

Enough With the Mean-Spirited Words Against Rick Warren (And Others)!

In the aftermath of the tragic suicide of Rick and Kay Warren's son Matthew, another tragedy is occurring: So-called followers of Jesus are using Matthew's death as an occasion to attack Pastor Warren. This is sick, ugly, and sadly, indicative of the state of the body today.

It's one thing for non-believers to make ridiculous statements like, "your son died due to your anti-gay hate toward gay people including your son" (as if there was even evidence that Matthew was gay, or as if he was not greatly loved by his mother and father, which he clearly was). It's another thing when believers take this occasion to bash Rick Warren's supposed theological errors, as if this was some kind of divine payback for his alleged sins. What kind of garbage is this?

In the old, pre-Internet days, it was a little harder to hide behind anonymity. Now, all you need is a screen name and you can engage in the worst kind of name-calling without any accountability. Even if you choose to identify yourself, you're still safely hidden behind a massive cyber-wall.

Forget about civility. Forget about respect. Forget about ethics. Forget about the many biblical exhortations to guard our tongues and watch our words. Not anymore. Just let it fly!

In recent years, I have written many articles dealing with highly controversial issues, trying to walk a fine line as I do (and not claiming to do so perfectly). If I take issue with a political leader, I try to use respectful terms when doing so, even when issuing a warning. When I strongly criticize people's actions or words, if I can avoid mentioning their

names without making the story meaningless, I do so, trying not to embarrass them further.

When it comes to “Christian” leaders who have publicly crossed the line into heresy, I will expose their errors just as publicly, especially if I have tried to reach out to them first. But even so, I will do so cautiously, rather than posing as the only sound believer in the Church.

When dealing with true Christian leaders who are teaching error, if I can’t do justice to their position in the space of an article, I will cite their words without identifying who they are, even searching for the phrases I quote online to be sure they can’t be identified.

Of course, I’ve been criticized for not naming names, but I know that the moment I mention a leader’s name in the context of a short article, that leader will instantly be demonized by some readers, and I’d rather be safe than sorry. (Recently, I wrote an article taking strong exception to public statements made by a sister in the Lord, but seeking to do so with grace. She immediately contacted me, letting me know she felt I should have contacted her first, and I agreed, apologizing to her for failing to do so—although I fully stand by the content of what I wrote—and posting online that I apologized for not reaching out to her first.)

But when I’ve read the comments that follow many Christian articles (on many different websites and social media contexts), I’ve been saddened by the many harsh, angry, mean-spirited, vicious, and judgmental posts.

Have we forgotten Paul’s warning to the Galatians that “if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another” (Gal 5:15)? Have we forgotten his exhortation to the Ephesians? “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those

who listen" (Eph 4:29). Have we forgotten his counsel to the Colossians? "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (Col 4:6).

What would the Internet look like if we followed these guidelines? What would our blogs look like? Our Facebook posts? Our tweets?

Proverbs states that, "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Prov 12:18), and most all of us know the statement that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov 18:21). And it was Jesus himself who said, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt 12:36-37).

For me, as an author, radio host, teacher, and preacher, this is very sobering. Do we really believe what Jesus taught? Would that all of us took heed!

Sadly, it is not just active Christians who frequent Christian websites. There are plenty of former-believers and outright non-believers who visit them too, and all too often, our inability to be civil in the midst of our disagreements, our extreme willingness to identify fellow-believers as false prophets and false teachers, our self-assumed right to judge the motivation of people's hearts, and our utter violation of Jesus' command to love one another as he loved us simply demonstrates to the world that our gospel is not true.

May this be the day we search our hearts, determining to watch our words, repent of our sins, and glorify the Lord with everything we write and say. Surely he deserves nothing less than this.

And remember: The world is watching.

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