

Is it OK for Christians to Cuss?

Daryl Wingerd

Why any Christian would fight for the liberty to use foul language is beyond me, but there is a growing debate as to whether cussing is appropriate for the believer. Let's start with two basic facts:

First, There is no verse in the Bible that specifically says, "Thou shall not use any of these words," followed by a list of the most common cuss-words of our day. Second, the verse most people use to argue against the use of foul language is Ephesians 4:29: "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth" As the second half of the verse seems to indicate, the "unwholesome word" Paul has in view here is probably not a reference to individual cuss-words, but rather to unkind, unhelpful, or untrue *statements* or *messages* that would tear a fellow believer down rather than building him up.



Having said that, I wouldn't want anyone to rush to the hasty conclusion that cussing is appropriate. In my view there are at least six reasons to conclude that cussing is inappropriate for believers.

1. Many of the words known as cuss-words are descriptions of immoral acts, filthy emissions of waste from the body, or private body parts. Whatever the original meanings of these words, these vulgar meanings are undoubtedly connected with them now. When a person uses one of these words, he is calling to mind one of these acts or objects. With this in mind, remember that Paul tells Christians to dwell on things that are honorable, pure, lovely, and excellent (cf. Phil. 4:8). When you use language that calls to mind some obscene act or private body part, you are not only dwelling on the wrong objects yourself, you are also making it difficult for your hearer to focus on the right things.

2. The Christian who uses foul language in public wastes the opportunity to set himself apart from many unbelievers who commonly say the same things. The fact is, the person who does not know you but hears you fire off a cuss-word in a sentence would not likely think, "Now there's a fine Christian man (or woman)"? Your speech leaves him with no reason to suspect that you are any different than everyone else, and therefore, gives him no reason to listen to what you might have to say about Christ.

3. Paul wrote to Corinth, saying, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32). He did not want Christians

to offend *anyone* unnecessarily, not even the unbelievers around them, and certainly not a fellow Christian. He was not referring to the offense of the gospel, of course, or an offense taken by someone who despises certain Christian beliefs or practices. Cussing is not part of the gospel message, however, and it certainly is not an essential Christian practice. Therefore, if even a single Christian (or an unbeliever, for that matter) is offended by your foul language, you have sinned.

4. Many movies receive an "R" rating because of foul language, meaning that even unbelievers recognize that cussing is inappropriate, at least for children. Additionally, in many public parks and other venues, the use of foul language is prohibited altogether. Frankly I find it shameful when Christians claim as a personal liberty that which even our pagan society recognizes as offensive.

5. Given the fact that the tongue is "a restless evil and full of deadly poison," that which cannot be tamed and which "defiles the body" (James 3:6, 8), Christians should have as their "default setting" a natural suspicion of what comes out of their mouths. This thought is affirmed by Proverbs 10:19 which says, "When there are many words, sin is not lacking." The fact is, the more you say, the more likely you are to sin. Using these biblical principles as a guide, if there is any question as to whether or not something produced by the tongue is sinful, we should always err on the side of caution rather than appealing to our liberty.

6. One would hope that Christians who claim the liberty to cuss in public, among their families, or even in the presence of other believers, would at least find such language unthinkable in the presence of Jesus Christ. The fact is, however, if you would not cuss in His presence, then you cannot cuss with a clean conscience at all because as Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

I would never want to rob a believer of any genuine Christian liberty, but our liberty in Christ is not "the right to do whatever is not explicitly prohibited." Christian liberty is freedom from the slavery of sin (Rom. 6:16-22), freedom from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13), and freedom to "have as our ambition . . . to be pleasing to [the Lord]" (2 Cor. 5:9).

Judge for yourself, but please make your highest aim to glorify God in all that you do and say (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). And remember as you judge that "there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:4).