are: "He's a Yankee." "He's a bureaucrat." "He's divorced." "He's never married." "Oh well, after all she's a blond." Etc. And the list could go on listing more offensive labels. Instead of labeling another, get to know that person as Christ commanded!

Taming the Profane Tongue

"(N)o one *among* mankind can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). This is not an escape clause for the Christian whose speech is profane. It is true that no man can tame the tongue, BUT GOD is able to tame the tongue! God has taken those with the most profane, vile, reprehensible and vicious language, and changed them! That change is still possible.

John Bunyan (*Pilgrim's Progress* author) after giving up profanity, "Now I could speak better and speak with more pleasantness than ever I could before." This reality is still available.

A control of profane language in all its forms (blasphemy, racial slurs, foolish words, cursing, etc.) is possible ONLY when you develop and possess:

🔑 A reverence for our Holy God! "(L)ike the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior," 1 Peter 1:15. Once we understand the majestic holiness of the Almighty God, how can we trivialize His great Name? How can we demean another who has been created in His image?

🔑 A reverence for People. "From now on we recognize no one by the flesh (from a worldly perspective)" (2 Corinthians 5:16). We need to realize that any speaking that strips away the value and dignity of another human is unacceptable. Attacking another in order to depreciate his value and dignity is profanity!

🔑 A concern for Excellence. "(W)hatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything, worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8). Here is the checklist to evaluate your words.

🔑 A spirit of Thanksgiving. "But rather thanksgiving" (Ephesians 5:4). Look at others and condition yourself to look for qualities for which you are thankful! If you are truly thankful for a person then it is impossible to be verbally insensitive, vulgar or abusive in your communication.

The Nobility of language

🔑 Our language is amazing. 🔑 Its vocabulary is beautiful. You have a language and vocabulary designed to be used with sensitivity, precision and beauty. By your words you can give strength to the weak and hope to the suffering.

🔑 Profanity is the vocabulary of Satan. It seeks to nullify everything godly conversation accomplishes. Those who speak with profane words deny the purpose for which God created them to communicate and demeans both the speaker and the one speaking.

There are times when verbal exclamations are needed. There is catharsis in unloading our internal hostilities and irritations. Even good ole Charlie Brown had to vent "Good Grief!" at times.

🔑 Christians need to control their speech so when they do "vent" they do not ridicule our great God or destroy another made in the image of God. We have the resources, the vocabulary, the control to tame our tongues!