

New Life

Bible Study Lesson

THE DEVIL'S WORKSHOP #3 – PROFANE LANGUAGE

DAILY READINGS:

- ❖ **Monday:** Do not use God's name profanely or in vain (Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 5:11; Proverbs 30:8-9).
- ❖ **Tuesday:** The Bible condemns vulgar language (Ephesians 4:29; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Colossians 3:8).
- ❖ **Wednesday:** Words reveal what is in the heart (Matthew 12:34-35; Luke 6:45; James 3:9-10).
- ❖ **Thursday:** Be careful of idle and evil words (Matthew 12:36-37; 1 Timothy 5:13; Titus 1:10-11).
- ❖ **Friday:** Use words that please God (Psalm 19:14; Proverbs 15:26; 1 Corinthians 10:31).
- ❖ **Saturday:** Use encouraging words that build up others (Proverbs 12:25; Acts 14:21-28; Acts 15:32).

MEMORY VERSE: *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."*—Ephesians 4:29

Profane Language Has Become Common

On August 3, 1776, General George Washington issued the following General Orders: "The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish, and wicked practice, of profane cursing and swearing (a Vice heretofore little known in an American Army) is growing into fashion; he hopes the officers will, by example, as well as influence, endeavour to check it, and that both they, and the men will reflect, that we can have little hopes of the blessing of Heaven on our Arms, if we insult it by our impiety, and folly; added to this, it is a vice so mean and low, without any temptation, that every man of sense, and character, detests and despises it" (*Founders Online*).

Today, profanity has become so common and accepted in many places that it is hard to imagine a time when a gentleman would never curse in the presence of a lady or when one could be heavily fined for using swear words. Profanity (sometimes called swearing or cursing) can now be heard in movies, on the radio, in music, and in video games. No doubt, you have heard it at school, at work, while shopping, or at ball games. Common excuses for using profanity are: "Everybody does it," "It's a way to express anger," "It's just words," or "I didn't mean it that way." Sadly, many people do not realize profane language is another valuable tool in the devil's workshop.

What Is Profane Language?

Many, many years ago, formal education and wealth was available to only a small group of people within the population. The poor, uneducated people often used language that was considered vulgar, crude, and offensive. This included telling dirty jokes and making suggestive or indecent comments. The more educated people found such language to be "profane" (vulgar and coarse). Sadly, today such language has too often become commonplace, with many people finding it socially acceptable. However, the Bible calls this "filthy language [or foul, vulgar, evil communication]" (Colossians 3:8).

Also, the Latin word that *profane* comes from literally means "outside the temple." In the Old Testament, anything that was common or unholy could not be brought into the temple. Likewise, to take anything outside that belonged in the temple would be considered profaning that which was sacred. (What did God think when Belshazzar did this in Daniel, Chapter 5?)



The Bible tells us that God's name is holy (or sacred). Many verses warn people to not "profane my holy name" (Leviticus 22:32). In other words, use God's name with abuse, irreverence, or contempt. Deuteronomy 5:11 tells us not to "take the name of the LORD thy God in vain," or use it in a evil, empty, or worthless manner. Yet, both the names of God and Jesus are often used today to express surprise, anger, happiness, and sadness. Others speak lightly of spiritual things, calling God "the man upstairs" or speak in anger, telling people to go to the place of eternal punishment.

Have you ever wondered why the names of other religious gods (such as Buddha, Krishna, or Allah) are rarely, if ever, used as swear words? Yet, the names of God and Jesus are used as curse words worldwide. While it can be understood that non-Christians do not acknowledge that God's name is holy, what about people who claim to be Christians? Has profane language begun to creep into the conversations of those who claim to be God's people? Some ministers have said cursing is okay if it helps the Christian relate to people. Is this true? Using God's name in such a way makes Him seem commonplace to the speaker and the listener. How can we convince a lost world of the greatness of God if we speak of Him with so little respect?

Minced Oath

"An expression based on swear words that are less offensive."

Substitute Words

One trick the devil uses is to try and convince Christians that substitute words (also called a "minced oath" or "euphemism") are acceptable because they are less offensive. Using these words might make you feel as if you fit in with worldly friends or co-workers. You might think, "These words are not as bad as the real swear words." However, you need to ask yourself a few questions: "Do the meanings of these words change when I use a substitute word?" "Do I sound like I am saying the actual curse words?" "Why do I want to *sound* like I am cursing?" Words have power and meaning. Changing a few letters to make a curse word into a substitute word does not change its meaning. (For example, the definition of the word *gosh* is "a euphemism for God.")

Most importantly, what does the Bible say about our word choices? Jesus warned that one day we will have to give an account for any idle words we might speak (Matthew 12:36). Idle words are defined as "empty, careless words." According to Matthew 12:37, your words will be used to judge you. Psalm 19:14 shows the importance of our "words" being "acceptable in [God's] sight." The Bible also reveals the source of our words—the heart (Matthew 12:34-35; Luke 6:45). The Bible stresses the importance of choosing our words carefully and controlling our tongue (Proverbs 13:3; James 1:26). After reading these Bible verses, can a Christian with a clear conscience use these questionable words?

Euphemism

"The substitution of a milder word or expression for one considered to be offensive or unpleasant."

Do You Need to Clean Up Your Language?

Have questionable words become part of your conversations? Do you claim to be a Christian but your word choices are not much different than those of people who are unsaved? Do you use words that your parents or pastor would be disappointed to hear you speak? What about your witness for Christ? Do your word choices cause people to be confused about whether you are truly a Christian or not? Ask yourself this question, Would Jesus use these words? It has been said that Christians are ambassadors for Christ, and Christians speak His language. Does your language reveal who you represent?

"The tragedy is that today there are many people who have become so habituated to unclean talk that they are unaware that they are using it" (William Barclay).

If you are using profane language in any form, ask God to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24), to help you to "keep the door of [your] lips" (Psalm 141:3), and to help you "put off all . . . filthy communication out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8). Because curse words are almost always used to tear someone down, change your speech patterns to words that are encouraging, words "that cannot be condemned" (Titus 2:8). Consider the powerful testimony of a "curse-free" Christian!

- 1. What “wicked practice” was George Washington concerned about?**
- 2. Whom did General Washington ask to set an example for the American Army?**
- 3. What are some general excuses people give for swearing?**
- 4. What are two definitions for the word “profane”?**
- 5. What are three terms given in scripture for vulgar language?**
- 6. What does it mean to profane God’s holy name?**
- 7. What is the danger of believing that swearing is acceptable if it helps you to relate to people?**
- 8. What are two other descriptions in the lesson for substitute words?**
- 9. How are substitute words one of the devil’s tricks?**
- 10. How could questionable words hinder your Christian influence?**