

Euphemistically Speaking

James said, “...*If any man offend not in word the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body (Jas. 3:2),*” and, “...*the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire of hell (Jas. 3:6).*” Life would certainly be more enjoyable for many of us if we would but learn to master our tongues, that is, learn to control our speech. Interestingly, the Bible teaches that our speech is related in some way to virtually every other aspect of our lives: Personal and spiritual relationships are influenced, strengthened or weakened by our speech habits and practices (Col. 4:6; 2 Tim. 1:13; Tit. 2:8), even our own inward, personal state of being is not left untouched, because who we are inside is invariably manifested outwardly by our speech (Lk. 6:45). In other words, our speech is in direct relationship to what we think of others, ourselves and God. An accurate summary of James’ statements would be, “Master your tongue and master yourself.”

The use of expletives, cursing, slang and generally foul language has permeated our literature and language to the extent that many people seem to be unable to communicate without them. While the use of this type of language indicates lack of self control, difficulty in self expression and an inadequate vocabulary, it has become so commonplace that it is mistakenly thought to be “normal.” The rejection of this ungodly communication by most Christians is to be applauded and encouraged. However, even Christians who would not overtly curse must be on the lookout for euphemisms, which are probably even more common. A euphemism is a weak oath that is defined as: “Substitution of a mild or roundabout word or expression for another felt to be too blunt or painful.” Weak oaths are feeble attempts to camouflage stronger, deeper, darker feelings. What does one really mean when he says, “gosh-darn,” “gee,” or “shoot?” Most modern dictionaries will show that these are substitutes for much stronger oaths. What about when the names of God and the Lord Jesus are invoked in an oath? Is this fit communication for the child of God? Or, is it evidence that the one who so speaks is like those of Matthew 23:27-28, full of inward corruption?

Let us remember that our speech is a tool by which the gospel is spread and that it is not to be that “*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing (James 3:10a).*” Our manner of speech tells more about who we really are than nearly anything else. Let us each endeavor to master our tongues, be mature and be in control!

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