

And They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Hate

Did you ever hear the song that begins with the words, “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord”?

The lyrics are very simple, with the repeated refrain, “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love/ Yeah they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Today, we might want to change that refrain to “they’ll know we are Christians by our hate, by our hate.” We have become terribly disfigured in recent years, in many ways, the opposite of God’s intent. How on earth did this happen?

If you don’t believe me, visit some of our personal, Bible-affirming, Jesus-believing, social media pages, where we savage each other and attack each other and spread hearsay and even lies about one another with reckless abandon. They are hate-filled pages, pages filled with venom and poison, yet pages that ultimately reflect what is in our own hearts. I ask again: How on earth did this happen?

To give one recent, case in point, when my younger colleague Jeremiah Johnson publicly apologized for wrongly prophesying Trump’s reelection, he received a torrent of hate mail of the basest sort, almost all of it from professing Christians.

This is the fruit of the Spirit? This is the result of our fellowship with God? This is what happens when we are changed into the likeness of Jesus? Obviously not.

Yet I see this every day. We are vile. We are vicious. We are mean-spirited. We treat each other with disrespect and disdain. There is little honor. Little humility. Little grace.

Perhaps worse still, we have been taught to hate and we have found justification for our hatred. After all, the Democrats

(or Republicans or whatever people have our ire at the moment) are downright demons. They are Satan incarnate. They are pure evil. They deserve nothing but damnation. They are worthy of our ridicule.

To treat them with even a modicum of decency is beneath our high Christian calling, a calling we now demonstrate by our condescending, cruel, mocking and merciless attitudes. Oh, how holy we have become!

The truth is that we can hate sin without becoming hateful. We can stand against corruption and evil without becoming vile. We can even be righteously indignant without becoming venomous.

Yet we get in the flesh and violate hundreds of scriptural exhortations, all while puffing out our self-righteous chests. This is a stench in God's nostrils.

At all points, God calls us to speak the truth in love.

At all points, God calls us to exercise self-restraint.

At all points, God calls us to follow the example of Jesus.

Some will say, "I agree. We should follow the example of Jesus—the Jesus who overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple and the Jesus who rebuked the Pharisees in the strongest possible terms. That's the Jesus I emulate."

Sorry friend, but you're barking up the wrong tree.

First, you're not the unique Son of God, and neither am I. Yet when He overturned the tables in the temple, He did so as the Son of God, taking action on behalf of His heavenly Father. Where, in Scripture, did He ever tell us to go and do the same? Where, in the Bible, is it recorded that the apostles followed His lead and repeated His acts?

Second, it was the perfect, sinless Messiah who rebuked the

Pharisees, men who were highly respected religious leaders of their day. Today, He might be rebuking some of us. Not only so, but He did more than simply rebuke them for their hypocrisy. He also died for their salvation.

When we have that kind of love, the love that is ready and willing to die for those we rebuke, then our words will sound and feel a lot different. That is the kind of love that weeps in secret before it rebukes in public.

Third, Jesus explicitly told us how we are to conduct ourselves, saying this: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:43-48, NIV)

Listen to those words again: "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

Are we living as children of our heavenly Father? Whose image and likeness do we bear?

Paul wrote, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). What kind of fruit are we bearing?

We should analyze everything we post or text or say against this grid. Is it in harmony with the fruit of the Spirit? Do our words and attitudes reflect true love? Or do they reflect

the works of the flesh, which include “hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions (Gal. 5:20b, CSB)?

According to Paul, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Cor, 13:4-8a, NIV).

One of my colleagues, the leader of a major, international media ministry, said that everywhere he has traveled in the United States, he has seen Christians angry and divided over politics.

Is that what has infected us? Have we become so consumed with partisan politics to the point that our Christian identity is now completely intertwined with a fleshly, angry, divisive and accusative spirit—the very spirit of worldly politics?

Or does the problem run deeper still? Could it also be that we have drifted from our first love with the Lord, drifted from intimacy with Him, drifted from the beauty and wonder of the cross, drifted from fellowship with the Spirit, drifted from being transformed by the Word?

Peter exhorted, “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart” (1 Pet 1:22, ESV).

John wrote, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:14-15).

Are we getting the message?

Jacob (James) added this: “Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless” (James 1:26, NIV).

Does that describe us?

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Today, we are better known for our hate than for our love.

It is high time—no, it is way past time—for some deep, serious soul-searching and repentance. It is time for radical change. May we learn to love again. {eoa}

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