

On Awards and Offenses

If the world hates you, bear in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you... They will treat you this way because of My Name, for they do not know the One who sent me.

John 15: 18, 19, 21

In the wake of comedienne Kathy Griffin's comments about winning an Emmy® Award from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (and who to thank for the same), a group of Christian performers at The Miracle Theater in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee took out a full-page advertisement in *USA Today* declaring, "Enough is Enough!... "The name of Jesus Christ should not be mocked, nor should those who love Him be slandered for their beliefs. It is time for people of faith around the country to stand firm against religious slander, bias, and bigotry of all types including Christianity."

General Manager Russ Hollingsworth was quoted on the theater's web site (www.miracletheater.com) as saying "We believe that every American has the right to worship freely and to speak freely. We believe, however, that as Christians it's time for us to take a stand for our faith and ask for respectful treatment from the media and the entertainment industry."

"It seems like Christianity is the only religion that it's acceptable to persecute," Mr. Hollingsworth said. "It made my heart sick to see people in the audience at the Emmy's laughing at Griffin's remarks. It should not be acceptable to mock anyone's faith. We have to start changing the hearts and minds of people on this subject!"

Mr. Hollingsworth is correct in his assessments. Once upon a time, it *was* not acceptable to mock the faith of others in private, let alone on a worldwide television broadcast. Proper parenting and the concept of good manners used to nip that sort of thing in the bud when you were a kid, before these ideas somehow became unfashionable.

I, too, was offended by Ms. Griffin telling the Lord Jesus Christ – the Son of Almighty God, Alpha and Omega, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Firstborn from the Dead, Holder of the Keys of Death and Hell – that her statue was her god now... and what He could do about it. And so, I signed the online petition. In general, this is not the sort of thing one should take lightly; the culture that spawns and encourages this nonsense must be held accountable. On a personal level, the Lord Jesus has been infinitely kind to both my family and myself – far kinder than I deserve. So, I don't think it's funny when someone gets up on television and "disses" Him before multiple nations.

Having said that, however, while I applaud Mr. Hollingsworth and the folks at The Miracle Theater for their stand (and I do hope to see your production if I'm ever in town), I have to ask: *What did you expect?*

Did you notice that *other* performers (Ray Romano, for instance) also had some of their remarks censored so that they wouldn't be released into general broadcast? Or that still others, while not actually applying their vocal chords to the word that would surely be edited out, did "mouth" it so that there would be no question of what they were trying to get across? While I was (pleasantly) surprised that the E! Channel did edit out Ms. Griffin's comments toward my Lord, I shudder to think what would have been let loose had the 2007 Primetime Emmy® Awards been broadcast only on premium cable... or Pay-Per-View, for that matter. This culture, frankly, has become a burlesque of polite society; crudity, profanity and vulgarity are the calling cards of performers who are considered "edgy" and hip. Nowhere is this truer than in comedy, where crude gets you "cred," and "clean" comics – those whose subject matter and language steer clear of the profane – are well off the radar, condemned to dwell in obscurity for the bulk of their performing careers.

This state exists because the culture is a reflection of the world that forms it – and the world is *always* opposed to what Jesus is doing. People of the world think everything in the world belongs to them. They don't like the moral lifestyle God demands of them in both the Law and the Prophets and the Gospels. (Overall, the world isn't too crazy about Judaism, either, but it's still regarded as somewhat bad etiquette to persecute Jews.) They don't want God getting in their business, and so they have deluded themselves into thinking that God does not exist; thus, they can live any way they please. The mere mention of the name Jesus is a reminder to them – whether they consciously admit it or not – that the world they have constructed is false, a dream from which one day they will awaken.

(In his standup comedy days, Steve Martin portrayed the mind-set of those in this state fairly accurately: "What if you died and went to Heaven, and it was just like everybody said it was, with angels and pearly gates... wouldn't you feel stupid?")

People disrespect Jesus and His followers because Jesus *is* the Way, the Truth and the Life – and people don't want to hear *that*. Jesus Himself knew this would happen, hence His comments during the Last Supper as recorded by John. The Apostle Peter echoed those remarks in his first letter recorded in the Bible:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something bad were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the Name of Christ, you are blessed, for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

(1 Peter 4:12-14)

And let's be honest, here; on the "suffering meter," trash-talking about Jesus is pretty low on the scale. That's about the extent of it at present here in

the United States; trash-talking and the occasional lawsuit from legal organizations who take Thomas Jefferson's "separation of church and state" remarks out of context. Our brothers in places like the Middle East and Asia are suffering through *serious* persecution – imprisonment, torture and execution – for the sake of the Gospel, much the same as the believers of Peter's day faced.

I'm not trying to say you're outrage is nothing; it's genuine, as was my offense to Ms. Griffin's comments. And maybe by stepping up to the plate and challenging such actions *now*, far more serious persecution might just be deflected or at least forestalled. But always remember that we're coming down to the wire on Jesus' return. The god of this world knows this, he knows his time is short and he's going to pull out all the stops to dupe as many folks into Hell with him as he can. Unless the United States experiences a genuine, full-strength, Holy Spirit-led revival, we may just go down the same road as Europe, or the Middle East or Asia. False religions and cults are in the wings even as you read this, waiting to take advantage of the growing spiritual vacuum in this country. Your actions in taking out ad space in *USA Today* are laudable. But even more important is that you keep doing what you're doing to present the Gospel to as many people as you can, that you act as members of the Body of Christ (both onstage, and especially *off*), and pray earnestly for the day of Revival in this nation and the world. *That* is what will ultimately change things in this culture.

And, Ms. Griffin, I realize the odds of you ever reading this message are incredibly remote, but on the premise of "never say 'never'" ... let me just say that I believe that you are probably not aware that it's not so much the idea that our *faith* has been "dissed" in your comments, but our Friend. It's not pride so much as it is personality. The rest of the world may act as if Jesus was this great teacher who is long since gone, but He *is* very much alive, and has shown us far more mercy and kindness than we deserve. He *is* coming back, sooner than most people are probably comfortable with, and will one day judge both the living and the dead for their works and their attitudes. I say this not to try and scare you into anything, because belief by force or coercion is no belief at all. I would invite you, however, to investigate the claims of Jesus for yourself; not any number of His followers who fall short of what He calls them to, but Jesus Himself. Learn the full truth of the offer He makes, and how good we have found things since we took Him up on it. Because to us, Heaven and Hell are not merely points of abstract theological debate – these places are *real*. We warn you of their reality because, frankly, we don't want to see *anyone* end up in the latter location for all eternity. I have seen some of your performances on television from time to time, and when you're not being foul-mouthed, you *are* funny. I would like to catch your act in Heaven some day.

For the Glory of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ
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