

Dear Christian, Stop Demonizing Christ-Followers in the Making

“We cannot fight the enemy and end up demonizing those who follow him. It may seem to win a battle more quickly but will make the eventual need for peaceful coexistence even harder.”

—Rick Joyner, *The Final Quest*

In our zeal to confront the darkness and expose the plots of the wicked, this admonition reminds us of a greater goal in our collective journey. Though there are certainly those who intentionally oppose God and His laws who must be held to account, there are also many who are caught in deception and blind to their bondage. How we treat them, talk about them, and testify before them may determine how many are won over by the truths we proclaim and the love we profess.

We often fight for *truths* more than for the *people* for whom they are given. Rather than assuming that all who believe differently than us are purposely rebelling against God, we must pray for the eyes of the Spirit to see them as Christ does. I believe that many of the strongest warriors for Christ to emerge in the dark days ahead will come from the enemy's camp. It will be those who seem to be hell-bent on destroying the kingdom that will eventually serve the King most fiercely.

The apostle Paul was one such individual that the disciples didn't see coming. His aggressive persecution of Christ-followers put the fear of God in many. And yet, his dramatic transformation and subsequent journey with Christ would eventually produce over half of the New Testament. I believe there are numerous “Pauls” within the ranks of the opposition and that the stewardship of our engagements with them may determine how many are set free and brought to the winning

side.

“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of as they were stoning Stephen, he called out... “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:54-55, 59-60, ESV).

We know that Paul (Saul) was present at the stoning of Stephen and that Stephen’s testimony and the glory he carried were witnessed by this mass-murdering Pharisee. What kind of impact did that have on Paul’s psyche? What did he see on Stephen that may have stirred his soul and made him question his religious quest? Could he have imagined that one day he would be in a similar position defending the very thing he was now attacking?

In our attempts to clarify the truth and defend righteousness, let us consider the future Pauls we may be addressing. I would challenge us to consider our own testimony when facing those who are promoting a lie and attacking our cause. We must be more motivated to set others free than we are motivated by hatred of the enemy. Though there will be many foolish zealots, religious hypocrites and political posers, there will also be some who are future kingdom ambassadors who simply need a demonstration of Christ from an authentic follower. Those we oppose today may end up being Christ-followers tomorrow. Even when dealing with differences from fellow believers, our interactions may determine the level of unity we experience once the dust settles and we remember we’re on the same side.

As we confront the lies, defend our cause and expose sin, let us also season our words with grace and illustrate a gospel of love and mercy. Let us be like Stephen and reflect the glory of God through our testimony and witness. May we allow the power of the Spirit to flow through our arguments so that

strongholds can be broken and lies be overturned without alienating those caught in them. May we have spiritual eyes to see potential converts and demonstrate a glorious message that compels them to leave their faulty positions.

We may be facing some strong opponents on the national stage, but we are also about to witness some of the greatest conversions and demonstrations of redemption ever seen. May Stephen's testimony live on through us, filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, able to see the glory that is available to any and all who call on His name.

"Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again ... Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 9:18, 22, NIV). {eo}

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