

HATE

"If you find the godless world is hating you, remember it got its start hating me. If you lived on the world's terms, the world would love you as one of its own. But since I picked you to live on God's terms and no longer on the world's terms, the world is going to hate you."
(John 15:18-19 *The Message*)

LIKE MANY OTHERS, I subscribe to a number of online discussion forums specific to the applications I use for my work. One of these discussion groups is for the program I use to lay out the pages of this publication. Unlike many other groups I have frequented, this for *Adobe's* InDesignCS is marked by good manners and helpful, constructive advice—that is, until the other day when someone posted a request under the username "JesusIsGod."

There are two spirits abroad in the earth: the spirit that works in the children of disobedience and the Spirit of God. These two can never be reconciled in time or in eternity. The spirit that dwells in the once-born is forever opposed to the Spirit that inhabits the heart of the twice-born. This hostility began somewhere in the remote past before the creation of man and continues to this day. The modern effort to bring peace between these two spirits is not only futile but contrary to the moral laws of the universe.
(A.W. Tozer)

This individual's message was polite, succinct, and thoroughly on-topic. There was no mention of religion, ethics, or morality. He was simply seeking advice for his use of the program—specifically, recommendations for a suitable how-to book—from those more experienced. And he signed the post, appreciatively, with his real name: Robert.

From the reaction one would have thought he was Billy Sunday himself, grabbing sinners by the lapels to shake their evil ways from their very souls. One would have thought he was a real Bible-thumper, spouting long passages of Scripture in long, ponderous, holier-than-thou paragraphs. But the solitary catalyst for the resulting fire storm was his username, noted only once in the header of the message: "JesusIsGod."

"I could recommend some, but I will once again point out that your user name is highly offensive to me and you won't get one bit of help from me."

"I didn't want to say anything, but Jesus is NOT God!"

[I take this to mean that while it is *not* OK to publicly state that Jesus *is* God, it *is* OK to state that He is *not*.]

"And therein lies the problem of such provocative handles. Others I'm sure would be prepared to argue that the very concept of God is a palliative nonsense. None of which has much to do with InDesign, unless you take the God concept to the ridiculous extent of assuming that God created it, too."

"Since everyone seems to be more interested in blasting someone for their handle and religious beliefs than actually answering his question, I will..."

"Nobody's blasting his religious beliefs. But this is not the place to proselytize. And please don't try to convince me that he's not."

"Assuming you're not new to the net, by choosing what you surely know would be an offensive "handle" to

many in *any* online (as in “global”) community, you’ve clearly demonstrated a blatant lack of respect and disregard for others you knew full well would be offended, as well as a clear lack of common sense.”

[This is getting slippery. So then, selecting a *nom de plume* that states one’s spiritual position demonstrates “a blatant lack of respect and disregard for others,” and “a clear lack of common sense,” but accusing someone of this heinous offense based on one little word buried in a header does not?]

“Okay can we stop now? This is going to turn into a religion forum and I’m going to get real uncomfortable with that.”

[Bingo.]

THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

Reading these diatribes (of which the foregoing list is only a representative sample), I wondered if the response would have been similar if the username had been “KrsnaIs-Lord,” or “IFollowBuddha,” or “AllahIs-God.” I doubt it.

In the world, taken as a whole, physical persecution of Christians exists, but is rare. In such places as Saudi Arabia, China, Vietnam, Sudan, Somalia, and others, Christians pay dearly—sometimes with their lives—for their faith. More often, however, the persecution of Christ’s followers is limited to political or verbal abuse, such as that above—and today that form of non-physical persecution is in plentiful supply.

They hate him who reproves in the gate,
And they abhor him who speaks with integrity.
(Amos 5:10)

The current Zeitgeist of “tolerance” is extended to felons, cultists, child molesters, murderers, Muslims, Buddhists, Democrats, homosexuals, transvestites, tree-huggers, communists, socialists, sexual predators, atheists, agnostics, and fools of every stripe. But there is one group to which “tolerance” is not extended: Christians—especially evangelical Christians. If you are a left-leaning Christian who subscribes to the liberal position that, for example, unborn children are expendable and God considers homosexuality to be just fine and dandy, then, by today’s standards, you deserve to be tolerated. If, on the other hand, you are a right-leaning Christian who is so foolish as to take God at His word, believing that

He actually meant what He said, then (in the eyes of much of the world) not only have you forfeited the right to be tolerated, but you are to be roundly reviled, condemned, and censored at every opportunity.

If you fall into the former camp, relax. For the time being you have the upper hand.

If you fall into the latter camp, take heart. You are in better company.

AWFUL THINGS

For the ruthless will come to an end and
the scorner will be finished,
Indeed all who are intent on doing evil
will be cut off;
Who cause a person to be indicted by a word,
And ensnare him who adjudicates at the gate,
And defraud the one in the right with
meaningless arguments.

(Isaiah 29:20-21)

There are two schools of thought on how the Christian should respond. Should he “turn the other cheek,” or should he fight back? Should he be in the middle of the fray, lobbying government, protesting with banners in the street, or should he remain in his closet, waiting until the dust settles outside? Should he be engaged, or disengaged?

One could authenticate either response from select passages of Scripture. What is clear from Scripture as a whole, however, is that no matter what occurs at the hand of willful flesh, in the end God will win. He will have His way.

“I, even I, am he who comforts you.
Who are you that you fear mortal men,
the sons of men, who are but grass,
that you forget the Lord your Maker,
who stretched out the heavens
and laid the foundations of the earth,
that you live in constant terror every day
because of the wrath of the oppressor,
who is bent on destruction?
For where is the wrath of the oppressor?
The cowering prisoners will soon be set free;
they will not die in their dungeon,
nor will they lack bread.
For I am the Lord your God,
who churns up the sea so that its waves roar—
the Lord Almighty is his name.
I have put my words in your mouth
and covered you with the shadow of my hand—
I who set the heavens in place,
who laid the foundations of the earth,
and who say to Zion, ‘You are my people.’ ”
(Isaiah 51:12-16 niv)

Hate is a powerful thing. It bruises. It hurts. It disappoints. It weakens confidence. It is hard to live with. Some of the vilest, most putrid things have been said not *by*,

but *to* Christians—awful, hurtful, obscene things.

But, then, we are in good company, for they all have been said before...

“Don’t pay any attention to him. He’s just a drunkard who likes to hang around sinners.”

“Yeah, he has some special powers—but they’re powers given to him by Satan. He serves the Devil!”

Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists, and others slapped Him, and said, “So prophesy, you ‘Christ’—which one of us hit you?”

They covered his naked, bleeding body with a purple robe, and shoved onto his head a crown of twisted thorns. Then they ridiculed him with, “Hail, King of the *Jews*!” They beat him some more, and spat on him, and knelt down before him in mock subjection. After their sport, they dressed him in his old bloody rags, and led him off to put him to death on the cross.

“Hey, you—I see the temple is still standing. Why don’t you just save yourself!”

“You’re *God*, right? So come on down from that cross. What’s the big deal?”

“You’re useless! You said you would save *us*, and you can’t even save yourself!”

“Who do you think you *are*?”

BADGE OF HONOR

One of the oddest responses for the believer is amazement or surprise. Sadly, it is one of the most common.

Why should any of us be surprised when those outside the faith treat us with scorn. Not only did our Lord experience such hate practically every day of His earthly life, but He made it clear that anyone following Him would experience it as well.

Perhaps a healthier response would be one of gratitude—and praise. For the hate heaped upon us is an honorable badge of our allegiance with Christ Jesus. And if we truly believe what God has said, we can know that nothing on this earth—nothing—can compare with what we have in Him.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.

(Philippians 3:8)

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