

*The Articles of*  
**Justin McCorkle**

*as published in The Gospel Fire*

## ...In Speech

---

As Paul instructed the young evangelist to be an example in several different aspects of living it was natural for him to include Timothy's manner of speech. Obviously, things such as profanity and course jesting were to be foreign to Timothy. As young members of the body of Christ today, we likewise need to remember how important our speech is as we go throughout our lives. Having seen the effects of harsh words to friends, relatives, and brethren, surely we can understand James' observation of how "the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!" (Jam. 3:5) Yet, many of us are still left with questions concerning the proper use of the tongue. What constitutes "profanity" or "course jesting"? Why are certain words "off-limits"? As we seek to answer these questions there is perhaps one point of common agreement for us to launch from; nothing can be used for more good or evil than our speech.

Many Christian teachers have erred in instructing the youth regarding proper speech. We must remember that language and cultures change, but the principles taught in the Scriptures remain the same. Instead of trying to define particular words and terms that are wrong, we ought to reflect on Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." The apostle was not concerned with pointing out every word that was right or wrong, but he rather showed that the only type of speech that was acceptable was speech which edifies! We should be spending our time reflecting on how we are speaking and determine whether or not it is edifying to those around us and most of our questions will answer themselves. Is profanity edifying? How could it be, it is profane! Are course jokes appropriate? Paul said no (Eph. 5:4) because it would not be imitating God (5:1) nor would it "impart grace to the hearers." We as Christians must understand that we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20) and should therefore be a living sacrifice in all things (Rom. 12:1-2). Our prayer should be the same as the men of faith before us saying, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips." (Ps. 141:3)

If we are having problems with our speech we also should recognize that the root of the problem is deeper. As Christ said, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34) and we should be taking heed to our heart. Many of us lash out with our words in moments of anger and explain it away as simply a fault that we have, but faults are meant to be overcome. Paul encouraged Titus to set an example as well by using "sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you" (Tit. 2:8). If we are allowing our emotions to rule us then we have yet to understand God's will for our speech. We, instead, ought to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jam. 1:19). If we will take a moment to think about what we are going to say in response to someone who has frustrated us then we will much more likely use our words wisely. We have all stumbled in word while angry, so we should learn from our mistakes and refuse to let our emotions rule over us. What good has ever come in your life by acting too hastily? When instructing the

Colossian brethren on how they should behave towards non-Christians Paul instructs them to "let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (4:6). Speaking without thinking will not produce seasoned speech but anger and bitterness.

Prov. 18:21 states that "death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Brethren, let us truly set an example in our speech with Christians and non-Christians alike. May the Lord grant us the patience to think about our speech, the wisdom to select the right words, and the love for one another that will lead us on to true edification.

*-January 2008*