

THE MESSENGER



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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An Irreverent Trend Runs Rampant

by Mitchell Stevens

As my wife and I tune in to one of our favorite television programs, Trading Spaces, we sometimes anticipate the big “reveal” at the end of the show as much as the homeowners themselves. The couple is herded into their newly decorated room, eyes covered, the host builds their eagerness with a few comments, and then you might as well mute the TV, because it happens every time. As generally wholesome as this home improvement show is, when these average, home-owning, all-American contestants are surprised with their radically re-decorated rooms, you are bound to hear the name of God shouted to the rafters. Everywhere, for any reason, people are calling on God in vain these days.

To say, “Oh my God” or “Oh my gosh” is the “appropriate” alternative exclamation. It’s what you say when you don’t know what to say. It’s almost a reflex to some. Why, even in Instant Messenger shorthand lingo, an abbreviation has been created for it (“OMG”). The name of God and his Son has been so loosely bandied about by everyone that recently a talk radio host, while making an emphatic point, had to clarify that when he said “Thank God” he was sincere: “I don’t mean, ‘Thank gosh,’ I mean ‘Thank GOD!’” This example proves that most people use the two words interchangeably – one is as meaningless as the other to them.

This long-standing trend should be deeply troubling to the Christian mind – indeed, it should be outright offensive. Instead, sometimes Christians can be heard using the same loose, thoughtless phrases evoking the name of God, or using the “harmless alternatives”: gosh, golly, gee. Concerning that most people don’t see a difference between “God” and “gosh,” shouldn’t we be all the more careful to steer clear of such irreverence altogether?

Certainly, God’s position on this issue is clearly stated. Even the quasi-religious are familiar with the commandment “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11). So, even those who wrongly make no distinction between Old and New Testaments should be clearly instructed on this one. While we should not ultimately bind this commandment from its place in the Law of Moses, the principles of God are eternal and abiding, and we can find them restated in the new Covenant. This one is no exception. Christ instructs us that when speaking to God, we should acknowledge that the name of God is “hallowed,” that is, sanctified, made holy, mentally venerated (Matthew 6:9).

Some might justify saying “Oh my God” loosely, since the proper name of God is Jehovah. This, however, is a very weak justification. First of all, we know the One Creator in our culture as God. That is His name. Furthermore, the idea behind the sanctity of God’s name is the sanctity of His person. Our attitude toward God – His name, His person, His word, and His church – should be one of fear and awe.

“But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.”

Guard Duty

by Irvin Himmel

Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles (Proverbs 21:23).

It is our duty to keep watch over our souls. Failure to guard our words leaves the soul vulnerable to troubles.

What to Guard Against

Keeping watch over the mouth and the tongue means guarding against improper speech.

- (1) *Words of Guile.* “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Psa. 34:13). To speak guile is to utter words of deceit. It is said of Jesus that he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth (I Peter 2:22). On one occasion Jesus complimented Nathanael by saying, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” (John 1:47). We are taught in God’s word to lay aside “all guile” and “all evil speakings” (I Peter 2:1).
- (2) *Rash Utterances.* First thoughts are not always the best thoughts. “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not the heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon the earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Eccl. 5:2). Reckless words spoken in haste are like the piercings of a sword. The fellow who speaks rashly may have a lot of indigestion caused by his having to eat his own words!
- (3) *Spouting of Slander.* The Bible warns against slander, backbiting, and malicious gossip. David said to the Israelites, “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off” (Psa. 101:5). “He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool” (Prov. 10:18). Paul warned against backbitings and whisperings (II Cor. 12:20). Slander slaughters! Carnal weapons have slain thousands, but tongues have slain ten thousands.
- (4) *Filthy Conversation.* “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). Some punctuate their speech with profanity and pollute it with vulgarity. With the mouth they spew forth so much filth and garbage that they are odious to others. The flavor of their speech is about like the odor of a garbage dump on a hot summer day.
- (5) *Untimely Words.* Remarks that are suitable for certain times and places may be altogether inappropriate in other circumstances. Blessed is the man who knows when to speak his mind and when to mind his speech! A “word fitly spoken” is not an untimely word (Psa. 25:11).
- (6) *Harsh Criticism.* Some never show any charity when they begin criticizing others. They act as if they can carve their way to success with cutting remarks. One should be careful of what he says, “for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter” (Eccl. 10:20). How often have harsh and unjust criticisms returned like a boomerang. One’s tongue may be so sharp that he cuts his own throat with it!

Bridle the Tongue

James reminds us that just as we put bits in the mouths of horses, and we turn about their whole body, we need to bridle the tongue. “Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!” (James 3:3-5)

The person who talks all the time is never taken very seriously. He keeps on talking even when he has run out of anything to say. If he would hold his tongue he could hold his friends.

There is “a time to keep silent, and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7). In some situations it takes real self-control to keep quite. “The silence of a man who can speak wisely and eloquently is a revelation of self-control, and often adds more to the dignity of his character than words can” (W. Harris).

Enormous influence is exerted through the power of speech. That influence can be either good or bad. We need to heed the admonition of the children’s song:

*Be careful little tongue what you tell,
For the Father up above
Is looking down in love,
So be careful little tongue what you tell.*

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26). We may suppose that we are serving God acceptably because we regularly meet with the saints for worship, we pray, and we read our Bibles. But do we guard our speech? Are we allowing an unbridled tongue to make hypocrites of us?

No one can place a sentinel over one’s mouth and tongue but the person himself. This means guard duty every day. Speech-control is important.

NOTES & NEWS:

Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses.

“...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James 5:16