

Profanity

Years ago, I was talking with an old friend from high school. He drove a moving truck for a living and had a small crew under him. As we talked we told old stories and he was cussing quite a bit, and he seemed very casual about it. As we got further into the conversation, I think he noticed that I wasn't participating in the profanity. Eventually he brought it up and asked me what I thought about his cussing. I think he just sensed the awkwardness and apparently felt the need to explain himself to me, as he started to make statements like, *"What even is a cuss word, anyway? I mean, we make up words and call them cuss words. Do you think what I'm saying is bad? Words that people might consider bad might not have even been a word ten or twenty or forty years ago."* He had been using some obviously well-known cuss words; the type that would change the rating of a movie, if you know what I mean. In an effort to further justify himself, he even went as far to say, *"These words aren't even in the Bible as cuss words, so it's not like God said not to say them."* This was a friend who claimed to be a Christian, but had a very loose definition of what was right and wrong.

Since he asked, I responded. I asked him how old his daughter was. He said she was five. I continued by asking him, *"What if you tell your daughter that it's time to turn off the T.V. and brush her teeth for bedtime. But, she turns to you and casually says, '@%+# you, I'm not finished yet with the show.' Would there be consequences for her language?"* He was busted and quickly admitted, *"Yea, she'd be in serious trouble."*

I then asked, *"You're a Christian, right?"* He said, *"Yes, but I don't think we can know what words are necessarily curse words."* I replied, *"I think we can know, but let's talk about that in a second. First, let me ask you something. What if you're finished working for the day with your moving crew, and you've been casually cussing and making filthy jokes all day. Then after work, you turn to your co-worker and say, 'Can I tell you how Jesus changed my life?' How serious is your co-worker going to consider your testimony when you talk the way you talk?"*

When the Bible says it's a sin to murder, it doesn't need to go into any detail further than that. It doesn't need to include methods of murder, like using a gun, or a car-bomb, etc. It just has to say, *"Don't murder"*, and it covers all possible scenarios of murder. Likewise, when the Bible says that there should be no cussing, cursing, swearing, profanity, or other sinful speech, it doesn't need to provide an exhaustive list of words or phrases to avoid.

Colossians 3:8, ***"But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth."***

Ephesians 4:29, ***"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."***

Ephesians 5:4, ***"and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."***

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."***

Matthew 15:11, ***"It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."***

Colossians 4:6, ***"Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."***

This begs the question, *"What makes a word a curse word, or a sinful word?"* Biblical truth and common-sense principles can be applied to address this. Here are some questions to consider when evaluating your language.

1. Am I trying to honor the Lord with my speech?
2. Am I trying to honor and edify others with my speech?
3. Is the word considered a curse word by others, even though I might not find it offensive?
4. Does the culture I'm in consider this type of language offensive?
5. Is the intent of my word meant to offend, even if it's a word I've made up?

Taming the Tongue

If you consider yourself a Christian, it's important to understand how vital your language is. Not just the words themselves, but the aggression, body-language, tone, and attitude all communicate intent. In short, your testimony matters! How you talk and live speaks volumes about what matters to you; what you believe. The Bible strongly cautions that the tongue, though it's a small part of the body, has the power to control the whole body! How many people have been put in jail because their mouth got the better of them? Consider what James, a bond-servant of Jesus ("bond-servant" = one who voluntarily commits his life to serve another) and also Jesus' half-brother, had to say about the power of the tongue.

James 1:26, ***"If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless."***

James 3:2-10, ***"For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way."***

Responding to Sin

It's in our fleshly nature to retaliate, and to desire to return insult for insult. If you find yourself in an argument, or being challenged, and you respond with profanity, your sin nature might cause you to wrongly defend yourself by saying, "But he cussed me out and said..." Prepare yourself for this sort of thing by living according to God's Word. Tend to your daily need of Scripture, which is your soul care. Luke 6:28 says, ***"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."*** The word kindness means to show grace in the face of sin. This kindness can only come out of us when the Spirit of God is working through us.

Isolate vs. Insulate

A person might say, *"But Chaplain, I'm in a jail and I hear cussing non-stop, all day long! I can't escape it, so I can't help it when it comes out of me."* If you're tempted to think this way, consider this example from Pastor Rick Warren. He said that he orders fish whenever he goes out to dinner. He loves fish but his wife hates it, so they never eat it at home. As soon as the dinner arrives, the first thing he does is put salt on the fish. How odd that this fish has lived in salt-water its whole life, but has no saltiness to its taste. How could that be? The fish isn't isolated from salt water, it's swimming in it! But, the fish is insulated from the salt-water. Likewise, a Christian wanting to control his speech may not always be able to isolate from all filthy speech, but he can choose to insulate himself. This happens when he saturates his mind with God's Word, and submits himself to the leading of the Holy Spirit. A Christian has to be ready to engage a filthy world but without himself becoming filthy. James 1:27 says that pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Conclusion

Evaluate yourself. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what speech you might be using that is offensive to Him. Be willing to let the Spirit convict you. Make it the desire of your heart to guard your tongue, to control your speech, and to insulate yourself with the righteousness that only comes through the Spirit living inside of you.