

Spiritual Nitpickers: Usually Self-Gratifying ‘Rotten Apples’

Certain types of people won't shut up *and* won't put up. I call them spiritual nitpickers.

Spiritual nitpickers are usually rotten apples who spoil the entire bushel. With one pluck of the key "Submit," their reactions begin errant conversations online while they grin with a misplaced self-satisfaction and belief they are actually helping build the kingdom of God. But they are giving Christians a bad name.

From dark rooms, they sit in front of glowing computer screens with keyboards, awaiting belligerent rampages to be posted, tweeted or commented under the cloak of anonymity. Today's social media environment has created mobs of spiritual nitpickers searching for material they can lob grenades of fury at, satisfying a pent-up need to display their version of righteousness in a public forum.

Much like modern-day Pharisees, spiritual nitpickers hide behind veils, the law and their interpretation of the Bible. Yet they are revealing a bigger issue. In fact, compared to the gnat, it is camel-sized.

When Jesus walked the earth, he confronted Pharisees directly with grace and truth. They would fire curveballs, and Jesus would knock them out of the park, boggling their minds with a mirror.

But don't listen to me. Listen to the red letters in the Bible, and study Jesus' response to the Pharisees' verbal grenades:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have *practiced the latter, without neglecting the former*. You blind guides! *You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel*” (Matt. 23:23-24, emphasis added, NIV).

I italicized the point here. The Pharisees preferred making public displays of minor obedience to the law rather than living a life of major obedience with justice, mercy and faith. They were the first to throw stones, and today they are the first to lob grenades from the keyboard.

When Paul encouraged us to “fight the good fight of faith” in 1 Timothy 6:12, he wasn’t referring to spiritual nitpicking. He knew the difference because he had been a spiritual nitpicker himself. You have to read the previous verse to find what we should be fighting for: “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (v. 11).

What the “Good Fight of Faith” Really Looks Like:

1. Love God. With a world and priorities competing for our attention, we have to fight to love God. It’s a moment-by-moment decision to seek Him first, give Him your time to soak in a relationship, and sacrifice your money according to what is taught.

2. Love others. The most important commandment, Jesus said, is twofold: Love God *and* love others. This is counter-cultural because we live in a dog-eat-dog world with everyone fighting for themselves. But to love others as yourself, you have to develop empathy and put yourself in someone else’s shoes before seeing opportunities to reach out a helping hand. That takes courage. It’s a battle out there, and love is our weapon.

3. Live the message. Instead of lobbing grenades from behind a

keyboard, step outside your door in faith, and connect with what matters to God—people. Our mission field is all around us, starting with our family. A God's man will lead his family, shepherding their faith and growing closer to God himself. From there, your actions will speak louder than your words, and your mercy, compassion and integrity will do the talking.

4. Look in the mirror. Before nitpicking about a spiritual gnat, keep a mirror handy and take a minute to look at yourself. A God's man will see a man who sees good intentions, encourages others, and finds ways to help, love and share God's hope. There is good and bad in this world, even among Christians, but it's not our responsibility to lord theology over people. Ultimately, that's God's domain. Our domain is to fight the good fight of faith in our lives.

Spiritual nitpicking is not a spiritual gift. So, before you find fault in someone else, remember these words:

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you” (Rom. 12:3).

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