

# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



September 21, 2014

## Sticks and Stones

The increasingly hateful rhetoric being hurled against Christians is a new experience for many of us. But it's really nothing new—and God has already told us how to respond.

*“. . . Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12).*

*“. . . Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed” (1 Pet. 3:16).*

*“In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (1 Pet. 4:4).*



Believers in 21<sup>st</sup> century America are passing out of a unique period in history, when Christianity was considered respectable among the majority of the population. We are now moving back to the historical norm, a hostile environment in which believers are a persecuted minority. Under our system of government—at least for now—we are protected from physical violence. But our enemies have more creative (and legal) ways of making our life of faith uncomfortable. The favored weapon now is

verbal abuse. Christians are openly smeared as bigoted, hateful, intolerant, a threat to society, and a host of similar pejoratives. And for what? For merely affirming our convictions regarding what once was considered a common sense standard of morality.

We are not accustomed to this kind of harsh treatment. But the fact that Peter addresses this phenomenon among his readers almost two thousand years ago should reassure us that we're not experiencing anything new. God's people suffered that same kind of indignity then; now it's our turn.

Why are Christians the subject of such vitriol? There may be a few isolated cases of believers who really are bigoted, hateful, etc., but the number who fit that description is too few to justify tarring the entire movement as a threat. Something else is going on here. The more likely explanation is that our lifestyle—and the convictions that undergird that lifestyle—serve as a rebuke to the ungodly conduct that others choose to embrace. They will never admit it, of course, but their hateful

attacks on us are an attempt to silence the truth they knowingly reject.

Peter not only acknowledges the reality of this verbal abuse, he also instructs us how to deal with it. Some shrink back in fear, giving up faith—that's surrender. Others retaliate with their own version of hate speech—which renders our character no better than that of our critics. Instead, Peter encourages us to *let our lives speak for us*. The best response to the spiteful talk is to simply be who we are: agents of love, kindness, compassion, and good works. It's the same response that Jesus displayed when He was mistreated. We are His disciples; shall we do any less?

A final thought: Occasionally we will be approached by someone who, along with some belittling remarks, also expresses genuine curiosity about what makes us the way we are. When we encounter such an honest but confused heart, we must “be ready to give a defense”—with gentleness and reverence—concerning the hope that motivates our life (3:15). In the end, it is our goodness that will triumph over evil.

– David King