

WELL SPOKEN

It should be no surprise that if anyone could swear like a sailor, Peter could. The alternative was being identified as being a follower of Jesus Christ. In Pilate's courtyard, during the supposed trial of Jesus, Peter was accosted by a woman and identified with these words, "Thy speech betrayeth thee". Jesus had prophesied that He himself would die at the hands of this mob. It is therefore easy to believe, that although Peter was there, he was afraid for his life. So he did the first thing that came into his mind. He dropped back to a time before Jesus had come into his life. He swore to convince them that he had nothing in common with Christ.

It still works! What group of people would our vocabulary choices identify us with? Any chance of someone accusing us of being disciples of Jesus Christ because of our speech? Jesus taught us that we are to swear by nothing, but to simply let our ayes be ayes and our nays, nays. Paul warns us in 2 Timothy 2:16 to avoid profane babblings, because they lead to more ungodliness. We are called to be ambassadors of Christ. In other words, to proclaim the good news of His coming to all the world. To speak for Him. To be His voice. Amazing then, isn't it, the words God sometimes comes up with when we get angry?

You are right of course. God has nothing to do with why we often curse, even when we wish we had not. Swearing is of this world alone. It is a loss of control, the result of the soul, or the mind, overruling the spirit. It is often the mark of a poor education with a subsequent limited vocabulary. It is sometimes used by those with no real sense of identity or worth to gain the attention of those around them, even if it must be done by giving offense. Make no mistake though! Those who call it trash talking and gutter language do well to realize that it comes from below, rather than above. This is a very good reason not to expose ourselves to, and fill our minds with, the language and vocabulary of the world's entertainment and friendships. It will be the first thing that comes out under stress.

Especially disturbing is the way that so much of swearing involves breaking God's ordinance against taking the name of the Lord in vain. If anything should warn us of the originator of this sin, it should be this. Of all beings, Satan knows better than any one how much authority and power is vested in the name of Jesus Christ. It has power over him. He can not remove it from the earth, so his only hope is to prevent as many as he can from realizing the value and the liberating power of it. To this end, he cheapens it. He involves the use of that name with every type of evil upon the face of the earth. It is used with contempt by his servants in their daily lives. Worst of all, it is used casually by untold billions as just another set of words or another exclamation to use when their minds can not work quickly enough to supply them with anything more specific. And in the act of sinning against the commandment of God, they name the only name that can set them free. How Satan must smile every time he hears that name trivialized.

The tongue, especially when expressing the contents of the heart, is a terrible thing to tame. According to James 4:11-12 and James 5:9, the church of God is also troubled by it. This is why even the world admires those who have the ability to think before they speak. So many sayings reflect this. "Loose lips sink ships", "open mouth, insert foot", and so on. We think the Lord appreciates a controlled tongue also. He gives us the privilege of speaking for Him, rather than the rocks or the trees of His creation. He must surely prefer that we use His vocabulary when we do this, rather than that of His adversary. Knowing that we have a hard time ruling our souls, He makes the offer to put His Holy Spirit within us to direct us. So that our lives, our actions, and our speech might betray who is in charge of our lives. When trouble comes, if we hold our peace, then allow His Spirit to speak through us, we might be surprised at what words proceed out of our mouths. Or sometimes, even what language.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Peter made a conscious decision to swear to be convincing as a non-follower of Christ?
2. Why do you suppose it is swear words that often come first to our minds in time of stress?
3. Any chance of someone accusing you of being a disciple of Jesus Christ because of your speech?
4. Is the impression that you form of someone's intelligence raised or lowered by their use of curse words?
5. What is your reaction when someone around you begins swearing? If it bothers you, have you ever asked them not to? Have you ever moved away from them? Left the premises?
6. If you have ever asked someone to not swear, what was their reaction? How did you phrase your request?
7. Do you find those words in your mind and sometimes on your tongue to be more of a problem after you have been around it for a while?
8. What are some reasons that you think people swear?
9. Have you ever been around those who curse to gain attention? Is negative attention better than none? Ever heard a comedian who used foul language to shock the audience? Did you think it was humorous?
10. Do you think that those who have continually used the name of God in vain find it more difficult than others to believe that salvation can be found in that name?
11. Is the development of the ability to think before speaking part of becoming mature?
12. How many problems have you created for yourself by saying something before you could stop yourself? Lost any friends when conversations were repeated? Lost any customers? Jobs? Lost any privileges from back talking your parents or teachers?
13. How many people do you think lose their lives because of something they said when they should have just kept silent?
14. How many have lost their salvation?
15. In Matthew, we are told that we will have to give an account for every idle word we have spoken. He also said that by our words we will be justified or condemned. If you had a chance, how many conversations have you had that you would want to erase from God's records if you could?
16. What is lost by taking the time to think through our responses, especially in times of stress, before blurting out whatever comes to mind? What is gained?