"Stupid" Christian Vulgarity

I grew up in a lukewarm Christian home, but as a teen became super religious. I ended up being the music leader for my youth group, director of music for my college Christian group, and the music minister of my church. In my 20s I left religion on good terms. Today I, oddly, don't really have any protestant friends … but I surround myself with non-religious people, atheists, and Mormons. I have this preface just to state my credentials on the topic … so it is a slightly harder to easily disregard.

I find some things insanely vulgar. I can get offended by language very easily.

My daughter has recently started calling everything she doesn't like "stupid." I've noticed that it is a fairly common insult for kids her age (almost 5). This insult is often used for anything they don't like in any sort of context. I've taken some time to dissect this, and I realize that these kids have attached themselves to this insult because of how amazingly potent they feel it is. The word is a permitted word, but the term encompasses so much of what children fear … incompetence, inferiority, social exclusion, unlovability, etc. It is such a poisonous dagger for children all wrapped up in one word. The word holds so much strength for children and they know how much power it holds because of how much they know they would be hurt by someone using it on them.

I hate you if you call a child stupid. In the moment you attack a child with this word, I hope you die. However, this word is just the most common version of the humiliation of kids. There are more subtle ways to hurt and undermine them commonly adopted by adults. All of these attacks I find incredibly offensive.

Do you know what I don't find very offensive? Fuck, Shit, Cunt, Ass … or a myriad of other words with little context attached.

As a Christian I was taught that the ideas I think and the words that come out of my mouth should be to serve the Lord. The most common verse quoted was Ephesians 4:29 "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." However, what I was really taught was contextless rules of do's and don't's. I was taught that "bad words" (fuck, ass, shit, etc) were sins, while everyone ignored the accepted words used to shame, manipulate, and otherwise harm people.

I've lost any regard for this shitty view of vulgarity. It merely saves the sensibilities of busybodies, while ignoring true harm done with language. Cuss words can be used in a vulgar sense, like calling people a cunt or a nigger in various contexts … but these words can also be used outside of these contexts in a non-vulgar sense (of course, judged by my

sensibilities), like I just did.

I can go into some detail about how language in this regard is used to signal submission to authority, or as a rejection of authority … but that would probably make this a bit too long and detailed. The short and sweet for this post: context is king. If someone wants to say any word, it is not vulgar out of context, it is only the context that empowers it with assholery. My daughter's favorite phrase is "Bite my shiny metal ass," and it is adorable, but if I hear her call another kid stupid … I will be horrified.

BTW … I have Mormon employees and friends who I respect as individuals, and so I don't cuss around them, but that is purely due to my respect for their preferences, not an affirmation of their sensibilities.