

Has Jesus Become a Buzzword on Social Media?

It's no secret that Christians and conservatives have become cancel culture targets from big tech companies over the past couple of years.

Some of the biggest conservative names and ministers have had their accounts censored, suspended or shadow-banned, and it has become quite prevalent recently.

CBN News' Billy Hallowell is one of the latest to feel the wrath of one of the big tech companies—Facebook.

"You know, it's interesting because you would assume when you get this alert pop up that says you've violated hate speech paradigms, that you've said something horrible," Hallowell told Charisma News' John Matarazzo in a recent interview. "So, here's what I wrote, and I wrote this on April 2. I think that's important because it was a 40-day period that elapsed from the time that I get this alert. I wrote, 'Jesus died so you could live.'

"That is the message that I wrote. There's no link. It was just 'Jesus died so you could live.' And that is what prompted this response from Facebook. And that response, just so you understand, I'm on my phone, I see it on my phone, I see it on the desktop. At first, I thought maybe it was a mistake. It was a joke. I'm like, 'What is this?' I got this alert. It said your post goes against our community standards on hate speech."

Facebook didn't go into detail with Hallowell about what made his post violate its hate speech protocol, making it all the further confusing.

“What they did do, and they give you a little bit of information and the wording is so strange, they said, ‘no one else can see your post,’” Hallowell said. “Which I’m like, ‘wait, what?’ We have these standards, because we want everyone to feel safe, respected and welcome. And then the message goes on to say—and this is the part that concerned me—if your content goes against our community standards, again, your account may be restricted or disabled.

“So I’m thinking to myself, wait, so if you arbitrarily decide that some other message like Jesus died so you could live is somehow a problem, you could disable my account. I had never had this happen. And I share messages like this all the time on that page. And then they say, ‘Hey, you can disagree if you want,’ which I did. Yeah, I then went through the process and asked them to review it.”

It only took a couple of hours for Facebook to review the post, and it was immediately removed from Hallowell’s page.

“I laugh because it’s so ridiculous,” Hallowell said. “So I get another alert, which says we have removed your post from Facebook. So, this is a new alert now. Then it says, and this is the best part about this, they remove it even from the preview. So, you no longer see the message that was a problem. It says posts unavailable and that they’re unable to show the content.

“Then there’s a little section on this alert that says what happened. It says your appeal was reviewed and your post does not follow our community standards for hate speech. So, we’re back to the hate speech again. And there’s really nothing you could do at that point. There’s a little section you can go in and see your page health. At that point, I was thinking, ‘okay, they’ve now reviewed it.’ I’m thinking at the time, A.I., right? Maybe artificial intelligence or using some sort of system, which is probably what happened, and maybe the word died is what caught their attention.

"But I found it particularly problematic that I've now gone through their system to have this reviewed. I would hope a person reviews it that at that point. And their review still finds that I've somehow violated hate speech standards."

Hate speech has been defined in so many ways in recent months and years, and it appears that anyone that has been offended by anything you've said can flag you for hate speech, no matter what you've said.

Hallowell says his first reaction was one of confusion as to why he was discriminated against, and who made the determination that what he wrote was "hate speech."

"My worry was OK, there are two options here," Hallowell said. "And maybe there are other options I haven't thought of, but maybe Facebook is using A.I. and this whole system is just messed up and they're capturing things they shouldn't. Or, Facebook is intentionally trying to crack down on these kinds of messages, which seems very strange to me. We obviously know there's bias in Big Tech and we've probably all talked this to death. But this one in particular I found shocking."

"Jesus died for you so that you could live." Why does that sound hateful?

"If you don't believe in Christ and have a relationship with Him, you're not going to be with Him in eternity," Hallowell said. "Is that why? I was confused, but then my mind was saying I'm not the type of person who likes to just let something sit. So I reached out to the Facebook press department. I also reached out to an individual that somebody had forwarded me to. Not surprisingly, nobody responded to me."

So, what does Hallowell plan to do about spreading the gospel now that Facebook has flagged his account?

"For me, that's what it's all about, right? It's being able to

speak the truth,” he says. “We live in a country that gives us the right to do that. And these issues are complicated, because people are going to argue that Facebook can make their own rules because they are a private company. It is funny to me, because those arguments that are made are not invalid. But when you make the same argument about a small-town bakery or about some other organization or company, suddenly they don’t have the right to make their religious-fueled decisions for themselves.

“But Facebook and Twitter do; they can keep you off the platform, but a baker can’t decline a cake. I think it’s interesting, all of that debate and discussion. But for me, you know, I’m active on a lot of other platforms. I want to be present and I want to be used however God wants to use me.

“But let’s move theology to the side for a minute, just to make the point of we live in America. We have a First Amendment. We’ve built a country, and bad ideas should lose out. But let’s have a discussion about it. If you think my post is untrue, about Jesus dying so we could live, then tell me what you think is the better idea. At the end of the day, the best idea wins. I think we’ve really been abandoning that as a country. We’ve allowed safe spaces, and we’ve allowed emotion to dictate so much. ... But we have to hold people’s feet to the fire on this. I really do believe that. We’re called to reach other people for the gospel. And we’ve got to do that by living it.” {eo}

Shawn A. Akers *is the online editor at Charisma Media.*