

Equipping The Saints

“...For the equipping of the saints for the work of service...” ~ Ephesians 4:12

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What Are You Saying?

(By Andrew Dow)

Words mean things, and Scripture warns us to be careful with the words we choose to use. The epistle of James says, **“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!”** (Jam. 3:5, NASB). It is no wonder that Scripture instructs, **“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”** (Eph. 4:29).

With all that Scripture has to say about our words, it is very troubling to hear more and more Christians talking like the world. Peter wrote, **“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior”** (1 Pet. 1:14-15). We are to be set apart from the world in ALL of our behavior. However, we often ignore these commands when it comes to certain aspects of our speech.

One of the areas in which I believe Christians let their guard down is in the use of euphemisms. A euphemism is simply *“the substitution of a mild, indirect, or vague expression for one thought to be offensive, harsh, or blunt”* (dictionary.com).

Euphemisms are not always inappropriate. For instance, it might be inconsiderate to bluntly state, *“so-and-so died.”* To make the same point we will use euphemisms such as *“he passed on,”* *“she crossed over,”* or *“they went home.”* The words are different, but the point remains exactly the same. Similarly, many in the world will use certain words to purposefully take the place of inappropriate words. I hope you will allow me to candidly offer you a few things to think about as we all consider what types of things Christians should and shouldn’t say.

Considering Some Euphemisms

God’s third commandment to Israel states: **“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”** (Exo. 7:20; cf. Lev. 19:12). Something that is vain is empty or worthless. This command is likely given to keep the Israelites from taking meaningless oaths in God’s name (cf. Deut. 6:13; 20:20). When the Lord’s name was invoked it was to be a very serious matter. How do you think God perceives of the flippant use of His name today? People today make reference to God without any serious consideration for who He is. It is commonplace to hear people shout *“Oh my God!”* or *“Jesus!”* when something surprising happens. Many of us rightly teach our children to avoid such vain uses of God’s name, but have we ever considered other words that some frequently use? Think about the following words and definitions (all definitions come from dictionary.com).

Gosh: *“Used as an exclamation or mild oath... euphemistic alteration of God.”*

Golly: *“Used as a mild exclamation expressing surprise, wonderment, puzzlement, pleasure, or the like... euphemistic alteration of God.”*

Goodness: *“A euphemism for God: Thank goodness!”*

Gee: *“Used to express surprise, disappointment, enthusiasm, or simple emphasis... a euphemism for Jesus.”*

OMG: *“Oh my God! (used to express surprise, alarm, etc.)... from its use in digital communication.”*

In addition to some vain uses of our Lord’s name, there are a number of other kinds of euphemisms that have worked their way into our everyday vernacular. For instance, many of us would never carelessly use the word *“Damn,”* but do we use any euphemisms in its place? The word *“darn”* is defined as *“to curse; damn,”* and the word *“dang”* is defined as *“damn (used euphemistically).”* Another term, *“doggone,”* is defined as *“to damn... euphemistic alteration of God damned.”* Another word we might avoid is the frivolous use of the word *“Hell.”* Yet, many choose to disregard the fact that *“Heck”* is *“a euphemistic alteration of hell.”*

What’s The Point Of All This?

I’ve used a lot of paper here to briefly offer definitions and origins of words, but what’s the big deal? I am NOT writing this article to become the “word police.” It is not my intentions to definitively state what words Christians should or should not use. We must all examine our own language to discern whether or not it agrees with God’s Word. However, there are a few things I hope a consideration like this accomplishes.

First, I hope we recognize that words mean things. It is not acceptable to follow the whims of the world in whatever directions they go. If we use the words of the world we might fit in, but we will be rejecting the desire of God that we be His holy people. Words mean things. Let’s make an effort to understand the words we use and use only those words that glorify God!

Second, we need to understand that we will be judged by our words. At the beginning of this article we noticed a few texts that show the importance Scripture places on the words we use. Therefore, it should not surprise us when our Lord says, **“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”** (Matt. 12:36-37). The words we choose to use will affect our eternal destiny. Let us always make sure that our vocabulary aligns itself with God’s desires.

Therefore, we need to be careful to understand the words we use. We need to carefully perceive how our words come across to those who hear them. The definitions I provided above were not written by overbearing brethren, but by people in the world. The world recognizes what these euphemisms mean, we need to recognize what they mean as well! Our aim should always be that our words bring glory and honor to God. Let’s show the world that we belong to Christ, and let it begin by carefully choosing the words we use today.

Notes:

AM Lesson:

Attitudes Toward Truth

PM Lesson:

Do Miracles Occur Today?

“Go therefore and make disciples...” (Matthew 28:19-20)