

When Christians Turn Mean and Hateful

People have always been rude, thanks to human nature. But have you noticed that rudeness has gone to a whole new level since the advent of social media? What people were ashamed to say to someone's face can now be easily posted on Facebook, or tweeted, or typed anonymously on a blog or web forum.

Why are we so mean today? Maybe people have watched too many angry political slugfests on television or read too much hateful banter online. Maybe all this toxic dialogue has desensitized us, and we just don't know how to bite our lips and say anything kind. And while I'd love to say that Christians are immune to this epidemic of harsh conversation, that's not the case. Sometimes we are just as mean as everyone else, even if we don't drop F-bombs as often.

I recently visited a web forum that specifically caters to Christians, but I had to exit quickly because the tone of the discussion was so caustic. Christians were skewering each other, name-calling and judging people they've never met in person. There used to be rules for arguing, but today—at least on the Internet—the gloves are off, all weapons are allowed and there are no referees. It's a bloody free-for-all.

The father of the modern Pentecostal movement, William "Daddy" Seymour, knew that there is a direct correlation between the level of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the way we treat people. He said: "Pentecostal power, when you sum it all up, is just more of God's love. If it does not bring more love, it is simply a counterfeit."

Ouch! What we need today in the church is a revival of genuine love. If you want to see such a revival in your own heart, start by taking these steps:

1. Let go of all unforgiveness. The No. 1 reason people have anger seething under the surface of their hearts is they have not forgiven people who hurt them. Holding resentment in your heart is not only unhealthy for you (it can cause disease); it is also toxic for those around you, because they are subjected to your bitter venom when you speak. Forgive people quickly and allow the sweetness of God's love to neutralize the poison.

2. Get healing from past abuse. Many people are verbal abusers because they were abused, bullied, rejected or judged in the past. If that was your story, you can break the cycle through the power of Christ. Let Him teach you how to love people, even if no one in your past knew how. Also, open your life to a mature mentor who can model Christian love to you, and take the risk of building healthy friendships.

3. Go on a fast from negative words. Many Christians fast at the beginning of each year to ask God for personal revival. But you can fast from sweets, carbs and proteins for 21 days and still be spiritually unchanged if you are complaining, grumbling, criticizing or spewing hateful words from your mouth every day. Ask God to set a guard over your mouth to instantly convict you of unkind words and actions that quench the Holy Spirit.

4. Stop bashing the church. Today there are a growing number of disillusioned Christians who have given up on the church because they were hurt by a pastor or a fellow believer. These so-called "dones" (people who are "done" with organized churches) sometimes feel compelled to vent in public forums about how the church has failed them. Yet bashing the church is never going to make anyone feel better; it will only drive them farther from God and His reconciling power.

We must remember what British preacher Charles Spurgeon said: "You are no lover of Christ if you do not love His children ... Love Christ and you will soon love all that love Him." God

loves His church with all of its flaws, and so should you.

5. Let God stretch your love. The apostle Peter wrote: “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, *fervently love one another* from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22, NASB, emphasis added). The Greek word for “fervently,” *ektenos*, means “stretched.” It implies that if we want to love people like God loves them, we will be stretched to the max. Stretching hurts, but in a good way!

God wants to put His very heart inside you, but He can’t until you make room by getting rid of every hateful attitude. Open your heart wide, and let His love invade the places you have closed. His fervent love can change a bitter, angry, cynical critic into a kind, gentle, affectionate lover of people.

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