

3 Things We Should Learn From the Starbucks #RedCups Fiasco

Now that the “brew ha-ha” over the #MerryChristmasStarbucks controversy has cooled, it’s worth taking a look back to see what might be learned.

In the rare chance you missed it, last week a self-proclaimed “social media evangelist” threw a double-shot of espresso in the face of Starbucks’ supposed war on Christmas. His accusation seemed outrageous. Starbucks had banned Christmas, hates the baby Jesus and is impaling gingerbread men on candy canes (OK, that last one was in jest.)! That’s right, this year’s little red cup is a direct assault on Christmas.

The video encouraged Christians to go stick it to the Christless company by purchasing their \$5 lattes.

What? Give someone I disagree with my money?

The idea was to trick the ba-hum-bug baristas by telling them that your name is Merry Christmas. That way, the Grinch in the green apron would be forced to offer the offensive holiday greeting. What a way to change the world!

Unfortunately, very little of what he shared was true. But why let something as pesky as facts get in the way of a great social media campaign?

For the record, I’m not defending Starbucks. The company has done several things to leave a bitter taste in the mouth of many Christians, but banning Christmas isn’t one of those things. Starbucks is a company interested in making a hefty profit on their overpriced coffee.

They aren’t going to sacrifice a lucrative holiday season for their ideology. Their shelves are stocked with plenty of

Christmas gifts, including Advent calendars, a special Christmas blend of coffee and “Merry Christmas” gift cards. Their stores are even decorated with snowflakes and snowmen and the atmosphere is filled with Christmas music. If they are waging a war on Christmas, it must be a covert one.

Starbucks said the simple red cups were their way of providing their customers a canvas to decorate and share their own story this season. If that is the case, then I like the red cup. It reminds me of the reason for the season isn't about snowflakes and Santas but the scarlet blood of my Savior. That's my story!

Yet in spite of all this, the rant went viral. In less than a week, 16 million people had watched the video, and a national discussion was ignited. If you're like me, by the second day, I was tired of seeing the posts and ready to move on ... but the video just wouldn't die.

The media embraced it like a giddy child on Christmas morning. They were happy to keep it front of America as an example of religious ignorance. In the end, it might have been a big win for the evangelist, but it was a loss for the image of Christianity.

Looking back, there are a few things we can learn:

1. Stop sharing stupid social posts.

I get it, the video was like watching a wreck on the side of the road. You just can't help but slow down and turn your head to take a quick look at the damage. We live in a day where people pay attention to view counts, likes and shares. Hit a million eyes, and the media comes looking for a story.

The mainstream media were quick to write the narrative. Headlines read, “Starbucks Cups Cause Boycott From Christian Groups,” “Starbucks Holiday Red Cup Offends Christian Sensibilities” and “Christians Angry Over Starbucks Cup

Design.”

We were told everyone was offended, when the truth is no one was. Sensible people saw it for what it was: a ridiculous rant that caught a few minutes of Internet fire.

We get it. The media isn't the voice of everyone, and this time they were not even the voice of anyone. But that didn't stop them from perpetuating the idea of ignorant Christians who were now at war over a coffee cup. Of course none of that was true.

To me the greatest outrage in the controversy wasn't over a red cup but the fact that Christianity got attached to it. Everyone that watched—and worse, shared—helped feed into that narrative. In the future, exercise caution with that like button and get acquainted with the unlike button.

2. Don't get into distracting divisive debates.

Learn this lesson from Christ. He refused to engage in mankind's mindless debates. When the Pharisees came seeking a debate, He didn't get distracted. Paul wrote, “But avoid foolish and unlearned debates, knowing that they create strife” (2 Tim. 2:23).

The enemy loves it when we debate over things that don't matter because it distracts from the things that do. Do you want to truly make a difference in the world? Then learn to quickly discern between what is worthwhile and what is worthless. Truth be told, you already do.

I heard one secular commentator opine on the Starbucks matter.

He said, “If Christians wanted to actually do something in keeping with the Christmas spirit, they would invite a homeless guy into Starbucks and buy them a sandwich and a drink.” I agree. But here is the thing: The believers I know do things like that all the time. They are good, honest,

hardworking people who care deeply about others and show it often. They don't attract attention, but they do make a difference on a daily basis.

It is unfortunate how these online debates attract negative attention and incorrectly paint the true Christ follower to look like something they are not. I don't expect the media to every honestly portray true Christianity, but there is no need to give them ammunition either. Run from these pointless debates. Stick to your call and keep making a difference. Don't get distracted, and let's refuse to be divided.

3. Any fool can make a fuss on Facebook.

Technology has made it possible for anyone and everyone to broadcast their thoughts and opinions to the world. Everyone has a platform to preach, be they a fool or a wise man. My father used to say, "Loose lips sink ships." It was his way of reminding me that a wise man holds his tongue and only speaks when he has something of value to say.

There used to be a time when establishing a platform to speak was costly. Those who built them earned them. They understood the responsibility and the power they had. Most weighed their words and refused to waste them. Social media has provided everyone with a free platform, and people freely publish their thoughts without thought. Words carry power, so be careful what you say and what you share. This past week was proof that one post can make a lot of people look foolish.

Reinhard Bonnke said that the first time he saw Facebook, he thought, "My word, it's a pulpit for preaching to the world." Consider how true that is. You have the power to share the gospel with multitudes. There has never been a day as today. Treat your platform with the respect it deserves and publish responsibly.

I imagine the gentleman who posted the video never thought his rant would take off like it did. It blew up, and now, for a

season, he is the #MerryChristmasStarbucks guy. Personally, I want to be known for something more important. I hope you do as well. Treat everything you do online as if the world is watching, because they are.