

Biblical Outrage in a Twitter Outrage World

#JusticeforHarambe

His name has become a joke to so many people, including in [one of the more hilarious Babylon Bee entries](#), that I wonder how many people seriously expressed outrage over the killing of a gorilla in the Cincinnati zoo.

Regardless of the actual number, that incident is like the poster child in my mind for social media outrage era. I do not think anyone who uses Facebook or Twitter or Instagram can deny that these websites have given us a venue to show people just how upset we are by major and minor injustices in the world.

I'm not going to try to sort out the differences between major and minor here. There is no doubt that some events are worthy of mass outrage and social media posts, including things like shootings and sexual abuse. What I am going to do instead is look at a significant passage of Scripture that deals with appropriate outrage and then try to contrast how we filter and practice this passage in our modern day.

I have and will likely always teach that biblical truth is the intersection of what the Bible meant to its original audience and what it means today. Culture differences make applications to Bible texts akin to mining for gold and when the culture around us changes significantly in a short period of time (as it has in the U.S. with the extremely recent and prominent rise of social media sites), we are prudent to constantly evaluate how we apply the Bible.

The story in Ezra 9-10 is simple enough in its conflict. God's people were kicked out of their homeland for 70 years for idolatry in actions like marrying from among the surrounding

pagan nations. After they were mercifully allowed to come back, a report came to their spiritual leader, Ezra, that some had begun yet again to commit the same violations of their law that got them thrown out in the first place. Ezra's reaction is one of outrage. Ezra 9:3 says:

When I heard this report, I tore my tunic and my robe and ripped out some of the hair from my head and beard. Then I sat down, quite devastated.

The expression "quite devastated" here could very well be rendered "horrified". A few verses later in 10:1 we read:

While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself to the ground before the temple of God...

He had no keyboard and didn't direct himself to an audience. But Ezra was clearly upset in a similar way we see people attempting to communicate on the internet. And how he reacts beyond the outrage has a lot to say for us in the United States that will help us know how to react on Social Media and beyond. Here are a few things Ezra did that we would be wise to consider doing when dealing with injustice around us.

Ezra's Outrage Was For His Neighbors

Probably the most important thing I have gleaned from the Social Media Outrage Era is that we can be very selective about it. We tend to react to whatever we see based on the people we've friended or what news sources we follow. And if we wanted to, we could find something every single day to be upset about.

I've often feared that I am getting desensitized to much tragedy news. Because tragic events are constant in a 24 hour and social media news cycle. And then I wonder, why do we express outrage over things we see on Facebook that are

hundreds or thousands of miles from us when every single day there are certainly terrible injustices and people hurting in close proximity to us? That perhaps we are missing something because social media outrage is easy and convenient while dealing with real people in real messiness, as Ezra did, is hard?

What if we were proactive with our outrage instead of reactive? What if we were so involved in our communities, churches and neighborhoods, that we were aware of injustice for people we see face to face and as a result, we had less time for outrage over things and people we know far less about?

I've heard several people say that social media gives us a broad but shallow audience while the local church gives us a more focused but far deeper impact. Our outrage supports that claim.

Ezra's Outrage Included His Own Sin

Here is something I do not see very much of on social media: Someone expresses outrage over some act of injustice and then includes pronouns like "we" and "us" when referring to who needs forgiveness. Yet, that is exactly what Ezra did even though he was not guilty of intermarrying with pagan nations.

This is a pattern you see in the Bible. Isaiah (6:5), Nehemiah (1:6-7), and Daniel (9:4-17) all did the exact same thing. They were righteous men yet did not exempt themselves from corporate confession and repentance.

I can't help but wonder if social media outrage makes it easy to see the problem as "them" instead of "us".

Ezra's Outrage Was Tempered By Confessing God's Grace

Outrage can be healthy to experience and express but if a person is a follower of Christ, eventually they should be just as likely to express how gracious God is. Keep in mind, if a Christian victim of something like sexual abuse makes a social media post shortly after the event and doesn't mention God's grace, I am not going to judge that person. But on the whole, social media outrage is far out of balance in our expressions of gloom and doom, despair and bitter judgment.

Again, Ezra teaches us that we can be viciously angry over things people do to harm others. But if we need a theology of still proclaiming God's grace manifested in our past, present and future.

Ezra's Outrage Was Profound, Lasting and Meaningful

Ezra essentially fasted for many hours over the news he got. He mourned boisterously. He prayed with humiliation. What he expressed was so powerful, it caused others to join him.

I wonder how often we express outrage over some Twitter trending hashtag and then 15 minutes later are eating lunch and laughing with friends? Please understand I get that not all outrage has to be this significant. But I sincerely worry that we have replaced deep, personal grief that shakes us to our core with a wimpy anger that is a mile wide but an inch thick and leaves us about the same as we were yesterday.

Ezra's Outrage Was Followed By Practical Action Steps

Outrage is a part of the human experience. If you are an

emotionally healthy human being, you will feel it. But feeling anger is not enough. Confession and Repentance are the heart of Christianity and Ezra guides the people to swiftly do something to undo the horror they had committed. And when we have dealt with those things in our own lives, we need to get out and follow up practically, even on social media.

If I feel that some people are victims in the DACA conflict, I could write up a post telling people how I feel about it. Depending on how I expressed myself and if my post is based on what is true biblically and factually, then that could be good. But I could also post a link to help teach people where they can go to get help if they are in the mess. That's where I have felt conviction and where I want to change.

And then there is plenty to do outside of the internet. But I want to be clear that social media, like fire, is something that can be productive or destructive and there are ways to use it with wisdom. Even with our outrage.

Comments are welcomed below.