

WATCH YOUR EXPLETIVES!

Gary McDade

Whether one knows what an expletive is or not is not at issue. The proper use of the tongue is the issue. James 3:1-13 is the biblical lecture on the importance and difficulty of controlling the tongue. Interest in doing just that doesn't hide behind the technical grammatical arrangement of a word or words being misused or even abused. The humble disciple of Christ wants to rid his vocabulary of any word that might disgrace him and the cause of Christ. So, what is an expletive? Webster's dictionary has, "A syllable, word or phrase inserted to fill a vacancy. . .without adding to the sense" (p. 400). An expletive can be also "an exclamatory word or phrase" (Ibid.). It may be also an interjection. Basically, an expletive is a filler. Many words and phrases correctly serve as useful expletives such as ah, oh, or wow. But, among those which should never be so used, one deserves special treatment. It is the word "Lord."

What is meant when "Lord" and derivatives like Lordy, Lawd, etc., are used as expletives? *Cruden's Complete Concordance* has the following definition for the word "Lord": "This word means in general, one with power or authority, a master or ruler. The Hebrew word transliterated 'Jehovah' is usually rendered in the Old Testament by 'LORD' written in small capitals. This the American Revision changes to Jehovah. Otherwise the word is used for Jesus Christ, for the Holy Spirit, for a husband, and for any one whom it was desired to address deferentially" (p. 390). Unless a British nobleman or a husband is being referenced when "Lord" is used, the danger of taking the Lord's name in vain exists. It is undoubtedly a matter of habit when "Lord" is used as a filler or an exclamatory expression. But, many Christians who use the word "Lord" in this way are appalled when the words "God," "Jesus," and "Christ" are so used. Romans 2:1 details the inconsistency involved: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." Bad habits must be broken. Remember James 3:10: "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

The word "Lord" is not a euphemism. A euphemism is "the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant" (*Webster*, p. 248). The dictionary gives heck, gee, gosh, golly and darn as euphemisms. Even those few who argue that the use of a euphemism isn't the

same as swearing have nothing to say in their defense for using the word “Lord” as an expletive. “Lord” calls the name of God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit. Moses wrote, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Ex. 20:7).

The reverence that should accompany the use of the name of God is demonstrated in the book of Revelation. An impressive glimpse into the celestial grandeur of heaven is gained in the fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation which features the Lord God Almighty seated upon his throne which is encircled by twenty-four other thrones upon which are seated twenty-four elders crowned with golden crowns and clothed in white raiment. Proceeding out of the throne are lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps are burning with fire before the throne and are representative of the seven Spirits of God. A sea of glass like crystal stretches out before the throne. In and about the throne are four living creatures awesome in appearance with six wings each who cease not saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8). With reverence to God on his throne the twenty-four remove their crowns and cast them down before God’s throne while bowing down to worship him who is worthy of such homage.

In the fifth chapter the focus of John’s attention is directed to a book in the right hand of God. A strong angel proclaims a mandate with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?” (Rev. 5:2). It appears to be a very special and sacred book so much so that the only one in heaven or earth who is worthy to reveal its contents is Jesus Christ. As Christ is presented as being alone worthy to take the book and open it, the writer employs the use of irony to make an important point with which his persecuted readers will surely identify. Announced as “the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David,” one who is strong and unshakable, the reader would expect to see Jesus presented in some gallant and spectacular way. But, instead when he beholds Christ, there stands “a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth (Rev. 5:6). As he takes the book out of God’s hand, a new song is sung extolling his worthiness to do so.

In the nineteenth chapter the Lamb comes forth riding a white horse. He is called “Faithful and True.” In righteousness he judges and makes war. John describes him: “His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress

of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written **KINGS OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS**” (Rev. 19:12-16).

Hywel R. Jones suggests, “To take the name of God **in vain** is to use it with an idle, frivolous, blasphemous or insincere intent” (*The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, p. 132). Jesus taught this same reverence for the name of God when he told his disciples, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed [i.e., holy, sacred] be thy name” (Matt. 6:9). And finally, the apostle Paul taught Christians to glorify God in using the Lord’s name. He wrote, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).