

## Free(?) Speech

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**I**t is a sad spectacle to see our fellow man reject the counsel of God and try to find his own way. This has been highlighted by the Don Imus scandal and the resulting debate on the power of words to do harm.

First, Don Imus deserves no sympathy. He has made millions of dollars by disparaging and insulting anyone and everyone that crossed his radar screen. He has walked a fine line of verbal abuse, pushing the envelope until finally, it appears, crashing and burning.

Second, the morals and tactics of those who have used his foolish comments for personal glory and political gain are equally despicable. Neither side of this issue holds the high moral ground.

What gangsta rappers, shock jocks such as Don Imus, Hollywood movie makers and others in the media need to learn is that no speech is “free.” Words always have consequences. Voices in our society harp long and loud about the “right” to say and sing what they want, but few want to take responsibility for the effects such speech creates.

Long ago God said:

*“The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness”* (Pr 15:2).

*“A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit”* (Pr 15:4).

*“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is”* (Pr 15:23)!

*“Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles”* (Pr 21:23).

For too long the media has defended its profane spewing by some lame justification as:

“We’re not *causing* degeneracy; we are merely *reflecting* what is already present in society.” But is that a valid rationale? What possible value is there in mimicking evil? Some might say that drawing attention to evil practices might help raise awareness and increase opposition to it. But is that what happens with, say, gangsta rap music? When critics turn the spotlight on the producers of this filth, those same producers run and hide behind the first amendment, defending their right to make money from such “artists.”

Christians must not expect the world to foster spirituality. But this is more than a “religious” principle. This is a matter of self-evident common sense. Any influential medium which glorifies profanity, indiscriminate sex, drinking, and murder should not be surprised when such behaviors run rampant and the perpetrators, themselves, attribute their inspiration to said medium.

In fact, what Don Imus said was but a very mild form of what certain members of our society are screaming at each other on a daily basis.

But there is a lesson in this morality play for all of us. Our speech comes with the price of responsibility. Words reflect values and ideas. They mold and shape our children. They affirm, or undermine, our mates. They promote harmony, or sow discord, among God’s people. We will give account for “idle words” (Mt 12:36) because our words really do reflect who we truly are.

And let’s not be fooled by the “I just tell it like it is” mantra. Honesty does not give permission to destroy people. Our use of the truth should help others reach for a higher goal.