

# EDITORIAL: Winsome witness to repulsive religion

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Thanks to politics, religion keeps grabbing headlines.

- *Surveyed just prior to their presidential primaries, 52 percent of Mississippians and 45 percent of Alabamians indicated they believe President Obama—who speaks frequently about his Christian faith—is a Muslim.*

- *The Pennsylvania chapter of American Atheists set off a racial storm when it posted a billboard featuring a black man wearing an iron collar with the caption "'Slaves, obey your masters'—Colossians 3:22." The atheists said they sponsored the sign to protest the Pennsylvania House of Representatives' resolution declaring 2012 "The Year of the Bible."*

*Editor Marv Knox*

- *Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum made headlines when he told audiences President Kennedy's 1960 address advocating church-state separation made him want to "throw up."*

- *A strong subtext of this year's presidential race is Mitt Romney's Mormon faith. Polls show significant numbers of Americans, particularly in the South, are suspicious of Mormons. That fact fueled Santorum's candidacy, holding on for primaries not only in Alabama and Mississippi, which he won, but across the South and Southwest.*

- *The Obama administration's healthcare mandate requiring contraception coverage in employer-funded health care programs not only infuriated Roman Catholic bishops, whose doctrine opposes contraception, but Protestants who believe the mandate manhandled*

*constitutional protections for religious liberty. Countering those protests, other Christians contended the policy supports the moral responsibility to provide adequate health care for women.*

Those are just a few of the latest dispatches from the faith-foments-furor front. No doubt, you can recall other illustrations. Wherever you turn, it seems, you see Americans arguing about religion. Small wonder, then, the fastest-growing religious group in the nation is composed of the "nones," or people who say they have no religious affiliation.

This poses a problem for Baptists and other evangelicals, who believe ultimate meaning, fulfillment and salvation are found in a personal relationship with God, available through faith in Jesus. How can we help others draw near to God when "religion" repulses people? We must adopt and maintain characteristics quite uncommon in this age dominated by culture clashes. We need:

- **Concise clarity.** *Unfortunately, many people who rage against Christianity simply don't understand it. They're confused. If we viewed our faith as they do, we'd hate us, too. We need to help them see Christianity clearly. And we must get at it concisely, because if we take too long, we lose.*

*For example, "Slaves, obey your masters." No 21st century Christian advocates slavery, and we don't believe the Apostle Paul did, either. To counter erroneous Scripture citations, we must explain the Bible and its cultural context. And we must learn to apply it to today, so people don't hate God simply because they misunderstand divine nature.*

- **Compelling control.** *This isn't about manipulating others or managing debates. It's about controlling ourselves. Many people form an inaccurate image of Jesus because they accurately analyze people who claim to represent him. Even when we disagree with others, we must be winsome*

*in our attitudes and kind in our spirit. We must exercise discipline to remain gentle and Christlike, even in adversity.*

• **Courage and compassion.** Cowardly Christians hurt our witness. The rarest bravery is the courage to call out our own tribe. We must confront fellow Christians whose meanness, judgmentalism and arrogance drive wedges between Creator and creatures. And we can demonstrate Jesus' love by compassionately caring for others—by tangibly expressing his grace through the words we say and the deeds we do. Of course, Christians already practice many acts of care. But if we bring Christlike compassion to politics and the public square, we can change the world.

—Marv Knox is editor of the Baptist Standard. Visit his blog at [baptiststandard.com](http://baptiststandard.com).