

Why I Don't Use the F-Word

I honestly never thought I'd see the day when Christians would justify swearing.

I lived a sheltered life growing up. My Christian parents allowed me to watch a re-release of *Gone With the Wind* at the local theater when I was 12, and my virgin ears were scandalized when Rhett Butler told Scarlett, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a [obscenity]." I had never heard such language—and I knew that if I ever talked like Rhett Butler in my house, I would be sent to the backyard to choose my own switch.

Fast-forward to today, when profanity has so saturated our culture that dirty words are unavoidable. Dropping the F-bomb is a daily habit for millions of Americans. Jesse Sheidlower, the editor-at-large of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, says the F-word has lost its shock value. He says, "For most people, it's hardly noticeable anymore."

Today students wear "WTF?" T-shirts to school. I've seen the F-word indelibly tattooed on people's arms in dark blue ink. And I've heard guys and girls alike use the F-word more than 15 times in a sentence to simply describe their day. There's even a mock children's book titled *Go the [Obscenity] to Sleep* that was one of the fastest-selling titles on Amazon in 2011. What's going on here?

Music has certainly played a role in forcing the F-word on us. (Listen if you dare to any popular hip-hop artist for proof of this nastiness.) One song by the rock band Limp Bizkit a few years ago featured the F-word 50 times. American rapper CeeLo Green released a song in 2010 called *[Obsence phrase]*, and it was nominated for a Grammy Award. Meanwhile, the Motion Picture Association of America recently relaxed its ratings code to allow more uses of the F-word in PG-13 movies. (The

old rule only allowed one F-bomb per film.)

I'm not going on a crusade to wash out our nation's potty mouth. We live in a free country. And besides, I don't expect non-Christians to talk like Sunday school teachers. But at the risk of sounding like a prude, I think true believers need to be reminded that it's *not* okay to talk trash. This certainly goes for preachers—no matter how young and trendy they are.

I honestly never thought I'd see the day when Christians would justify swearing. But it was only inevitable, since many popular preachers have emphasized greasy grace while overlooking our serious lack of discipleship. The underlying message these days is: "Don't be religious or legalistic. We have to be relevant to the culture." The implied meaning is: "Go ahead and talk dirty. God doesn't care. Maybe when non-Christians hear you swearing, they won't label you a religious nut." I'm not buying that line for three reasons:

1. Filthy talk defiles you and those around you. Jesus said it is not what goes into the mouth of a person that defiles him, but what comes out of his mouth (Matt. 15:11). Then the apostle Paul wrote, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths" (Eph. 4:29, ESV). The word *corrupting* here refers to rotten fruit or rancid fish. Filthy talk stinks! Dirty words have the power to soil you—and the rancid odor will linger in your soul.

2. Obscene or crude language is a reflection of your inner character. British preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "Beware of everyone who swears: he who would blaspheme his Maker would make no bones of lying or stealing." Ephesians 5:4 says filthy talk or crude joking are not "befitting" a Christian (ASV). The NIV translates it this way: "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place." If a Christian defiantly insists on talking trash, he has revealed deeper flaws and can't be trusted.

3. Rough language is a sign of an unsundered will. The psalmist wrote, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!" (Ps. 141:3, ESV). Mature Christians invite the Holy Spirit to inspect every area of their lives: attitudes, thoughts, grudges and addictions—as well as coarse language. If you insist on holding on to carnal habits, you are quenching the Spirit's fire. Your spiritual growth will be forever stunted.

The prophet Isaiah recognized that he was "a man of unclean lips" who lived among "a people of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). After his repentance, an angel touched his lips with the hot coal of God's holiness. We need this miracle today if we want to speak for God.

God wants to use our mouths as channels of His life and blessing, but we will never be His prophets if we talk like the world. Let God clean up your conversation.

J. Lee Grady *is the former editor of Charisma and the director of the Mordecai Project (). You can follow him on Twitter at @leegrady. He is the author of Fearless Daughters of the Bible and other books.*