

CUSS' WORDS

A 12 year-old girl asked me a question the other day that I couldn't answer. She wanted to know why some words were okay to say and some weren't, and how 'cuss' words got to be 'cuss' words in the first place. Can you help?

“Cuss” is a corruption of “curse,” and curse words originally were part of a longer sentence in which someone asked God to condemn another person or thing to eternal punishment. Eventually such words as “hell,” “damn” and “damnation” came to be used by themselves as expletives, often with the same cursing intent. Casual use of these words is inappropriate, since we are sinners ourselves and since we lack any power to carry out such a judgment (James 4:11-12).

“Profanity” describes language which lightly esteems what is actually holy. These “bad” words are good words used badly – exclaiming “O God!” or “Lord” or “God Almighty!” when we are not really talking to God, or using the name and title “Jesus Christ!” in the same flippant manner. This practice usually stems from thoughtlessness, but it shows irreverence and violates the Commandment which prohibits taking God's name in vain (Ex. 20:7). The Bible warns against a “profane” spirit (Heb. 12:16, KJV).

“Vulgar” language is “common” talk not used by respectable people in polite company. These words, which usually spring from Anglo-Saxon rather than from Latin or Greek roots, often refer to private body parts or private bodily functions. People who choose these words, or who use them out of context, show a lack of respect for their hearers, a lack of refinement in their own character, and probably a lack of vocabulary to express themselves in polite language. Christians are to avoid “unwholesome” speech (Eph. 4:29) and to speak “with grace” in language that encourages and enhances what is good (Col. 4:6).

Donald