

Are You a Christian Troll?

The need for people who rightly divide the truth is only going to escalate as the end-times season we are in continues to unfold. These Bereans are valuable, and it would do us all well to embrace the opportunity to analyze our belief systems and to grow.

Instead, all over social media especially, we see critical and arrogant spirits assaulting others they disagree with theologically. For Christians to be rude and to operate in a spirit of accusation makes one wonder if they are saved at all. In fact, the moment we utilize methods of communication that contradict the fruits of the Spirit, we lose our credibility. Fortunately, there are many people who confirm their credibility by debating and discussing with love and honor. Communicating with them is a pleasure. However, all too often, supposed guardians of theology are zeroed in on proving their point and on shaming all who disagree. On the contrary, the shame is on them as they attempt to demoralize and invalidate people's ministry. The focus is on mistakes, errors, disagreements and weaknesses instead of building others up, honoring them and encouraging them in the Lord.

"Be devoted to one another with brotherly love; prefer one another in honor" (Rom. 12:10).

As one who absolutely affirms bold and provocative messages, I'm dismayed that so many who name the name of Jesus presume boldness equates to cruelty and divisiveness. Haters and debaters who are driven by a contentious agenda against those they disagree with are doing great damage to the church. Strangely, they presume to be the champions of truth, knights in shining armor who are to be celebrated for defending their absolutely "perfect" view of Scripture. They presume themselves to be Bereans when in reality they are aligning themselves with a dark spirit of accusation and assault. These

are no Bereans. They are, in fact, Thessalonians.

The Spirit of the Bereans vs. the Spirit of the Thessalonians

According to his custom, Paul went in, and on three Sabbaths he lectured to them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I preach to you, is the Christ" (Acts 17:2-3).

In Thessalonica, Paul was reasoning in the synagogue and revealing the glorious truth of Jesus. Some were persuaded, but many weren't, and instead of exhibiting love in disagreement, they started a riot. This riotous spirit is driving the religious today, people who are not at all interested in life-giving truth. Their motive is selfish, protecting their own way of life and belief system.

But the Jews who did not believe became jealous and, taking some evil men from the marketplace, gathered a crowd, stirred up the city, and attacked the house of Jason, trying to bring them out to the mob (Acts 17:5).

I think I've met some of the bad characters the verse mentions. They are all over Facebook. In the face of this, Paul and Silas moved on to Berea.

"The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews" (Acts 17:10).

Many presume the Bereans heard the message and then, with a nasty, suspicious look on their face and thick theological walls built up, they put their noses into the Scriptures, looking to refute all that was being said. This is not what happened at all. Many modern "Bereans" are some of the meanest, most arrogant and unteachable people in the church.

They are so tightly wound up, fearing even the slightest threat to their personal doctrines, that they often slander and accuse people they oppose. This is not how the Bereans in the Book of Acts responded. Not at all.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, daily examining the Scriptures, to find out if these things were so (Acts 17:11).

Did you notice that the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians? Did you notice why? They received the message not with great suspicion, but with great eagerness. They were excited about this fresh, life-giving message that Paul was revealing to them! Their energy wasn't spent discounting the message but rather in searching the Scriptures to see if it was true.

Because of this, many Jews and Greeks were transformed.

The story doesn't end there, however.

But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also, stirring up the crowds (Acts 17:13).

The Thessalonians actually went to Berea to hunt down Paul and agitate the people because of his message!

I propose many who assume themselves to be Bereans are actually Thessalonians—people who are more intent on hunting, agitating and stirring up instead of eagerly receiving revelation from the Word of God.

Let Love Lead

When engaging in conversation, especially online on social media or in the comments section of articles like this one, simply be nice. Discussions and healthy debates are supposed

to be fun and edifying.

I try to make it a point to address false theologies while never assaulting the minister. I know, there are many who would argue that there are times in Scripture where false teachers were named, and they were addressed quite bluntly. Yes, there absolutely does come a time to do that, but it is not as often as many might presume—and it's always in a spirit of great love.

I do my very best to honor all, even if I believe their theology is way off. What benefit is there in being rude, arrogant or aggressive toward them as a person? When I engage in discussions on Facebook or other places online, one of my core values is to be nice. I never want the person I'm engaging with to feel I'm attacking them or that I presume to be superior. While I will boldly communicate my position, I don't want anybody who might disagree to feel unsafe or devalued. They are precious people created in the image of God. Yes, if they pose a risk because of their doctrine, we must deal with that. But it's usually more beneficial to attack beliefs than to call out and defame people.

If I'm not exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit in my conversation, I should not be communicating at all. It's time to shut off the computer and head into the prayer room. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control should dominate our discussions.

Quit calling everyone you disagree with a heretic. Quit commenting on articles like this one with the sole intent of exposing the author as deceived, false or in some sort of error. Share your perspective. Offer your point of view. Reveal your concerns. Be teachable. Communicate with honor and humility without abdicating your mandate to be a true Berean. Your eagerness to receive truth will open the door for many to believe in Jesus.

Please understand, I have thick skin. By the grace of God, I'm nearly unoffendable. When people are aggressive toward me personally when I write or preach, I honestly don't take offense. Reading unkind tweets and comments can be entertaining and even enlightening. I understand the messages I'm called to deliver are provocative, and I do know the arrows will fly.

But I will say this. As someone who is deeply troubled when other preachers and prophetic people are attacked simply because of a disagreement over their theology or style of ministry, I want to simply ask you to be nice. Don't aim your arrows in their direction. Understand the accusations and cruel things you say not only hurt them, but they also hurt their spouses and children. Do you have any idea how many tears wives have cried because their husbands are mercilessly assaulted by others in the church through gossip and all over the internet? This is a very real and terribly sad problem, and it simply shouldn't be.

Let love lead. Be kind. Be gentle. Be patient. Be bold. Stand for truth. Don't hate. Be tender in your debate. Put the arrows down and simply love.