

Does God Believe In Free Speech?

One of the fundamental constitutional rights of Americans is that of free speech. Although there are limits to this right (which are beyond the scope of this study), Americans can generally say anything they want without fear of legal prosecution, no matter how vile or hated it may be.

It's important for Christians to understand that God hasn't given that same right to His people. The Lord has put limits on what His people are allowed to say:

Matthew 5:22: "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

As you can see, those who are angry with people who don't deserve it are committing a serious sin in the sight of God. In fact, the emotion itself is a sin! Even if they don't act on that hatred they're still doing something wrong. However, those who take that unjustified anger a step further and call someone a fool are in danger of Hell. That's how serious it is.

It's not a sin to call someone a fool who actually *is* a fool. Jesus did this a number of times:

Matthew 23:17: "Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?"

Luke 11:40: "Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?"

Luke 24:25: “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:”

It's important to warn people when they're being foolish so they'll change their ways and learn wisdom. However, condemning the innocent is something we must never do.

This is how the apostle Paul put it:

Ephesians 4:29: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

The speech of Christians must be edifying. Now, this doesn't mean we can only say nice things. There are times when Jesus said things that were very difficult to hear:

Matthew 23:27-28: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

The reason Jesus said these things was because they were true and the Pharisees needed to hear His message. The religious leaders of His day needed to be confronted with the evil things they were doing so they would repent. Although these words weren't nice, they were true and edifying.

The fact that our speech must be edifying applies to the things we say to our friends *and* our enemies. God requires us to bless people, including our enemies:

Matthew 5:44: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;”

Romans 12:14: “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.”

As you can see, God has told us to not curse people. Although the world may curse its enemies, Christians aren't allowed to do that. Cursing others is prohibited:

James 3:8-12: “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.”

Our words matter to God! He cares about the things we say and He will hold us accountable for them. We don't have the right to curse people, and we aren't allowed to condemn the innocent with our words. Our speech must be edifying.

We must not be guilty of slander:

Psalm 101:5: “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.”

This principle applies to what we say about government officials as well. Although it's common for people to curse leaders

(especially wicked ones), Christians aren't allowed to do that:

Ecclesiastes 10:20: “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.”

I want to point out that it's not wrong to confront rulers (or the wealthy) over their sin. God used many people to do exactly that throughout the Old and New Testament. Everyone needs to have the gospel preached to them and everyone needs to be told to repent. There's also nothing wrong with disagreeing with those who are doing very wicked and vile things.

However, God doesn't permit His people to curse others. Instead we must bless our enemies, even if they're wealthy or powerful.