

Love Gives Good Google

Sue Scheff dreaded Google. A search under her own name turned up site after site of denunciations. Scheff, an advisor to the parents of problem adolescents, had angered a client. Über-angry and cyber-savvy, this individual turned her computer mouse into a microchip machete. She spammed sites from the PTA to YouTube. She tagged Scheff's reputation like a graffiti crew spraying obscenities on the side of a schoolhouse. Scheff sued, and won – but the internet has a life of its own. Frankenrumors burst the bonds of binding arbitration and ran amuck, trashing Scheff's street cred' in a virtual village as big as the globe.

She turned to ReputationDefender, one of many new companies that specialize in "online identity management," professional haz-mat crews for techno-toxic reputations. ReputationDefender created three new web sites using variations of Scheff's name. They whipped up a MySpace account. They sited and slogged and blogged until the critical first page of a Google search turns up positive words about the former victim.

Like rival companies such as Naymz and International Reputation Management, ReputationDefender does not delete – or even dispute – negative postings. They simply seek to outweigh them with positive words. They don't lie; they select which truths get told most often.

Paul told the Corinthians long ago to operate the same way. Cyberspace or face-to-face, love calls Christians to select the facts that define others as positively as possible. "Love . . . bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things," is the way the apostle said it (1 Cor 13.7).

Some people think he meant our belief and hope in God, but I'm not so sure, since he sandwiches these verbs with synonyms that basically mean "putting up with somebody." I don't think we're ever commanded to tolerate God; other people, however, are a different matter. Paul uses "hope" to describe his feelings for the flaky Corinthians themselves (2 Cor 1.7). Paul would have made a good Cubs fan. "Paul keeps firing off letters to the Corinthians," writes David Garland, "because he does not believe that they are a hopeless case."

Chrysostom says the verb sequence shows that love goes beyond hoping for the best from the other person to actually believing it. "And even if these good things should not turn out according to its hope," he writes, "but the other person should prove yet more intolerable, it bears even these." That's why the faith and hope of love come book-ended with endurance.

So love means that when your name comes up I put the good stuff on the first page. I don't lie and I don't deny, but I take seriously the responsibility of defining your character to another person. If someone Douglas your name, Christ commands that the results be the best I can manage.

So be a good steward of the spiritual-space world where words create web sites that shape the perception of others. And program the search engine of your soul to seek the good stuff first and list it foremost. Believe the best, and if facts belie belief, hope on. And if hope appears hopeless, draw endurance from the reminder that you, too, are saved by grace.

Searching,
Doug