

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

HATE

ONE OF THE BOOKS I AM CURRENTLY READING is *O Jerusalem!* (1972), which recounts the traumatic, violent birth of the modern Jewish state in 1948. Page after page of this book is filled with the visceral hatred between Arab and Jew, and the orgy of bloody violence they both conducted over the soil of Palestine. This explosive hatred of one group for another reminded me of an episode I observed some years back. ■ The internet-based discussion group I frequent for the Adobe *Creative Suite* applications is usually marked by good manners and helpful, constructive advice—that is, until one day someone posted a request under the username “JesusIsGod.”

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 than he. And he signed the post, appreciatively, with his real first name.

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." Here is a sampling of the voluminous replies to his innocuous request, with my bracketed comments inserted:

"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 publicly 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..."

"Nobody's blasting his religious beliefs. But this is not the place to proselytize. And 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 small sample), I wondered if the response would have been similar if the username had been "KrsnalsLord," or "IFollowBuddha," or "AllahIsGod." 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? 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.

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*?"

(paraphrased from the Gospels)

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."

John 15:18-19

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