

This May Be Satan's Biggest Back Door Into the Church

It's not unusual for bats to find refuge in a belfry (a bell tower either attached to a church steeple or another structure). In a figurative sense, to have "bats in one's belfry" is an idiom that means to have crazy ideas, to be very peculiar, erratic or foolish. For example, if you think you can paddle across the ocean in a rowboat, you have bats in your belfry—you're nuts!

Recently, something strange happened at our house. Our double garage/basement doors were accidentally left open one evening. As dusk settled, my oldest son closed the automatic, roll-up doors unaware that a bat flew in and was trapped in the basement desperate to escape. An hour or so later, my wife and youngest son went downstairs to drive somewhere. Suddenly, I heard a commotion. I jumped up from my office chair and ran toward the loud noise. My wife and son came running back up the stairs yelling, "There's a bat in the basement!" Startled, because bats give me the heebie-jeebies, I grabbed a broom and warily descended the stairs. In the basement, I saw the foul animal fluttering around erratically. He made a few passes and darted toward me kamikaze style. Quickly, I ran through the basement, opened both big doors, waved the broom wildly and finally managed to shoo the creepy critter out. I climbed the stairs like a superhero who just rescued my family from certain doom and declared, "I am Batman!"

Believe it or not, bats are actually mentioned in the Bible three times. In two instances (Lev. 11:19, Deut. 14:18), they are listed among the unclean birds Israelites were forbidden to eat. Believe me, there is no danger of this Gentile violating that ancient Jewish ceremonial law. No bats for me, thank you. In the final reference, Isaiah (2:20) described idols being thrown "to the moles and bats," where abominations

belong. So, all three references portray bats in a negative manner. Bats are creatures of the night and are often associated with Halloween and horror films. My point is a bat doesn't belong in your house and neither does another spiritual intruder—hatred.

If you claim to be a Christian, hate should have no place in your heart. It is one thing to disagree with people's views or opinions and disapprove of their words or actions, but it is another thing to harbor hatred. We must remember that God hates sin, but He loves sinners. If He didn't, churches and heaven would be empty. Late in life, John the Beloved became known as the "apostle of love," but he didn't begin that way. As a young disciple, Jesus gave him and his brother, James, the unflattering nickname "Boanerges," which means "sons of thunder." In other words, they were hot-headed, quick-tempered, mean-spirited and ready to argue and spout off their opinions. Billy Graham said it well, "Hot heads and cold hearts never solved anything."

On one occasion, John informed Jesus, "John answered, "Master, we saw a man casting out demons in Your name and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us." Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:49-50).

Just because people don't associate with your group doesn't mean they should be vilified as an enemy. Some people are so small-minded that if something is not happening in their church, denomination or circle of friends, they assume it can't be good or of God. But God is so much bigger than our little religious cliques.

Another time, as Jesus and His disciples approached a Samaritan village, they were turned away. Notice John's irrational overreaction, "When ... James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did?' But He turned

and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what kind of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them'" (Luke 9:54-56). James' and John's prejudice against Samaritans was so deeply inbred that they were ready to burn them all up at the slightest provocation. Jesus rebuked them and told them they had the wrong spirit. Americans and Christians today need to repent for any and all racism, renounce it and ask God to remove it from our society. Bats don't belong in your basement and bigotry doesn't belong in your heart! David's prayer is especially relevant in our increasingly hostile racial and political climate, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).

Remarkably, though John grew up with hatred in his heart, after spending time with Jesus and seeing true (*agape*) love modeled, he was transformed. As Martin Luther King expressed, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Later, we read how John returned to Samaria with Peter to assist Philip the Evangelist in a city-wide revival (Acts 8:12-17), evidence of his changed heart. Instead of praying fire down from heaven to destroy them, he prayed for the fire of the Holy Spirit down to empower them. John went on to write most of what the New Testament says about love. In his writings, he used some form of the word "love" over 100 times.

Once consumed by hate, John was transformed into the apostle of love. His words still soothe the souls of millions today, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). As Martin Luther King admirably said, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

Now is the time to take a spiritual broom and sweep the bats and the bigotry out of our lives. If you think you can be a true Christian and hold on to hatred, then you, my friend,

have bats in your belfry! {eo}

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