

Words Which Are Not Befitting

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How we use our language is one of the most profound ways to show what is going on in our hearts. There is a lot you can see about a person by the way he or she tells a joke, responds to a comment, or acts around people who use filthy or abusive language. Do we heartily play along with those who make fun of another person in a way that is hurtful? Do we say nothing when an illicit joke is made – even worse, are you the one telling the joke? People will know you by your fruit (Matthew 7:16-20), so the tough question that must be asked of us every day is: what kind of bad fruit is being produced by your words? Always try to remember what is said of our language in James 3:2-12. *“The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell... The tongue can be tamed by no man; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison...”*

Ephesians 5:4

“Nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not befitting; but rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:4). There is an ideal that should exist in the Christian spirit that is higher than the world. It is not just that we need to abstain from evil or refuse to give in to the just the most heinous crimes, but, as the previous verse states, *“Let it not be named among you, as is becoming saints”* (Ephesians 5:3). We are supposed to be such righteous people that we do not even talk about immorality and moral filthiness in a flippant or casual manner. Consider the following points from our text:

- **“Nor filthiness”** – This is defined as shamefulness, obscenity, and nastiness. *“Dirty, indecent, obscene language”* (**Commentary On Ephesians**, Boles, p. 298). Some people try to confuse the issue, however, and argue that “obscenity” is just in the eye of the beholder. Essentially, what is disgusting to you may not be disgusting to me. What is common language to one person is uncommonly filthy to another. Some try to make a comparison to the way that “city people” and “country folk” talk, arguing that some things that seem foul to one group are just a part of normal vernacular to the other. This argument falls flat, however, when we see that our motive behind the language is as important as the language itself (if not more so). Paul does not give a list of words that are “off limits” to the Christian, but categorically condemns all filthiness in speech.
- **“Foolish talking”** – This is *“impious, silly, godless speech without forethought and wisdom”* (Caldwell, p. 232). *“This is the talk of a fool, the man who does not know God”* (Boles, p. 298). *“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have done abominable works...”* (Psalm 14:1). Foolish talking would include pointless discussions on subject matter that violates God’s truth. Some things just are not worth debating – some subjects are just foolish. Quite simply, if there is a clear Bible teaching on a matter, arguing about it is just

foolishness. If there is no clear Bible teaching, then arguing about it will not reveal anything new (Deuteronomy 29:29).

- **“Coarse jesting”** – This is suggestive jesting, or coarse jokes. It would be the use of polished and witty humor as an instrument of sin. *“Sometimes it is lodged in a sly question, in a smart answer, in cunningly diverting or cleverly retorting an objection, in a lusty hyperbole, in a plausible reconciling of contradictions, or in acute nonsense”* (**Word Studies**, Vincent, p. 398). Coarse jesting is an oxymoron, basically. It is taking a subject that is dirty, lewd, or risqué, and masking it in smart words, feigned wisdom, or clever language. The coarseness comes from the use of sin as a means of gaining laughs, for it has been noted by righteous people that the lowest form of humor is getting a laugh from sin.
- **“Bur rather giving of thanks”** – This means that God always gives us something better to do. It is not that He makes us abstain from everything good in this life, or that He is keeping us from truly being happy. Rather, it is righteousness that leads to true happiness, not filthiness.