

Garbage Trucks (and Mouths)

by Bryan Gibson

The sanitation crews in my town do a great job. Throughout the week you see them stopping at homes and businesses, loading the garbage on to trucks. Unfortunately, some garbage has to be left behind—that which comes from people’s mouths. These trucks weren’t designed to pick up that kind of trash, and if they were, there wouldn’t be enough of them. To put in bluntly, it’s hard to find someone who doesn’t “cuss.” Some people know it’s wrong, and just don’t care; others perhaps are just ignorant of what the Bible says. So that we all know for sure what the Bible says, let’s consider the following:

God hears every word we say (Psalms 139:3-4), and in the Day of Judgment we will give an account to Him for the words we’ve spoken (Matthew 12:34-37). Some will refrain from bad language when “ladies are present,” or when the “preacher is around.” God is always present—and He will hold you accountable!

The teaching of Christ in the New Testament is plain: do not use corrupt, filthy, or coarse language (you might want to look up these words). This would certainly include “dirty jokes” (politely referred to as “off color humor”), and what are commonly referred to as “cuss words” (Colossians 3:8; Ephesians 4:29; 5:3-4).

Strictly speaking, profanity is a separate category from the ones in the previous point. Words become profane when sacred words and concepts are treated in a common and trivial fashion. Today, when you hear, “Oh my God,” or “Jesus Christ,” in many cases, it’s to express disgust or surprise—not exactly the reverence the Lord intended. The Lord’s name is sometimes even used in combination with other expletives. One would have to be truly blind not to see the blasphemy involved. And while we’re on the subject, is it really any better to use euphemisms, such as “golly,” or “Jee” (“gee”)? It’s not hard to see where these words (and others) come from—why not use some other words that we know for sure do not profane the Lord.

Some argue that since the Bible doesn’t contain a list of prohibited words, we can’t label any particular word as sinful. On this point, we quote Wayne Jackson: “The Bible could not possibly provide a list of ‘forbidden’ words, since words come and go. Some words become obsolete, and fade from the human vocabulary with the passing of time. Too, new words are ever being born. A ‘word list’ could never be totally relevant, even if it were possible to construct such. The biblical documents deal with different *abuses* of language, in a general way, but there is no catalog of prohibited words...Words become ‘bad’ by virtue of their connotation, motive, etc., and such circumstances can change from time-to-time, or from place-to-place.” For example, “bloody” might mean one thing to us, but in some parts of the world, it would be considered offensive speech.

Foul language is often directed to other people (“cussing someone out”). Would this not be an example of speaking evil of others, something the New Testament also condemns (Titus 3:2;

James 4:11-12; 1 Peter 2:1-2). “Foul” language is an appropriate description, because it indicates language that is out of bounds—that which has “crossed the line.”

Should the same tongue that is used to bless God curse man? (James 3:9-10).

Foul language is often spoken during a “fit of anger,” or an “outburst of wrath.” This is certainly no excuse, because God expects us to control our temper (Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Titus 1:7). “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19).

Adults are often greatly disturbed to hear small children using foul language. Guess where they learned it? In many cases, from their own parents. Surely, we can set a better example than that.

Many (especially youth) use foul language because it puts them with the “in crowd”; it makes them feel more accepted by their peers. But remember, our goal is not to please others; our goal is to please God (Galatians 1:10). The Lord is looking for some young people who willing to go against the crowd and stand up for what’s right. Any takers out there?

Others use foul language to add emphasis to what they’ve said. Some feel like they can get their point across better if they “cuss” (football coaches come to mind). The Oxford English Dictionary contains 295,000 words, with over 600,000 different word forms. I believe we can find a word in there somewhere to give the needed emphasis, without resorting to foul language.

Two passages very aptly express the attitude we should have toward this subject:

Psalms 141:3: “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

Psalms 19:14: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”