

Profanity (Part Two)

Prioritizing The Holy

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The subject of profanity is far larger than just profane speech. Of course, we most often think of profanity as crude speech and cursing because we hear so much of it out there in the world. The profanity that we hear is very blatant. You basically cannot go anywhere anymore without hearing it.

It used to be that you were able to go to a public place and not hear it because people would control themselves. But now it seems to be the speech du jour that if you do not sprinkle your conversation with a bunch of profanity then you do not have street cred; you are just not 'respectable' to the common people; you are not being real.

There used to be the 'seven forbidden words' (made infamous by a skit on the same name by George Carlin) that the FCC told broadcasters that they should not be using. That has pretty much gone by the boards now. Certainly, blasphemous words invoking God's name appear everywhere in the media. It seems there is no ban or restriction against them. People can use them just at the drop of a hat, and they do.

We are going to go into the third commandment. It is important that we understand the basis for God's prohibition of foul speech. We could also say that the ninth commandment—against bearing false witness—is also a commandment against wrong or untrue speech. This one sizes it up from a spiritual point of view.

Exodus 20:7 You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Very straightforward it seems and made up of simple English words. So it should not be hard too hard to understand. But we need to remember that this was written in Hebrew and not in English. Sometimes the English translations of Hebrew do not give you the full flavor of what the text is trying to get across to us.

Here we have the codification of God's prohibition against taking His name in vain.

A good many people and a good many commentators do not consider the implications of this commandment any further than verbal blasphemy. They say you just should not speak the name of God in vain. They do not really go into any depth of this word 'take'

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because, in a way, the whole commandment revolves around the meaning of 'take'.

'Take' in English is a very general word. If you look in a dictionary, you will find multiple meanings for the word 'take.' But, in Hebrew, the word has a bit more specific meaning than the general word 'take'. Knowing that, we can then understand there are a lot more things that we can do, beyond just our speech, that takes God's name in vain.

So I think a lot of the commentaries do not go beyond the verbal blasphemy because going into this much more important part is difficult.

It is pretty easy to talk about not speaking badly about God. But going on beyond what this 'simple' commandment really involves would take quite a bit of ink, quite a bit of time, quite a bit of explanation. If you need a refresher on it, John Ritenbaugh's sermon on the third commandment explains it in depth. But I just want to give you the essential factor so that we can go on.

The essential factor in the third commandment is that as God's people (We are called 'Christians'), we bear the name of Christ. That means how we act and how we talk reflects on God. We are His people. In fact, we are more than that: We are the body of Christ. He is our Head and we are all the parts of the body. We are one monolithic figure, as it were. You could almost say we are a spiritual organism. Therefore what the hand does can be said to reflect on the whole body and especially on the 'head'—on Christ (in the case of the church).

So the essential factor that we need to understand is that everything we do, whether good or bad, reflects on God. This goes back to the definition of 'take' in the commandment here.

Probably a better very simple word that we would use would be 'bear'—"You shall not bear the name of the Lord your God in vain." 'Bearing' covers both speech and behavior. One could use the word 'carry' as well. That would work.

But it is how we use the name of God. It is how we use the name, the character, the attributes of God, and what kind of light we shed on Him through our own actions and our own speech. That is the essential thing we need to know.

Our speech and behavior must not in any way denigrate what that name represents. That name represents His majesty, His character, His holiness, His sovereignty, and all those other parts of His character that come out in His names. His names help define who He is. They are the best windows, if you will, into what He is like. He names

Himself what He is.

Other people, in their relationships with God, name Him what He was to them. If they see Him as Almighty Sovereign, they tell us that that is what He is. So it does not just include names per se but titles as well, and of course, they name all His attributes. We find this in the psalms where David makes long lists of the things that God is to him: He uses 'rock', 'fortress' and on and on about what God meant to him.

So what we find then, when we bring it all down, everything we do, everything we say reflects on God. We should say nothing or do nothing that would give cause for others to think less of God than what He is. He is a good, loving, righteous God who never does anything wrong. He never says anything unkind or untrue. He is always there. You could go on and on with the things that God is.

We can do things and say things that will make other people who do not know any better think that God is not as great as He is. We do not want to do that. So one of the commandments has specifically to do with our speech and our conduct as representatives of God, and so He prohibits us from doing anything that would in anyway lessen, in anybody's mind, what He is. Otherwise we bear His name in vain.

Romans 2:17-24 has to do with the Jews specifically, but it applies just as well to the church which is composed of spiritual Jews. We are the Israel of God. So, instead of the Jews, put your own name in there. Paul writes:

Romans 2:17-20 Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.

Paul is specifically talking to the Jews and their adherence to the law. But we also adhere to the law. We just do it in a slightly different way because we have been given the Spirit of the law.

Paul comes to the conclusion here (if you fit that description that he just made):

Romans 2:21-24 You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You

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who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

So Paul is saying if we are going to be a true light to the world, if we are going to be true sons and daughters of God, we have to make sure that we are not being hypocrites. If we say that we agree with what God has given us as His law, His principles, His way of life then we should not step outside that. If we do, we are bearing His name in vain. His name has been put on us, and if we do something that is out of His way of life, if we miss the mark, then we are, in that small way (whatever it may be), bearing His name in vain.

I would like to go into the 'speech' part again, just as a kind of review of what we went over last time, so that we go into 'profane living' with a background of 'profane speech' because it is a little bit easier to understand it from the 'speech' point of view. I want to focus briefly on 'speech' so that we get a running start.

The third commandment indeed prohibits verbal cursing and swearing on God's name. So it is indeed there. The commentators are right. When they focus on that, they just do not go far enough usually.

So the third commandment forbids not only the blatant usage of God's or Jesus' names in a curse but also frivolous, meaningless, and irreverent speech about them, as well as the use of euphemisms in place of their names. So this is very broad. It is not only talking about cursing using the name of God but frivolous, meaningless, and irreverent speech, and the use of euphemisms.

In these days of social media, the euphemisms are out there even initialized. I see people in the church on social media using 'OMG' all the time and thinking they are not doing anything wrong. But they are breaking the third commandment. 'OMG' stands for 'Oh my God!' So one should not use 'OMG' as it is a euphemism.

Here are a few more euphemisms (maybe you use them and do not even realize that they are euphemisms) that stand for the name of God or Christ or Jesus, or any of the other forms: 'golly', 'goodness gracious' as well as 'goodness' and 'gracious,' 'good grief' (made famous by Charlie Brown), 'Oh my God!' or 'Oh my goodness!,' 'by George,' 'by Jove,' 'gee,' 'jeez,' 'gee whiz,' 'jeepers,' 'Jiminy Cricket,' 'crikey' (I think the Australians like that one), 'criminy,' 'cripes,' 'by Jingo,' 'gadzooks,' 'drat,' 'blimey' (that

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was ‘God blind me’ and it was shrunken down to ‘blimey’). If you go on the Internet and type in ‘euphemisms for God or Christ’, you should be able to find a list pretty quickly that is much fuller than this.

All of those words are euphemisms for one of the names of God or Jesus or Christ, or Jesus Christ. Anything with a ‘JC’, uses a euphemism, and whatever the words happen to be, is a euphemism for Jesus Christ.

So if we are in the habit of using any of these—if they are just something we just grew up with or whatever and never really thought about it—even though we may think that they are innocent, they are really not. We are actually calling down the name of God in a frivolous, meaningless, and possibly irreverent way as well. So we just need to excise them from our speech.

Let us go into the New Testament and see what Jesus says about these things. Early in the Sermon on the Mount, He talks about oaths and He forbids them. So we are going to Matthew 5 where He forbids swearing ‘oaths’ which, as a general term, includes all the speech prohibitions of the third commandment. So even though some people might take this narrowly just to mean swearing, like in a court case where they ask you to ‘swear to tell the truth,’ it does cover that. But it also covers any other kind of oath-making as well as swearing oaths and cursing.

Matthew 5:33 Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’

When Jesus makes a statement like “You have heard that it was said” and then say “But I say unto you” (which is what He says in verse 34), He is signaling to us that He is making a slight change in our understanding. It is not saying that He is necessarily changing the law from what it was in the New Testament; He is making it very specific to us as Christians. This is the original intent of what He meant.

As it says here, Israel was allowed to perform their oaths to the Lord. It was something that God allowed them to do. But, to His spiritual brethren, He says:

Matthew 5:34 But I say to you do not swear at all. . .

Back in Israel, the people were unconverted and worldly. So they backed their words with oaths that they said in God’s name. He says we do not need to do that. We are

held to a much higher standard. He says:

Matthew 5:34-37 . . . neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black [meaning, swearing by your head is pretty much useless]. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

So Jesus says whatever you back up with some kind of word oath based on the power and authority of something else, is from Satan. He says we do not need that. All we need is 'Yes' or 'No.' 'I will do this.' 'I will not do this.' Why? We can see here, if we think about this, this has a negative facet and a positive facet.

The negative side is that God does not want us dragging Him into our vain, useless, meaningless human agreements that He never promises to back up. There are certain things that God has promised that He will do, but He does not necessarily promise to back us up on our own silly ideas and plans. And here we are, trying to drag Him into something that may be entirely materialistic or might even be sinful. We do not want to do that. We do not want to bring God's name into any of that because that would be blasphemous. When we do that and especially when we renege, we are essentially lying and that is not good.

The positive side is that Jesus expects us, as Christians, to be as good as our word. So our 'Yes' or 'No' should be sufficient to bind us to any promise. If we do not fulfill our promises, we become liars and we expose ourselves as profane, as unholy, as sinners. And more than that, we dishonor God and His name by failing where He never fails. If God makes a promise, He always comes through. Isaiah 55 says if He says a word, it goes out and does what He meant it to perform. Our words are very infrequent in that respect. We say things and they go out and they just fall flat and dead and do not do what we say they are going to do. We do not follow up behind them.

Matthew 12 contains another section of Scripture where Jesus talks to the people there about profane speech. He makes a very simple point here. He says:

Matthew 12:33-37 Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart

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brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Pretty strong words there from our Savior.

The simple point is this: What comes out of your mouth reveals your character. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. What you say tells more about you than what you actually “say”, if you catch my meaning. It reveals a whole lot. It exposes your heart. You open your mouth and people can see right down into your heart.

What we say and how we say it may very well make or break God’s judgment of us. That is what it says: “Every idle word.” You will either be justified or you will be condemned by what you say. Even idle, thoughtless, lighthearted words—things you just spout out, things you say off the cuff, things you say without thinking—will come under His judgment.

If our speech is full of profanities, vulgarities, perversities, suspicions, gossip, putdown, pride, threats, misleading statements, double entendres, and outright falsehoods, we are shouting to the world and we are shouting to God (because He hears all) that our hearts are still evil. We are saying to God that not much conversion has taken place, that we still have hearts of stone and not hearts of flesh, and that we still reflect Satan the Devil and not God in heaven.

James 3 is a good long passage on the use of the tongue. James tells us there that we all stumble in many ways. But if we can control our tongues—which he says no man has tamed—then we are mature Christians, we are ‘a perfect man’ (a better definition of that Greek word would probably be ‘mature’ or ‘complete’). We have reached a pinnacle of Christianity that very few others have, if we can tame the tongue.

And James says if we are able to do that, then we can control the whole body, meaning, we will have control over all of us—the way we walk and all the rest—if we can get control of our stupid tongues (which means the mind that is behind it).

That is a tall order, but it is something that we have to grapple with on a daily basis.

We have total control over what we say, what we think, and what we blurt out without thinking. We have the control. We just oftentimes do not want to take it because it is so

good to get that zinger in sometimes, or when the hammer falls on the thumb and out comes the dirty word. We do have control even in situations like that.

We will sum all this up on 'speech.' At the beginning of Colossians 3 Paul is telling us that we have to seek those things which are above. We have been called to be in Christ. It is our job now to raise our expectations of ourselves to live on a spiritual level. That means that we have to mortify our flesh. We have to kill our members that are sinning. We have to cut out—excise—all the bad things in our lives. And we will get to why, here in verse 8:

Colossians 3:8-10 But now you yourselves are to put off all these [Paul had given us a list before. This is another list that has to do with feelings of hatred that are expressed in other ways, but oftentimes verbally]: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

This puts it all in a nice little tiny bundle. Blasphemy, filthy language, and verbal deceit of all kinds need to be totally removed from our speech. We really need to get a handle on this. We need to get rid of the outbursts of wrath. We need to get rid of any kind of hatred and hateful speech toward others, any kind of malice (trying to say one thing to get someone to do something else so we can go ahead and take the top position or whatever). That is the kind of thing we need to get rid of. And of course, blasphemy—any kind of blasphemous words against God—and any kind of cursing or other filthy language. We need to clean up our speech.

Why? Paul gives a very succinct answer here. He says all of that was part of our former life under Satan the Devil where we let human nature sway us completely. All those things are sins. They are evil. And it is evil that needs to be cut out like a cancer and not allowed to grow back. Because it reflects a way of life, it reflects an evil character of the god of this world.

The new man is what we are supposed to be working on and the new man contains none of those things. The new man that is to be growing in us is the very image of Jesus Christ, and He never once did anything or spoke any word like those.

Last time we saw the Greek word used in the New Testament translated 'profane' is 'bebelus' and the Latin word behind the English word 'profane' is 'profanus.' Both of

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them have their roots in the idea of being 'outside the Temple.' The Latin term meant 'before the Temple' meaning you were not 'in the Temple,' but you were 'outside of it.' The other one, 'Bebelus' from Greek, had behind it the idea of a threshold. What was meant was the threshold of the Temple.

So if you were on one side of the threshold, you were not 'in the Temple,' you were still 'outside the Temple,' and so you were profane. But if you crossed into the Temple, over that threshold, you were considered holy. You were allowed to be in the presence of the gods.

But if you were not allowed in there, then you were not holy; at the least you were secular, and at the most you were blasphemous. But it can cover all of that territory between secular and blasphemous. Anything that was not holy was profane. So if a person or a thing was profane, he/it was unfit for the Temple—unfit to enter the Temple.

Therefore we can conclude that any kind of action, speech, or lifestyle that is unfit for God's presence, unfit to enter behind the veil or into the Temple where God is, anything that is not holy or righteous or godly, is profane. Thus you have holiness and righteousness and godliness on one side—in the Temple with God—and then you cross the threshold, you go outside the Temple, and everything out there is profane. So you have a clear distinction at the threshold of the Temple between the holy and the profane.

Nehemiah 13 gives you a simple example of profane living. Simple illustration, most of us should be able to get it. It is about the Sabbath.

Nehemiah 13:15-18 In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

Isaiah 58 shows God telling what we should be doing with the Sabbath.

Isaiah 58:13 If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words.

I think it is pretty clear what we have here.

Exodus 20:8-10 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work.

And then God says, later on in verse 11, that He blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. As he says in Isaiah, He calls it “My holy day.”

Anything that is done on the Sabbath that is not connected with the holy is profane. Therefore the actions that we do or the things that we say that are not consistent with holiness, is profaning the Sabbath.

So if we treat the Sabbath day as in Nehemiah’s time, like a normal workday—they were treading out the grapes, they were bringing in the produce and they were selling them in the market, and they were doing all those normal workday things—then we are profaning holy time.

The Sabbath is God’s time. It is not our time. We are turning what He has made holy into something that is common, as every day. That 24 hours that God has separated for Himself and for us to use with Him, is not to be used—as it says here in Isaiah 58—to do our own things. It is not for our own pleasure. It is not even to talk about things that we want to talk about.

It is the time that God has hallowed for a date each week between Him and us. And He wants us to focus on Him, strengthen the relationship with Him, learn more things about His way, how to do the things He does, how to enjoy the things He gets pleasure in, and write those words that He gave us on our hearts.

When we mix the everyday and the commonplace—the secular—into this day, we profane the Sabbath. It is as simple as that. We are treating the Sabbath day as unholy.

More broadly, getting away from the Sabbath example, every time we compromise with

God's way and give into sin, every time we continue in an ungodly habit, we have, in a sense, stepped back across this threshold, out of the Temple, into profanity. There are just two ways. In simple terms, whatever we do that is not holy is profane. It is a long spectrum there between what is simply secular all the way to what is absolutely blasphemous. So when a person turns from God, he becomes profane. When a person sins, he does what is profane.

I believe II Timothy 4 is one of the saddest verses in scripture. Paul is in Rome. He is imprisoned. His life is about to be ended by the executioner's sword, by tradition, and this is the last book essentially that he is writing. And Paul says:

II Timothy 4:9-10 [He asks Timothy:] Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica [Then he mentions Crescens and Titus going elsewhere].

Demas forsook Paul. Perhaps he also forsook Christ, we do not know for sure. But Paul says here that Demas did this because he "loved this present world"—this evil world.

Now think about Demas. Here he was, a right-hand man to the apostle Paul, someone that he leaned on, someone that he needed, especially in this time of persecution, a time of stress. He was there on the frontlines of preaching the gospel with the apostle Paul. He was making history. He was doing God's will with Paul. But the lure of a better, easier life in the world drew him away. He stepped across that threshold, in this one area at least.

Why? What was so alluring out there? Did he have a girl in Thessalonica? I do not know. Did he have a job offer? Did he have some sort of business opportunity? It does not say. Did he have family back there that was drawing him away? I do not know.

What exactly enticed him from Paul? The Bible does not give us anything more than what is said here. Demas is not mentioned again.

Perhaps it was as simple as being fearful of the persecution that was coming on Paul, and Demas wanted to get out while he could. He did not want to face the sword with Paul. Maybe he was afraid.

Whatever the case, Paul says here that Demas chose the world over what God was doing. Whenever we choose the world over God, we expose ourselves as profane. We are, in a sense, turning our back on the Temple. We are revealing how much Satan still

has a foothold in us.

Ezekiel 28:16 says God cast Satan down as a profane thing. He had to get him out of heaven. He could not abide his presence. So there was then a great separation between God and Satan.

Isaiah 59:2 says that “your sins have separated between you and your God.” Sin separates. It causes a break in the relationship that has to be mended as quickly as possible, so that we can get back into the presence of God, get back in His good graces, get back right next to Him so that we can learn the most from Him and enjoy His presence.

So when we sin (when we do something, have weakness; maybe it is worse: maybe we continue on doing something habitual that is wrong), whatever it is, we are moving away from God; we are moving outside the Temple; we are crossing back over that threshold; we are weakening our relationship with Him; we are putting a distance between us and God, unless we repent and turn back. But if we continue in our profane life, consistently living outside the Temple, we can fall away altogether.

The Bible does not say what ultimately happened with Demas. Maybe it was just weakness. Maybe he later repented; I hope he did. The words that Paul uses, right here in this letter at the time, are not very hopeful. We just do not know. God is his judge. It is very sad that here at the time when Paul could have used him most, Demas turned his back and did a profane thing.

What we see here is that there are only two sides: There is the holy with God, and there is the profane with Satan and the rest of the unconverted world. You have to choose.

God put it very simply in Deuteronomy 30, where He says: “I have set before you an open door: life on one side, death on the other.” We can say: God on one side, Satan on the other; holiness on one side, profanity on the other. That is the choice. And God says: “Do you want to know what I want you to do? Choose life. That’s the best way.” “Choose Me,” He says, “because that’s the way to life.” That is the way to living that is going to produce the most eternally.

Now we get to the central point of my illustration.

Paul, in Hebrews 12, had just gotten finished talking about how we see Jesus, and we need to strip off every weight of sin that holds us back and run that race. And he says God is going to discipline us along the way. It is not going to be easy. But you have got

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to keep going because God is working out your salvation with you. He is trying to get rid of all those rough edges on you so He can present us before Christ as a finished product—as another son or daughter of God. So He is going to discipline us. So he says, “Do not lose heart. Stand up straight. Let us move. Let us go forward.” He gives us some instruction here.

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. . .

So he says this is the way: through pursuing peace and holiness. That is the way to see God. That is the way to have eternal life with God. And then he says:

Hebrews 12:15-17 . . . looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Esau is a tragic case. Esau was born into the family of Abraham. He was third in line from Abraham, Isaac—and we always say ‘Jacob.’ But the firstborn son was Esau, not Jacob, even though they were fraternal twins. He was in line. He was the firstborn. He was the heir of what Abraham and Isaac stood for and what they had built up, and all of God’s blessings that had been given to those two men for their faithful acts and faithfulness before God. He had it all right there. He would have inherited all that wealth that Isaac had and all that came with it.

But Esau squandered it. He squandered it to appease his hunger. All of that he could have had, and he gave it away for a bowl of lentils, probably the cheapest food ever. He gave it away for nothing. This is a big clue about why Esau is called profane.

Paul then calls Esau a fornicator; he was not just profane, he was a fornicator. What he alludes to here, which the Bible does not say much about actually, is his sexual appetite.

The Bible only says that Esau married Canaanite women. That is the only thing that it really says about Esau and his sexual appetite that he might be called a fornicator. But apparently there was more going on there than the Bible tells us. Paul evidently knew

some of those things.

In short, if we put it all in a nutshell, Esau allowed nothing to get in the way of satisfying his appetites. Not even God. Not even millions of dollars of wealth. It shows you he was not thinking straight. He was not valuing the right things. His priorities were all messed up. He was unwilling to sacrifice his base momentary desires to honor God in anyway. He just wanted what he wanted right now. He wanted what will satisfy him immediately. It sounds a lot like Americans.

Esau was placing value on the wrong things. He was making errors in judgment, counting godly things as nothing (and that is a no-no) but counting physical things that would satisfy his drives very highly. He had things topsy-turvy. He was just all 'Me' 'My' "I want what I want right now. You better give it to me" and willing to trade the greatest of things for what was least. Moreover, he had no appreciation whatever for the potential benefits of his birthright and his blessing—all the things that they would bring him and his family down through the centuries. Esau was focused on the now.

Jacob at least could see how things could work in the future, how they could be beneficial to him for the future. He was much more farsighted than Esau, who only saw what was right in front of his face and had no grasp of potentialities. So God comments at the end of Genesis 25: "Esau despised his birthright." He hated it. He despised it. It meant nothing to him.

But it meant a lot to Jacob and he was the one God chose—the one who valued what God had given. He might not have looked at it quite that way at the time, but God would work with him so that eventually he would value it in the right way. At least Jacob understood potentialities a lot better and he was not trying to get all those things to satisfy his immediate desires, like Esau was.

What happened to Esau? Even though he had all this potential as number three, after Abraham and Isaac, Esau and his family—the Edomites and the Amalekites—became the great enemy of God and His people. They went totally to the other side. Esau became then, in the Bible, a picture of immorality, profanity, godlessness, and violence and hatred against the things and people of God. In other words, he became an Old Testament type of Antichrist or anti-God. Esau was the enemy among humans.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19 Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your

Profanity (Part Two) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.

Exodus 17:16 For he said, “Because the Lord has sworn: the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

Amos 1:11 Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother [Israel/Judah] with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever [Esau never gave up his anger at Jacob for taking away the birthright and the blessing].

Obadiah 1:10-14 For violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. In the day that you stood on the other side—in the day that strangers carried captive his forces [God is talking about the Babylonian invasion], when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem—even you were as one of them [“You were on the wrong side,” God says]. But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of My people in the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among them who escaped; nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained in the day of distress.

Totally despicable people, as described here in Obadiah. They had this perpetual hatred against the Jews and against other Israelites before them. This is the picture of Esau that the Old Testament presents.

Back in Hebrews 12, there was a line that said “lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” A lot of speculation has gone on about what it means, but it appears to be an allusion to something that is written in Deuteronomy 29. This is all linked with Esau because it goes back to the type of

character that produces this root of bitterness.

Deuteronomy 29:18 So that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood.

This seems to be what Paul was alluding to in Hebrews 12:15. We see that Deuteronomy 29:18 is divided into basically two parts. He talks about a man, woman, family, or tribe whose heart turns away from the Lord—that is the one side—and they go to serve with the gods of those nations. Then it talks about “and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood.”

The way the Hebrew is set up, essentially what we see here is a kind of parallelism where the root of bitterness is not a character trait (even though it can be seen as that) but it actually refers to a man, a woman, a family, or a tribe that turns away from God that the root of bitterness is actually a person or a group of people. It is a bitter person who spreads trouble, dissent, misinformation, and falsehood among God’s people. As it says: “by this many become defiled.”

It is someone in the group (whatever the group happens to be—it could be a congregation, a whole church) who has taken root in the church and its roots go out and spread its wickedness, and it touches others and defiles others. In other words, profane speech and lifestyle can reach the point where it takes root in a group and it spreads to others defiling them and they become profane and turn from God.

And God says, “I want this rooted out.” Back in Deuteronomy He says: “Don’t allow people like that to live.” They were pretty strong words from God about such roots of bitterness at the time.

In New Testament terms, in the church, we would call these people Satan’s agents, as in the Parable of the Tares where the enemy goes out and plants his ‘tares’. Perhaps they would be the roots of bitterness—ones the enemy has sent in—spreading wickedness among the brethren. That is how bad it can get.

Profanity is not something that we should sneer at as some minor thing. It is very important.

David describes the wicked man in Psalm 10. He says:

Psalm 10:2-7 The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; let them be caught in the plots which they have devised. For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; he blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord. The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts. His ways are always prospering; Your judgments are far above, out of his sight; as for all his enemies, he sneers at them. He has said in his heart, "I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity." His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.

Psalm 10:11-13 He has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see" [meaning all of his evil deeds]. Arise, O Lord! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble. Why do the wicked renounce God? [And David answers his question here:] He has said in his heart, "You will not require an account."

So what David is saying here is that the wicked person does all of his wickedness because essentially he does not see God acting against him. All his ways prosper. He seems to be getting away with everything. God does not seem to care and he feels free to do all cursing and persecuting.

I used this as an illustration of some of the things I saw when I was in Pasadena, working at headquarters. I worked for church administration for two years and the things I saw in Pasadena could very well be some of these very same things that are described in Psalm 10.

I was there when Herbert Armstrong died and I was there when Joseph W. Tkach began changing things and I saw what was going on. I saw the people that were doing these things. There were people at headquarters and few very high up in the administration who appalled me in the way they acted. I was shocked that we considered some of these people—high-ranking ministers—even to be converted with the way they acted. Now I know that they were not of us even though they were with us at the time, like John says in I John 2:19.

I was among the ministers. At church administration, our main job was to be face-to-face with the ministry a lot. The ministerial refresher program was coming in and we had contacts with just about every minister there. I was shocked (I probably should not have been; I was a naive 20-year-old at the time) by the crude speech; about how many of them indulged their appetites, how many of them did not care a whit about the Sabbath

day; how they boasted of their accomplishments, mocked the faithful, mocked the “little people” in the congregations out in the field because they were just tithe-payers. They played the hypocrite with these people. They manipulated the system in their favor and got all the goodies that they could.

Others were less obvious. There were some who were like spiders that sat in the middle of webs of intrigue and division and obfuscation, but their fruits showed to be every bit as profane over the years. I am not going to name any names. But these are the kinds of people that made shipwreck of the Worldwide Church of God.

It can happen. There can be roots of bitterness in the church of God that can undermine the faith of many. The New Testament reminds us repeatedly, especially in the later epistles, that it has happened in the church of God and that it will happen again.

And if you remember the sermons on the parables of Matthew 13, Jesus Himself says it time and time again that evil will creep into the church of God throughout its history and create things that are abnormal that should not be there, that were not what He intended. We have to be aware of it and watch out for it so that we do not get caught up in it.

The issue of profanity or profane living is far deeper than just profane speech—more than just avoiding “profane and vain babblings,” as it says in II Timothy 2. Profane words are indeed sinful, but a profane life is not only sinful but terrible in its consequences, especially within the church because it can make the wrong example to others and drive them down with the person who is profane. It is a life lived apart from God and its effects are hypocrisy, degradation, apostasy, and ultimately, eternal condemnation. It is that important to us. Unfortunately, when it is practiced in the church, it often takes others with it.

Ezekiel 44:23-24 describes a time in the Millennial Temple and perhaps the time of the Great White Throne Judgment. God tells Ezekiel through this particular section that He is going to bring His priests to teach the people, and what they are going to teach the people is to distinguish between the holy and the profane.

Inability to distinguish between the holy and the profane has been a hallmark of the Israelite psyche down through history, and it is really a human thing. But because Israel was God’s chosen people, they were the ones that were the bad example.

The Israelites constantly chose to value the wrong things, the wrong beliefs, the wrong ideas, and then they spurned God. They refused to do His ways. They were, in many

ways, like Esau (their uncle). They despised their birthright and all the blessings of God in favor of the foreign gods and the more physically satisfying lifestyles of the peoples around them.

In the Millennium and in the White Throne Judgment, the priests are going to be charged with setting them straight, with helping them to understand the difference between the holy and the profane. To put in another way, they are going to teach them to prioritize the right things and to always put God first—"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." But Israel always went for the other things and left God by the side of the road.

So this is a pretty good clue that Christians who are now the Israel of God need to be doing this right now. As an essential part of our overcoming and growing, we need to learn to distinguish between the holy and the profane.

Let us conclude in II Corinthians 6. Paul says:

II Corinthians 6: 14-18 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. [He is not talking about other people in the church; he is talking about the world here—what we would consider the profane world.] For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.

We are holy. We have been made holy. The holy and the profane have nothing spiritual in common. We cannot play on the other side and expect to receive no ill effects. We cannot tempt ourselves by dallying in the ways of this world. So we must put on the mind of Christ, through His Spirit, and practice the righteousness that we know despite what other people do around us.

God has called us to a counter-cultural way of life. We have to go against the grain of this world and live the way of life that He has given us to live, to be holy, because we are the temple of God and the body of Christ.