

Meme Streak: When Christians Spread Internet Hate

It's become so easy in our society to spread hate.

The rise of the meme has been an interesting phenomenon. This past year, it has become something that has caused me deep concern.

For the uninitiated, memes are pictures or short videos that have words overlaid across them that are usually short, quippy and intended to cause a spontaneous emotional response.

Some are really funny and completely harmless, but many employ the use of sarcasm in order to make a point, like political posts or posts about social concerns.

"Christian" memes intended to in some way shame, judge or correct others regarding things like church attendance or Bible reading in a public and passive aggressive way bother me most.

A meme was posted recently in an online forum about children's ministry that featured four children in church using electronic devices.

The implied message was that if we let kids use electronic devices in church, they will never follow God and we can't expect them to.

All I could think was, "Really? Someone felt it necessary to publicly shame these four children and their parents by posting this picture with this sentiment as a meme on social media, proclaiming that they would likely never follow Christ because they used an iPad in church?"

Memes like this one leave out so much of what church actually is.

What if these same kids had people in church committed to walking with them through life? What if each Sunday they were greeted by name?

What if their parents recognized their kids probably wouldn't get the same thing out of the sermon as them but still wanted their kids to experience gathering with

the whole faith community?

In other words, this picture shows just a moment and not a story.

God is bigger than Mario and Pokémon. Even if we don't agree with this behavior, our disagreement won't bring the love and light of Christ to these young hearts. That's up to us - the church, the community.

The definition of the word hate is "intense or passionate dislike." Meme culture has made it easy for us to express our intense passionate dislike in short statements with a funny face in the background.

It's so easy to spread hate. In fact, if we post it and people who agree with us like it, they share it too. The term we use for memes that get posted a lot is "viral." Viral refers to a virus, like a cold. Easy to share, easy to spread.

Memes can be little capsules of hate that we can spread easily like a virus. And Christians are doing it!

Lots of "Christian" memes are out there that, at their base, use shame, sarcasm and judgment to make a point. Many times, political memes shared by Christians do the exact same thing.

We need to shake ourselves out of the stupor of the habit of hate.

Of course, we may feel something is wrong and needs to be addressed, but there are much better ways to share our hearts than a cutting statement over a picture to be passed around circles that already agree with us.

We cannot expect the next generation to live into faith in Jesus if our approach is to use shame and sarcasm as motivation.

Jesus came to offer a new way, a way founded not in hate, but in love (see John 13:34-35).

I've never seen a life changed by a judgmental, sarcastic meme. I've seen many lives changed through the love of Jesus Christ shared through relationship and conversation and the act of laying oneself down for a friend.

We should seek to create a habit of choosing to build relationships with people, even if we disagree with them on some political persuasions or religious

behaviors.

What if we resist the desire to “pull a punch” and hit them with a clever one-liner?

What if we lay down our right to a “thumbs up” from those who already agree with us and seek instead a conversation with those who don’t?

What if we are willing to break with the habit of hate and pursue the way of love?

If we’re willing to do these things, then maybe our voice will be heard in a way that actually brings about lasting change and transformation in people’s lives, especially those of the next generation.

Memes can be quite funny, and they can get the point across in ways that we just wish we could. They are easy to share. They are easy to “like.”

But Christians aren’t called to an easy path. We are called to seek peace and pursue it. We are called to love like Jesus.

One day, our children will Google us. Let’s make sure they find love there.

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