



"When language in common use in any country becomes irregular and depraved, it is followed by their ruin and degradation."
—John Milton

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Hijacking Our Language

The English language is a huge, vibrant, beautiful tongue. No language on earth can compare to its breadth and depth. The definitive *Oxford English Dictionary*, the unofficial but accepted authority on the language, lists and defines more than a half-million words, far more than any other language spoken today. Thousands of words are added each year through the coining of new words, the combining of old words, and the borrowing of foreign words, although the curmudgeonly among lexicophiles grumble about these additions, declaiming that the language already contains words that mean what the new words attempt to describe.

Far more pernicious, however, is the purposeful twisting of common words' meanings to fit and promote a particular political point of view. This came out during the recent debate over President Bush's deployment of 21,500 additional troops to Iraq. The Bush administration and its backers said this was a "surge" in troop levels, spinning the policy as a positive push to wrest control of the region from the insurgents and bring [peace](#) and victory.

Its opponents, however, described it using a different term: To them, it was an "escalation," bringing back long memories of a similar troop buildup in

Vietnam—and of the disastrous results that ultimately followed. (It should be noted, however, that the additional soldiers in Vietnam did not cause the ignominious retreat from that country; it was a lack of political will to defeat the Viet-Cong.) The two sides have also volleyed the terms "withdrawal" and "redeployment," as well as "terrorist" and "insurgent," among others.

Another example of language abuse is the oft-heard term, "homophobe," used as a pejorative for anyone who opposes homosexuality. It is a total misnomer, as its intrinsic meaning is "fear of sameness" (*homo-* "same" + *phobia* "fear"). As can be easily seen, it is similar to words such as "arachnophobia" (fear of spiders), "altophobia" (fear of heights), and "xenophobia" (fear of strangers or foreigners). "Homophobia" has been hijacked by the liberal left and distorted to mean "hatred of homosexuals" in order to paint its opposition as irrational, untrustworthy, and even dangerous. Not content with morphing *gay* from "merry" to "homosexual," the left has violated the English language to its own debased ends.

Similarly, a further distortion of language has occurred with the usage of "tolerant" and its negative, "intolerant." In its original sense, *tolerant* means "inclined to forbear or endure," implying that a person would put up with something known to be morally wrong, dangerous, annoying, etc., for an indeterminate time. However, the word is now being used to mean "accepting without bias of what is different" or even "welcoming" of the same. The politically correct crowd demands that society "tolerate," not just cultural differences, but also sexual perversity and religious deception as if they were normal and morally equivalent to what is good and true. A person is considered "intolerant"—and likely to be ridiculed, hated, and perhaps persecuted—if he expresses any opinion that does not grant full normalcy to any unbiblical belief or deviant behavior, including pederasty, Wicca, terrorism, same-sex unions, children's rights, Islam, feminism, or whatever the liberal cause of the week happens to be.

Speaking of belief, another word that is becoming warped is "fundamentalism." Originally, this word was coined to describe a twentieth-century Protestant movement that stressed a literal interpretation of Scripture as "fundamental to Christian life and teaching," as Webster's so succinctly phrases it. Although not Protestant, the church of [God](#) would generally agree with this approach. However, "fundamentalist" has been turned against those

who practice fundamentalism, becoming a derogatory term meaning "fanatic, right-wing religious nut."

Incredible as it may seem, this definition has been helped along by the rise of Islamic terrorism. These terrible acts of violence have been perpetrated by Muslims adhering to Wahhabism, a literal, ultraconservative, and quite belligerent interpretation of the Koran. Rosie O'Donnell and others of her ilk have made ridiculous public statements in which Islamic fundamentalists and Christian fundamentalists are equated—as if Jerry Falwell has a global network of militant [Christians](#) devising havoc against innocent civilians throughout the Muslim world.

What is occurring to the English language recalls the prophet's cry in [Isaiah 5:20](#), "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" The malicious alteration of language is one more black mark against a society descending rapidly toward a disastrous fall, weakened first by its own suicidal behavior before succumbing to its encircling enemies. Isaiah broadens the principle of distortion to include not just words but also morality, ideas, impressions, and even sensory perceptions. When black equals white in so many areas of human life, all distinctions disappear—and rather than [the world](#) coming together in bliss and harmony, it produces weakness and eventual dissolution. Such is the theme of the decline and fall of most of the great civilizations.

Words are important, for through them come all ideas, good or bad. In the end, they are but symbols whose meanings can often be distorted to suit intent of the author, and we need to be attentive to their use so that we are not deceived. Remember Jesus' first warning in the Olivet Prophecy: "Take heed that no one deceives you" ([Matthew 24:4](#)). In this day of politically correct language, it is very good advice.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

The Five Warnings of Hebrews

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The writer of Hebrews does not identify a single flagrant violation of law, but instead delivers a general castigation for incremental, continuous, disrespectful, and forgetful neglect—a failure to esteem what should have been thought precious, their calling and salvation, while esteeming inferior things like wealth or status. Hebrews expounds four other warnings, all designed to wake the church member up and motivate him toward greater devotion to God. Similarly, the modern church of God stands in danger of allowing salvation to slip away from pure neglect. By these warnings, we should know how to turn our lives around so we do not fall short and lose salvation.

From the Archives: Featured Article

The Four Horsemen (Part Two): The White Horse

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

At God's command, the white horse and its rider gallop over the earth 'conquering and to conquer.' Richard Ritenbaugh analyzes the symbolism of this horseman, a precursor of the destruction that is wrought by its fellows.

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