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Cussing Christians by Rod Jetton

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Part 1

A friend of mine asked this question. “Is it always un-Christian to cuss?” To answer let’s first define what cussing is. Meriam-Webster offers a one word definition of cuss; “curse.”

They provide the following simple definition of curse, “an offensive word that people say when they are angry: magical words that are said to cause trouble or bad luck for someone or the condition that results when such words are said: a cause of trouble or bad luck.”

They also offer the following full definition, “1 a prayer or invocation for harm or injury to come upon one. 2 something that is cursed or accursed. 3 evil or misfortune that comes as if in response to imprecation or as retribution. 4 a cause of great harm or misfortune.”

If I ask, “Is it okay for a Christian to cuss?” You might say its okay. However if I ask, “Is it okay for a Christian to curse?” You probably have more doubts. But since cussing is actually the same thing as cursing, we find there is not much in the definitions of cursing that seems very “Christian.”

Now you’re probably thinking, “Rod, get off your spiritual high horse and live in the real world. Just because I let a cuss word occasionally slip out doesn’t mean I’m cursing people and wishing bad on others.”

At this point I am reminded of what Thomas Case said in his *A Treatise of Afflictions* when he wrote, “If I have not written here what I have found, I bless God, I have written what I have sought.” I’m most definitely no saint and I sure don’t have virgin ears. In the Marine Corps I heard plenty of cursing (or cussing as you may want to call it). I’ve listened to well-educated officers from some of the finest universities in America drop the F-bomb numerous times in one sentence. It seemed like it was the only adjective they knew and I felt it made them sound completely ignorant. I’ve also heard Gunnery Sergeants use curse words so effectively it sounded like well-spoken poetry. They somehow used curse words at just the right time to add the perfect amount of emphasis as they reprimand a lance corporal.

Unfortunately, I’ve also done a lot of cussing (I’ll call my cursing cussing, it makes me feel better) myself in the past. Ironically, my language was worst in the times I drifted farthest away from God. So instead of me giving you my opinion on Christians cussing, let’s look at what the Bible says. After all, that’s what us Christians say is our guide on how we are supposed to live our life.

When cussing is a big temptation for us or curse words are the first thing to come out of our mouth when things don’t go as planned, these first verses may tell us a little bit about what is in our heart. Matthew 15:18 says, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.” In Luke 6:45 Jesus also added, “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” These verses show us one way to tell what is really in our hearts. In Jeremiah 17:9 the Bible says our heart is deceitful and no man can understand it. It seems God is telling us one good way to identify what is in our heart, is for us to reflect on what comes out of our mouths. If cussing and cursing is always coming out, that’s probably a good sign of what’s inside us.

These next verses tell us what kind of man uses bad language with the last two contrasting what kind of language we should use:

- “A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth.” The NIV version says it like this, “A troublemaker and a villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth.” - Proverbs 6:12
- “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” - James 3:8
- “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” -Romans 3:13-14
- “But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice,

slander, and filthy language from your lips.” -Colossians 3:8

- “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

- “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” -Colossians 4:6

To me these verses paint a very unflattering picture of a person who uses bad language. Take a moment to think about a person who you know who is always cussing. What’s your opinion of them? How would you grade their temperament? Do you see their conversation building up others or spreading grace?

Next, I want to go to those tried and true words of Paul that all “good” Christians bring up anytime they want us to stop doing something they think is bad. 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God -- even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Even though these verses have been misused to beat believers over the head legalistically, I feel they effectively apply to the question of cussing. If we believe we should follow Christ’s example, we will find there are no recorded verses in the Bible of Jesus cussing, and I feel all the other verses highlighted above make a strong case for Christians to guard their language.

If you don’t like Paul’s preaching and are convinced that your cussing is appropriate, or adds emphasis that helps you communicate your feelings to others more effectively, I want you to consider a few of Jesus words on living the Christian life. In Luke 17:1-2, “Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.’” Wow, that is a VERY scary warning. Do you think a cuss word slipping out of your mouth could cause anyone to stumble? He added in Matthew 5:16, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” How much glory do you think your Father in heaven enjoys from your descriptions of things when you’re angry? Do you think others are pointed to Christ when you use cuss words to help motivate them? Do you think God is pleased and ready to come to your rescue when you utter a curse word about your miserable life while things are falling apart?

Maybe you’re thinking, “That’s all good and well Rod, but I’m kind of annoyed at all your spiritual goody, goody talk. Life doesn’t work that way and we can’t always do

everything the Bible says.”

Okay, I hear you and propose you consider a few real life examples:

EXAMPLE #1 - When I was in the Marines, our battalion had two chaplains assigned to it. A priest for the Catholics and a Lutheran minister for the Protestants. With only two chaplains for a whole battalion serving on 13 different Navy ships, they couldn't hold services on all of them each week, so I volunteered to be a lay reader. Lay readers were responsible for leading services for all faiths when the chaplains were not around. I'm Protestant and attended those services before we were deployed, but the protestant chaplain would occasionally tell off-color jokes with a few bad words thrown in. They were funny, we all laughed and he seemed like a good guy, but I thought it was a bit odd that a chaplain would use that kind of language.

To better serve the Catholics on my ship I also attended Father Trazic's masses. He went through all the Catholic rites, but when he gave his homily, he would preach strongly against drunkenness, whoreing around and all the other things that young sailors and Marines tend to indulge in. He never told an off- colored joke nor used bad language. I'm sure the other chaplain had the best of intentions and was just trying to relate to a bunch of young wild Marines, but once we were deployed in 1993 and then got sent to Somalia after the rangers were killed, the protestant chaplain didn't have too many people coming to his services, but Father Trazic held some fairly large masses, and I was right there on the front row.

You see, when there is a chance you might get shot and die, you don't want a chaplain who was telling off-color jokes and using bad language praying over you. Most of us were far from perfect and we knew if we went down and were bleeding out, we wanted a good man who was trying to keep us on the right path praying for us as we entered eternity.

I'll never forget towards the end of that deployment as we were doing a big field exercise with the French Foreign Legion in France and Father Trazic came by our area to visit with the men. While he was there, a cold rainstorm blew in and he didn't have any rain gear. I watched as about 30 cold hungry Marines took their rain gear off and tried to get Father Trazic to wear theirs and stay dry. You don't often see infantry Marines do anything to help a Navy guy from headquarters who is out visiting the men in the field when the weather is bad. Normally they want them to suffer so they have to endure what the infantry does. But these men respected Father Trazic, they loved him, I loved him and after all these years I have never forgotten that crusty Polish chaplain who didn't shy away from telling us young Marines what we needed to hear.

EXAMPLE #2 - When I was 18, I spent the summer before college working in construction with a good Christian man who was friends with my father. He was in a gospel group, taught the boys Sunday school class and was someone I looked up to a lot. One day we were pulling some thick wire through a small pipe and he asked me to go get the lubricant that would help it slide through easier. He called it “baby sxxt” because it was brown and runny. It was an accurate description of the lubricant and it’s not a terribly bad word in that situation, but I was shocked. I never said a word to him, my dad or anyone, but I just never expected a Sunday school teacher and gospel singer to use any bad words. He was a wonderful man and maybe I shouldn’t have been so surprised, but I just didn’t expect it. As a young man heading off to college, it stuck in the back of my mind that maybe a good Christian could cuss some and it would be ok.

One thing you should know was I have never heard my dad cuss. He is a preacher and in all my life I’ve never heard him say a single cuss word. Now as a teenager I drifted away from the Lord and I cussed a lot, but I thought that all preachers and good Christians were like my dad. That was the first time I had been around a good Christian in a secular environment and heard one cuss. I had heard lots of other people cuss, but not any Sunday school teachers.

I saw my dad get angry a lot. When working on cars, he would throw wrenches, bust knuckles and yell at me to hold the flashlight still, but I never heard him cuss. I thought that was the way all church leaders were supposed to be, but as I grew up I learned that people like dad are the exception. Most let a word slip out here and there, while many make it a frequent habit. But it’s a habit only when they are not at church or around other Christians!

EXAMPLE # 3 - Last summer I was at a good friend’s house when his 14 year old son came in and let a “damn” slip out. My friend who is a Christian, got onto him and told him to watch his mouth. This surprised me because I had questioned my friend about the many times he used “dxxn” and “sxxt” in his casual conversations with me. When I had brought it up, he told me he didn’t do it that much and that it wasn’t a big deal.

So once his son left the room, I asked him why he was giving his boy a hard time about cussing when he cussed all the time himself. At first he argued with me about how often he cussed and then said it wasn’t good for his son to use bad language. I didn’t want to be too pushy so I just ended the conversation by saying, “I don’t think you will have much luck teaching him not to use bad words if you’re always letting them slip out.”

Now I haven’t said much else about it when we are together, but I guess he is thinking about it more because now when he says one of these bad words in our casual

conversations (which happens frequently), he stops and apologizes and has admitted that maybe he does need to work on saying them less. He is thinking about doing a cuss jar that he and his son have to donate to if either of them let a word slip out.

EXAMPLE #4 - A few years ago when I was back on track with the Lord, reading my Bible and praying every day, the Lord used my lost employees to show me my language needed cleaning up. I was supervising a small staff and some of them cussed quite a lot. I didn't say anything and tried hard to let my example speak for itself, but one day things were not going well and they were griping and complaining about stuff and using bad language and I stood up and said, "Look, you all need to buckle down, stop your bitching and whining and just get the job done." I added, "And I would appreciate it if you all would watch your language and stop cussing so much!"

I sat down feeling good about myself and that I had finally said something about the bad language when one of the guys said, "I think you're right and as soon as you stop using bad language we will too."

Oh Snap!! I started thinking to myself, "What, me use bad language! What in the world was he talking about???? I never used bad language, as a matter of fact I pride myself on not using bad language."

I turned back around and self-righteously shot back, "I don't use bad language!"

He calmly replied, "You say bitching and pissed off all the time."

In just the blink of a second I could feel my cheeks turning red with embarrassment as I was quickly convicted of my hypocrisy. I wanted to tell them those were NOT bad words. Those were just Marine words, much less offensive than all the other words used in the Marine Corps. But I knew my opinion didn't matter. I knew these kids I was supervising and trying to be a good Christian example to had been hearing me curse for the last six months.

All I could do was apologize for using curse language and commit to stopping and slink back into my office. Despite my good intentions I had blown my chance to be a good witness, and honestly when he first confronted me I wanted to justify my language and tell him those were not bad words. But my human logic was quickly proved wrong by his response and my prayers afterward.

Interestingly enough, my dad and I had just been talking and I had used the word screwed in our conversation. Dad made a point to say he didn't think that word sounded that good and suggested I not use it. He went on to rant about preachers today who use it in the

pulpit and added that “pissed” and “crap” were other words he had been hearing young preachers use that he felt were not very positive. I didn’t bring up my use of bitching to dad because I knew that would be one he didn’t like and I chalked his talk up to an old preacher rant and patted myself on the back for all the “bad” words I didn’t use, quickly forgetting about dad’s opinion. (Why is my dad always right?)

CONCLUSION

Those are all real life examples. Lots of Christians justify their bad language by saying it helps them relate to others and keeps them from looking too good, good, but have you ever thought about all those who are lost around you and what message they are picking up? They may not be worried about getting shot and bleeding out, but if they ever do worry about eternity, will you be the one they want to talk to? If they have a hard time, will you be the one they ask to pray for them, or will they think you might not be the “best” choice to help them through their tough time?

Have you ever been a stumbling block to a younger person? Maybe they never said a word to you about your language, but what were they thinking? Could your words allow them to justify their actions because of your example? Would they be able to say, well Rod did it so it must be ok?

Do you want your kids to grow up cussing at people when they cut them off in traffic, or spewing out a blue streak when they drop something on their toe? Our small cussing problem can grow into full blow cursing for our kids. They can curse those who hurt them or even worse curse God when things don’t go right. Sometimes what we do just a little bit, our kids do a lot. I would say most Christians hope their kids turn out to be better Christians than themselves.

Maybe you are like me and justify your bad words as not that bad. Maybe your mom said them, or at work they say them and you just don’t think they are that “bad.” Do you compare your language to others and convince yourself that you’re not so bad? Both those justifications caused me to be a stumbling block to others.

One of my favorite books is *The Practice of the Presence of God*. It’s about how Brother Lawrence, a 17th century monk had such a close relationship with God. One of the points he stresses more than once is to, “Do nothing, say nothing and think nothing displeasing to God.” I find this difficult, but Brother Lawrence continually drives this point home as he explains what it means to practice the presence of God. How often do we stop and contemplate if all our words are pleasing to God?

I’m currently looking at a small card on my desk that’s titled 5 Resolves for Personal Revival. Item #2 on the list says, Forsake All Questionable Habits and Activities and

references Romans 14: 23. Next to that it has a small box to check with these words written beside it, “I will not go to bed this evening nor live this day without removing from my life every habit or activity I cannot be absolutely sure is approved by God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31, Romans 13:14 & Romans 14:14.) I picked it up after our revival last week and I’ve been looking at it every day during my prayer time. I know I need to check that box, but it’s a serious promise to make and I’m meditating on all I may have to “give up.” Would there be any words you might have to give up if you checked that box?

Most Christians don’t want their preacher to cuss. They don’t expect their Sunday school teacher to cuss and they don’t want their kids to cuss. But for some reason we go to great lengths to justify why it’s okay when we cuss. The funny thing is, we do a pretty good job of never cussing in front of our preachers, Sunday school teachers and unless we’re really mad, our kids. But there is one fairly important guy who is always around to hear all our cuss words. Any guess who he is????

We pat ourselves on the back because we don’t take the Lord’s name in vein by saying God dxxn, and we don’t drop any F-bombs or use the really “bad” words. Many of us seldom witness to others and we spend most of our time at church complaining about the sad state of the world and wonder why more people don’t come to church and get “saved” just like us.

Could it be because they have decided that they are already... just like us?????

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