

February 8, 2015

Slacktivism

by Jack Wilkie

There are a lot of things that frustrate me about my generation and about the state of the world today. There's the moral relativism that is winning the day, the intolerance of the intolerant, the victory of emotion over reason, and any other number of trends that I could write about all day. But one trend that annoys me more than perhaps any of the others is this act that's now known as "slacktivism."

You might not have heard the term as such, but you're probably very familiar with the idea of slacktivism due to its widespread effect on today's culture. oxforddictionaries.com defines the word as "Actions performed via the Internet in support of apolitical or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g., signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website."

Think about the #OccupyWallStreet movement, a movement that accomplished basically nothing but had tens, maybe hundreds of thousands of people filling sites like Twitter with their "support." Another example is the red and pink equal sign profile picture that filled Facebook in support of gay marriage in the last two years. Did the gay marriage movement gain anything by these pictures? No, but those who posted them gained a feeling of accomplishment and being part of a movement. People tweeting their disgust for Bill Cosby is another recent example. Nobody really questions whether people support a man accused of being a serial rapist, but we sure have to make our voices heard!

The biggest problem with all this is that slacktivists are today's moral crusaders. You can feel good about yourself and join a movement simply by sending a tweet from your cell phone or signing an online petition. Take 10 seconds, and you can walk away with the feeling that you're helping change the world.

Now, let's turn the focus inward. Has slacktivism become a part of the church as well? Sadly, we'd have to say yes in a lot of cases. Just a few examples:

- We'll talk about how we need to stop abortion. And how do we tell people to make the difference? Go vote. Voting is great, and voting can accomplish a lot... but voting is something we do twice in even a busy year. Taking twenty minutes to vote once or twice a year does not constitute actively trying to end abortion. It's slacktivism.

Consider the numbers. The overwhelming majority of abortions (83%) are sought by the unmarried. 88% of people 18-29 admit to premarital sex and a mind-numbing 80% of those who claim to be Christians (in the broad sense) admit to it. Until those numbers change, is abortion really going to end by us pulling a lever? No, we need parents who raise up godly children, who don't accept fornication as inevitable, who teach their children why it's not acceptable to violate

God's institution of marriage, and who teach them practical solutions for avoiding compromising situations. We need churches who will teach on the sanctity of life and how sex and children are a part of God's plan in the Scriptures. Only then will we start to see a change, the type of change that our minimalistic efforts just can't accomplish.

- James 1:27 tells us that pure and undefiled religion is to visit the widows and orphans in their trouble. In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus paints a picture of the judgment where He will confront people based on the way they took care of the needs of those around them. In today's world, we've made it too easy for Christians to come into the building on Sundays, put their contribution in the plate, and know that their part in taking care of people has been paid for. It's a huge encouragement to see churches who are actively engaging the needs of their communities instead of settling for such slacktivism. That attitude needs to be a part of all of our lives. We need to realize that it's not good enough to drop a few bucks in the plate on Sunday and hope that gets to people who need it.

- One final example comes in the form of a phrase, an attitude rather than a specific instance. If you've ever heard the phrase, "That's what we pay the preacher for," you've had a first-hand encounter with Christian slacktivism. If we're all brothers and sisters, the church family we talk about in our prayers and Bible classes, then we should all be there to support each other when one falls sick or ends up in the hospital. If the lost are truly lost and Matthew 28:18-20 was a call to all disciples, it's not left to just one person per congregation to reach out. I'm blessed to work with a congregation where this attitude just isn't part of the equation, but I'm familiar with enough congregations and ministers to know that it's not like that everywhere. If we think it's our job to show up on Sunday and Wednesday night and it's someone else's job to do all the work in between, the church will be paralyzed by our slacktivism.

The work that God has set before us is simply too exciting and life-changing for us to settle for minimal engagement. The world has convinced themselves that they're "doing their part" by giving an effort so small that it's almost laughable. As the church, we can't afford to be slacktivists who feel we've done our part when it costs us nothing. Let's keep growing, keep fighting, and keep looking for ways to change the world with the power of God's Word.