

What We Should Learn from the Kathy Griffin Fiasco

Kathy Griffin is one of only three women who've won a Grammy for best comedy album. Her profanity-laced stand-up comedy routines made her a hit on HBO, and she was voted one of the funniest women alive by the Oxygen network a few years ago. Her popularity soared in recent years because of the way she irreverently pokes fun at politicians and celebrities.

But few people were laughing last week when Griffin posted images of herself holding a model of President Trump's head dripping with fake blood.

And it wasn't just conservatives who were offended. CNN swiftly canceled her appearance on its New Year's Eve special, and CNN commentator Anderson Cooper tweeted that Griffin's photo shoot was "disgusting and completely inappropriate." Even though Griffin apologized for her botched attempt at political humor, saying, "I beg your forgiveness," venues around the nation quickly canceled her scheduled appearances.

Within a few days, she declared that she was the victim and blamed the Trump family for trying to destroy her career.

It has never been exactly clear why Griffin crossed the line from humor to insanity by making fun of decapitation. Was she trying to encourage someone to kill President Trump? (She denies that.) Was she sending a not-so-subtle message to radical Islamic terrorists? (We already have plenty of images of Egyptian Christians being beheaded.) Was she simply giving people who hate Trump a way to process their anger? (If so, that was a flawed strategy that backfired.)

Or maybe she was just trying to get attention? If that was her reason, Griffin got more than she bargained for. This was no joke. It appears that her career in comedy is over.

The same day Griffin posted her images on Instagram and Twitter, I was reading 1 Corinthians 6. I noticed that when the apostle Paul listed the sins of ancient Greece, he included a sin I had never noticed before.

Paul wrote: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor *revilers*, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10, emphasis mine).

I've read that passage many times, but the word "revilers" jumped off the page. The Greek word, *loidoros*, means "one who reviles; one who speaks profanely or rails at abusively." It refers to irreverent speech that is hurtful and crudely disrespectful. The verb "rail" can also mean "to complain loudly and bitterly," and it implies that the criticism contains nasty rumors or untruths.

And even though Paul was describing the sins of a culture that existed 2,000 years ago, his words have particular relevance to us today—in this age of public outrage. We are a generation of revilers. In our country today, we can't argue respectfully. No, we insist on verbal nuclear war. Today, our political discourse has no rules.

Whether you listen to news broadcasts, talk radio or political commentary or read online forums or Facebook comments, you will find that our national tone has changed. Revilers can't just disagree politely. They have to shout, and they have to lace their comments with vicious attacks and malicious jabs. Revilers also feel a need to drop F-bombs and use vulgar language in every sentence to make sure their words are as vile and hateful as possible.

Revilers have no respect for people in positions of leadership, either. Whether they are talking about a

president, the CEO of a company, a college president, an athlete or a stay-at-home mother, revilers pounce on their prey and skewer their victims with abusive words that have been dipped in the acid of hate.

And revilers come in all varieties—both conservative and liberal. When President Obama was in office, some conservatives used hateful racial slurs to denounce him—and some even lynched him in effigy. That is shameful. We should show respect to any elected official regardless of our own party affiliation or political views.

Now that President Trump is in office, his image is being defaced and mocked publicly. And liberal activists have launched hateful campaigns against Vice President Mike Pence as well because of his Christian convictions.

I hope we learn from the Kathy Griffin fiasco that reviling is not the righteous way to effect change. Those of us who represent Christ have no business reviling anyone. We may disagree with a person's political positions, but if we have the Spirit of Jesus we cannot use crude or hateful words to push our position. James 3:8 reminds us that the tongue is "full of deadly poison," and we are commanded never to curse men "who are made in the likeness of God" (v. 9).

Revilers, in essence, believe they are God. They think they can say whatever they want, in whatever way they want to tear down another person. Reviling is rooted in pride—and God hates pride.

Don't let the spirit of the reviler influence your attitude or infect your speech. Don't let pride control your tongue. Pray that the spirit of the reviler will no longer affect you. And pray that it will no longer control our media and our public conversation. {eo}