



Spirit of Grace Herald

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Will Smith, Denzel, And the Devil

When Will Smith slapped Chris Rock on the platform at the Academy Awards, I was surprised but I did not consider it a spiritually newsworthy event. Hollywood "stars" are not exactly known for their godliness and self-control. Will Smith obviously has anger issues, but that was no great shock to me. With such huge popularity and correspondingly huge egos, probably half the actors in Hollywood do as well. I never gave serious thought to writing about it or using the incident to make any particular theological point.

But when I heard what fellow actor Denzel Washington had to say to and about Will Smith, I felt it was perhaps time to say something. Let me begin by saying that I respect Denzel Washington. He seems to be a genuinely nice guy and he professes faith in Christ and a respect for the Bible. But when I heard some of the things he said to Will Smith and about the incident I have to be honest – I found it a little nauseating.

In case you have been living under a rock, let me review exactly what happened that night in front of a national television audience. Comedian Chris Rock, in his monologue, seemed to mock Will Smith's wife, Jada's, lack of hair by suggesting that she could star in *GI Jane 2*, which would call for a woman *GI* who would obviously be sporting a "buzz-cut." It brought a laugh from the audience, and strangely, even Will Smith laughed at the joke, but he quickly processed what was said, decided it was an

insult, and then walked up to the stage and slapped Chris Rock with force. It would have been a cruel and insensitive remark from Rock for sure, had he known that Jada suffered from a disorder that caused her to lose her hair, but most sources suggest he had no idea about this.

Within a day or two most Americans were united that Will Smith's action was indefensible. Insult or not, this was not the way to "defend his wife's honor." But when Denzel Washington stepped in, and gave his counsel and opinion, this took things to another level. So what did Denzel say to Will Smith? He told him: "At your highest moment, be careful, that's when the devil comes for you." I am not going to suggest that there is not some truth in that, but it seems to me that is probably not what Will Smith needed to hear.

Denzel seemed to be saying, "This was the devil's work. You are on a spiritual high, God has elevated you and blessed you, and the devil came along and created this." But you cannot simply blame this inexcusable action on the devil. It was not the devil who slapped Chris Rock; it was Will Smith. Nor does the devil have such unlimited power that he could come and take over Smith's body and force him to walk up to the stage like a robot, while saying to the devil: "Yes, master, I will obey you. I will slap Chris Rock on the face." No, it was Will Smith who did this.

Jesus declared that it is by the fruits of our lives that the truth about our character will become known, saying: "Therefore by their fruits you will know them." (Matthew 7:20). In addition to his slapping and cursing, Smith confirmed to an interviewer (previously) that both he and Jada have, with mutual agreement, engaged in sexual relationships outside of their marriage, and that they have an "open marriage." This is not exactly godly fruit. Will Smith revealed the nature of his heart by the obscenities that he shouted at Rock after he returned to his seat, screaming at him twice, with hatred and anger on his face, "Keep my wife's name out of your *** mouth." The slap and these obscenities, while on national television, revealed that Will Smith needed a little more than to be told that the devil had come at him while he was on a high.

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Washington later stated: "There's a saying when the devil ignores you, then you know you're doing something wrong. The devil goes, 'Oh, no, leave him alone, he's my favorite.' Conversely, when the devil comes at you, maybe it's because (you're) trying to do something right. And for whatever reason, the devil got a hold of him that night." So according to Denzel Washington, Will Smith is such a spiritual favorite of God, the devil just had to sneak into his mind that night, move him to go up and slap Chris Rock, and then scream curses at him. So the more you slap and curse people, the more it proves that you are one of God's special favorites? I always thought it was the other way around. I thought godly men and women do not physically abuse people and curse at them. I thought godly people are gentle, kind, patient, loving, and tender-hearted. Guess I was wrong. In fact, I guess the entire New Testament must be wrong.

Denzel went on to say: "I don't want say what we talked about – but there but for the grace of God go any of us. Who are we to condemn? I don't know all the ins and outs of this situation, but I know the only solution was prayer." Denzel is giving a pop-theological version of Biblical truth. He is suggesting that no matter how horrendous the behavior, no matter how crude or violent or abusive the action, we must never judge or criticize. If we see a man robbing and beating a helpless old woman, we should never intervene or judge that man. He probably had a momma who mistreated him when he was small.

Denzel's attitude toward Will Smith in this matter represents a kind of wimpy, anemic, pathetic, unbiblical version of Christianity, you might call it Christianity-lite, that has become all too popular in the church today. This is not the Christianity of the Bible. If the apostle Paul lived today, do you suppose that he would say of Will Smith, "The poor man! He is one of God's favorites and the devil has come after him. And I'm just like him. I'm sure that if Chris Rock had said something about my momma, I would have done the same thing. I would have rushed up to that stage and slapped him silly."

This refusal to ever criticize any person or denounce any action springs from a pop-Christianity that holds no one accountable, condemns nothing, blames nobody, and makes excuses for the most despicable behavior. How we need more John the Baptist's in our world today, who cried out to King Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife!" Many of our modern Christians would have told the fiery prophet that it is wrong to condemn or judge anyone. But John could not keep silent. He surely knew it might cost him dearly, and it did indeed cost him his life, but still John stood up for the truth.

As Denzel Washington stated, Will Smith needed prayer that night, but what he needed to pray was that Jesus Christ would come into his heart and make him a new man from the inside out, and give him a new nature, where love, gentleness, kindness, humility, and forbearance would rule in him by the Holy Spirit. Then he would experience what Paul described in the book of Philippians, when he wrote: "...that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:10-11).

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