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What's the Big Deal about Foul Language?

By Freddy Davis

During my years in seminary, I also worked various part-time jobs to make money for living expenses. We were quite young then and did not have the resources to attend school without having some kind of extra income.

There was a period of time that I worked a construction job as a welder's assistant. I was, basically, a "gofer," and my job was basically to make sure that the welder had all of the things he needed to do his job. I certainly did not mind the work, but there were a number of rather unpleasant things about it. For one, it was a very dirty job. Every day when I got home I had to immediately shower as I was filthy from head to toe. There was another "not so great" element about that job, as well – the environment created by the other workers. They were nice enough people, all right, and treated me well, but almost to a person they had potty mouths. It seems that foul language was just a natural and normal part of their vocabulary. They actually thought nothing of speaking that way and meant nothing personal by it. It was just the way they talked.

Over time, as I worked around those guys day in and day out, that kind of language started to get into my head. I, personally, had not been raised that way, and was never inclined to use that kind of language. Beyond that, I was in seminary because I felt God's calling on my life to serve in church ministry, and had a personal desire to grow in my faith in Christ – which I felt included using "non-nasty" language. However, being in an environment like that where I was hearing it all the time made that very difficult. I found that I had to

consciously work very hard to keep from expressing that kind of language in my own life. I managed, but I did find it quite hard.

The experience I just shared was many years ago. During that time, even people who used bad language, as my co-workers did, mostly believed it was not a good thing. What is going on in today's society, though, is at a whole different level. Vile language in modern society has become so common that it is almost impossible to avoid. You hear people dropping F bombs, words meaning excrement, various sex acts, references to human private parts, using God's name in vain, references to hell and eternal damnation, insults to people because of race, profession, family status, and on and on. You hear it in movies, in TV and radio interviews, TV programs, and just in everyday situations at work or other places in society. It is even common in some families.

The question is, "Is it really bad or wrong?" What is it about course and vulgar language that is bad?

How Does a Biblical Worldview Treat Course Language?

In a nutshell, the Bible is clear that the use of foul language is bad. But it is not simply the fact of using bad language that is the problem – as if this were some legalistic requirement. No, there are reasons that go beyond the fact that it is simply taught in the Bible. It is these reasons that get us to a biblical worldview understanding of this issue.

Essentially, these reasons go directly to matters of the heart. Matthew 15:18-19 tells us: *18 But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and those*

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things defile the person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, acts of adultery, other immoral sexual acts, thefts, false testimonies, and slanderous statements.

God is most interested in what is in the heart. So when evil things come out of our mouths, that is an indication that there is evil in our hearts. When we come to know Christ, our hearts are transformed. We become new creatures in Christ. While we will never become perfect this side of heaven, Christian salvation expresses itself in a deepening relationship with Christ – one that increasingly expresses His character in our lives. If that is not happening in an individual, it is evident that God is not guiding that person's life.

It is the teachings of the Bible that define what that means in terms of the language we use, so let's look at some of the things the Bible says about this topic.

Psalm 34:13-14

13 Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit.

14 Turn from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

Proverbs 4:24

Rid yourself of a deceitful mouth And keep devious speech far from you.

Matthew 12:35-36

35 The good person brings out of his good treasure good things; and the evil person brings out of his evil treasure evil things. 36 But I tell you that for every careless word that people speak, they will give an account of it on the day of judgment.

Romans 3:13-14

13 "Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving," "The venom of asps is

under their lips"; 14 "Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness";

Ephesians 4:29

Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but if there is any good word for edification according to the need of the moment, say that, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

James 1:26

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this person's religion is worthless.

What we gain from this is that using clean language is an expression of a biblical worldview, while using vile language is an expression of a non-biblical worldview. The reason for avoiding bad language is because God is holy, and we are supposed to imitate Him in our lives.

How Does a Naturalistic Worldview Treat Course Language?

People who hold naturalistic beliefs certainly do have a personal sense that there are things that are moral and immoral, and they actively seek to enforce their morality out in society. As Naturalism has no *objective* basis for claiming anything to be moral or immoral however, it must depend on subjective criteria to make those determinations. This applies in a general way to any moral issue one can name, and this includes the use of vile language. Thus, people who hold a naturalistic worldview generally see no big deal about using profane language. To them there is no God in existence who would be displeased, so declaring base language to be wrong could be nothing more than a personal preference.

In times past, when American society was dominated by Christian Theism, vile language was recognized as bad because the majority in society believed that if the Bible taught a moral principle, it was actually an objective

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truth sanctioned by God. The result was that while many people still spoke using bad language, it was recognized as being something bad. However, with society now dominated by Naturalism, with its rejection of belief in God, there is no compelling reason to refrain from using it. Thus we hear it commonly in every part of the public arena – whether it be at in-person gatherings, in the media, in entertainment, or in any other part of the societal environment. Now it is commonly accepted as okay – even normal.

So What Is a Christian to Do?

As Christians, we simply can't accept the use of profane language as a personal norm. We know that God is not pleased with that, and that it does not further his purpose in the world or in our lives individually. As Christians, we should avoid it as a matter of our witness for Christ. But beyond our personal use of language, we can also see its use in society as an opportunity to witness to our faith. The way to do this is to simply to stick out as a sore thumb in an environment where profane language is common.

Your "sticking out" that way can be of a more quiet variety as you simply interact with people who curse but never do it yourself. Believe me, over time, they will notice – and in many cases will even ask you about it. When they do, don't be shy about explaining that the reason you don't do

it is because there is someone you love so much you don't want to offend them – Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, it is also possible to be more overt in your objection to profane language as a means of sharing your faith. When you hear profane language, you can appropriately ask people to refrain, or even call them on it as inappropriate. If you use this approach, though, be sure that your own attitude is right and that you are doing it in a way is appropriate to the situation. Sometimes it may be appropriate to do it publicly if you are in authority over people in some capacity. These may be situations where you have the ability to establish the norm of some group. There may be other situations where you encounter people swearing in public in ways that offend a lot of people and you have an opportunity

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to be their defender. In most cases, however, it is probably better to pull a person aside and make the correction in private. This can have the advantage of not embarrassing the person in a way that causes them to reject you, and more importantly, reject your witness.

As you engage this process, however, be very conscious of what you are doing. Whatever the situation, always keep in mind your reason for doing it – to bring honor to God. Vile language never does that.