

Bad Language

We are not concerned particularly with non-Christians here. What should we think when we hear people who are known to be Christians using bad language?

Without any doubt the worst kind of bad language is coupling a name of God with profane expressions. We don't judge anyone's spiritual condition, but leave that to God. However, there was a revealing instance that the book of Leviticus mentions. A certain Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed. The people brought him to Moses. They put him in custody, that the mind of the LORD might be shown to them. The LORD told Moses, *"Take outside the camp the man who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Then you shall tell the children of Israel, 'Whoever curses his God will bear his sin.'"* We can also cite what St Paul wrote: *"No one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed."*

Non-Christian people round about us freely blaspheme and swear. One of the surest tests of whether a word is swearing is to test it to see whether it is commonly used with the expression "By." For example, try "Heck:" (for "hell") "Jeepers" (for "Jesus"), "Crikey" (for "Christ") - the list goes on and on. Twisting up the name doesn't mean that it is then acceptable. If your name is "Henry", and someone says, so that you can hear it, "By Henry, it is hot this afternoon", you think, "Why does he have to bring in my name simply to say that?" If he twists your name into "Henrico", you know just as well that he doesn't respect you. The truth is that God's name is holy, and He does not condone people's careless use of His name.

Then there is what is known as "bad language." On the superficial level, we could remark that people must be short on imagination if they have to fill almost every sentence with "the Australian adjective." On a more serious level, it indicates an unsavoury attitude to life in general. Paul wrote, in Ephesians, *"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."* The word "corrupt" means "bad" or "rotten." Jesus used it in His saying about a "bad" tree and "bad" fruit. He argued both from the kind of fruit to the kind of tree, and the other way around.

Our concern should first of all be with ourselves. How do outsiders see us Christians? That is not an idle question. Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, and Peter's first letter express the writers' concerns that Christians should be well spoken of by people in the community who are outside the church. Besides, if I advertise by my language that I don't take my faith very seriously, how can I possibly make a credible witness to others? That is why it pains us when people who have the reputation of being Christians seem to declare the contrary by their language. What this means is that we should be beware of hypocrisy. If people express their attitude as: *"I don't use bad language when gentlemen are present, when women are around, or when a pastor is present"*, they are frankly admitting their hypocrisy. They are admitting that they are prepared to do it when another kind of company is present, and are virtually saying, *"If you want to know what I am really like, watch me when I am in that sort of company."* Indeed, if a person wants to know the kind of person he is, he simply has to examine the kind of things that he says, thinks, or does when alone, or when in certain kinds of company. It should be as impossible for a tongue that has been touched by the holy things in the Sacrament to speak profanely as it is for a spring to yield both sweet and salty water.

However, should we really link bad language with hypocrisy? Jesus once said, *"Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."* What does that last part mean? If you want to know what a person's heart is full of, take notice of what runs over through his mouth!

Can we really say that a person who has the name of a Christian and regularly uses bad language is a hypocrite? Again, it isn't our task to judge what is anyone's heart. We leave that to God. However, God's Word has not left us in any doubt: *"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless."* That is hypocrisy, isn't it?

We have the duty to warn people who have the name of "Christian" and regularly use bad language, that they should be more aware of the coming judgment. Jesus said, *"A good person produces good things from the good stored in him, but an evil person produces evil from the evil stored in him. I tell you: on Judgment Day people will have to give an account of every careless word they say. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."* It is God who will do the acquitting and condemning!

Christian people must regularly go back to the Gospel. We all have evil natures, and have to admit that what comes out of our hearts is evil. We praise God that He has redeemed us from all wickedness through the costly blood of His own Son. That was no child's play, for Him, and we should not treat what He has so lovingly done for us as child's play. Gratitude for His precious salvation, through which He has declared us just and holy

in His sight, is that we should reflect His holiness in our desire to be holy.

Sometimes bad language in others can open the door to an opportunity. If someone is regularly coupling the name of Jesus with profanity, I can try saying, *“Please; just for my sake, do not blaspheme the only name through which I hope to have eternal salvation.”* It can be made an opportunity for a word of witness. However, in this wicked world, we know how even that can quickly invite more blasphemy.