

Minced Oaths



“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”[Exodus 20:7]

Introduction:

A **minced oath** is a word (or expression) derived from misspelling, mispronouncing, or replacing a blasphemous word (swear word) with a less harsh sounding word so that the speaker won't be accused of using profanity.

NOTE: The following article is based upon a tract by G. H. Seville (1867-1977).

A visiting minister was asked to lead in a prayer in Sunday school, and when he had finished, a teacher heard one of her girls whisper, “Gosh, what a prayer!” Such an exclamation, seems incongruous in expressing one’s appreciation of a prayer, but a little thought will lead anyone to the conclusion that “gosh” is not an appropriate word for a Christian to use on any occasion whatsoever. When we look into the original meaning of such interjections, we may be surprised that even some Christian people are habitual users of expressions which the dictionary terms “minced oaths.”

A very commonly used interjection is “Gee.” It is capitalized in Webster’s New International Dictionary and given this definition: “A form of Jesus, used in minced oaths.” This derivation is even more apparent when the form “Geez,” now frequently heard, is used. Two other common words and their definitions are these: “Golly” - a euphemism for God, used in minced oaths; gosh, a substitute for God, used in minced oaths.” “Darn, darned, darnation” are said to be “colloquial euphemisms for damn, damned, damnation.” Persons who allow their lips to utter “Gosh-darned” quite freely would be shocked if they realized the real meaning of the word.

A certain minister, professor in a sound seminary, when he was a child, was not allowed to use “goodness,” “mercy,” or “gracious” as exclamations. He was inclined to think the restriction a family peculiarity, merely a parental over-carefulness, but now he can see that it had a sound Calvinistic basis. The

Shorter Catechism asks, "What is required in the third commandment?" and then gives this answer: "The third commandment requireth the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works." Certainly goodness is an attribute of God. That this is so recognized by Webster in the latter part of his definition: "The word is used colloquially as an exclamation, or in various exclamatory phrases, as 'for goodness sake! goodness gracious!' - the reference being originally to the goodness of God."

The use of minced oaths is quite contrary to the spirit of the New Testament teaching.

For example, our Lord Jesus said: "But I say unto you, Swear not at all ... but let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." (Matt 5:34, 37). The phrase "whatsoever is more than these" suggest the meaning of expletives, or explanations: an expletive is defined as "something added merely as a filling; especially a word, letter, or syllable not necessary to the sense, but inserted to fill a vacancy."

James, in writing his epistle, repeats almost exactly the words of the Lord Jesus quoted above: "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oaths; but let your yea be year, and your nay, nay; that ye fall not under judgment" (James 5:12). That last word recalls our Lord's declaration: "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt 12:36). The result of this judgment is given in the following verse, "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matt 12:37).

If we try to excuse ourselves by saying that these exclamations slip through our lips unawares, we need to heed the Holy Spirit's warning in the epistle of James: "If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth (or, curbeth) not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26). Even though we do not intend these minced oaths to bear the meaning the words originally had, we certainly cannot truthfully say that the use of them accords with Christ's command, "Let your speech be Yea, yea; Nay, nay."

James seemed puzzled by the same anomaly that puzzles us, namely, the presence of minced oaths on the lips of Christians. Writing of the tongue as "a restless evil ... full of deadly poison," he said: "Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men who are made after the likeness of God: out of the same mouth cometh forth blessings and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:8-10).

While no attempt has been made to give a complete list of all the words in the vocabulary of near-profanity, enough has been said to indicate that present-day speech has fallen below that standard which Christ Jesus set for His disciples.

The tendency in the use of expletives is to find the milder ones becoming less expressive of our feelings, to discard them and use stronger ones in their stead. A careless following of others in the use of these common minced oaths will dull our own spiritual sensitiveness, and will weaken our Christian testimony. To gain victory in this matter of full obedience to our Lord Jesus, we need to make the prayer of David our daily petition: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in they sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

G. H. Seville (1867-1977) - Sunday School Times

A newer version of this message on minced oaths is available in PDF format here:

Common Corrupt Communication and the Christian (PDF brochure)

The full text of the newer version can be viewed here:

Common Corrupt Communication and the Christian (plain text)

SEE ALSO: Swearing For Christians & A Bible Study On Corrupt Communication And Minced Oaths
