

How to Deal With Nasty Religious People

I will never forget an incident that happened in a small church my dad pastored when I was 10 years old.

Two deacons accosted my father one evening during the prayer time at the altar. One of them was big and the other was fat. The big deacon put his fist on my dad's chin and told him to resign because my dad, in their eyes, wasn't "spiritual."

My dad had not embraced some of the crazy and nonbiblical manifestations that a group wanted to bring into the church. Additionally, my dad preached from notes—a cardinal indication in their eyes of his lack of anointing!

That incident marked my first encounter with nasty religious people. It would not be the last.

My father graciously stood his ground and didn't resign until those people left and the church was stabilized with people of godly character. I admired the heroic way he responded—he didn't act like the devil in resisting the devil (see Jude 9).

Jesus also dealt with individuals who were outwardly religious but not inwardly godly. His conflict with them had been building. It started when He forgave a paralytic of his sins (Mark 2:6–7). The religious types didn't like Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors, or the disciples of Jesus not fasting, or the disciples plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath, or Jesus healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 2:15–3:6).

Religious headquarters now got involved. A delegation walked the nearly 100 miles from Jerusalem to accuse Jesus of being demon-possessed. Their goal was to discredit Him. (You really

have to be upset to walk that far to make an accusation!)

They couldn't argue against the wisdom of His words or the wonders of His works, so they attacked Him by alleging the source of His power came from the prince of demons.

These weren't theological liberals who debunked the unseen world of the supernatural.

No! These teachers of the Law were persons who spent their life in the "Book." But they didn't know its Author!

They had mastered theological study without knowing God. Their relationship was with the words and interpretation of the text, but their lives did not reflect the goodness and kindness of the living God.

The two deacons who nearly assaulted my dad, like the teachers of the Law, had a disconnect between their theology and their actions. Why would any person who presents himself as spiritual threaten to slug someone? Why would harsh and unkind words be said—all in the name of God?

Our culture is filled with preacher's kids, deacon's kids, and former church members who have abandoned the church—not because of the gospel but because of the poor example of nasty religious people. My heart goes out to them because the representation they saw of the gospel is not the real one.

Let's never become persons who are expert in doctrine but devoid of the character of Christ. What good is served if we are full of opinions and information but lacking in love and kindness?

A Prayer: *Lord Jesus, let me never be a person who causes others to stumble and lose their way through my bad example. May my words and actions always be consistent with my confession of faith in You. {eo}*

Excerpted from Dr. Wood's book, Fearless: How Jesus Changes

Everything, available from Vital Resources. **George O. Wood** is the general superintendent of the Assemblies of God.

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