

That's not Christian

By [James Sledge](#)

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I think I'm getting a tiny taste of what it must feel like to be a typical Muslim at a typical mosque when people twist Islam to justify their hate or violence. It happens when I hear someone like [Jerry Falwell Jr. encouraging Liberty University students to get concealed-carry permits](#) so they would be able to "end those Muslims before they walked in." He even joked about "what I have in my back pocket right now..." chuckling as he asked, "Is it illegal to pull it out? I don't know."

Falwell later clarified that he was speaking of terrorists when he said, "those Muslims," but I don't think that helps at all. Worse, I'm certain that people both inside and outside the Christian faith are saying to themselves, "This is what Christians believe." But that cannot be if they are truly followers of Jesus. That is my response.

In some of the most strained biblical interpretation I've ever heard, Falwell claims that Jesus' words, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" somehow justifies the use of deadly force. Falwell is talking about the same Jesus who stops his own followers from pulling swords (the concealed weapon of choice in those days) to save his life, adding, "For all who take up the sword will perish by the sword." This is the same Jesus who demand love of enemies. But now some people hear Jerry Falwell Jr. and think to themselves, "Jesus approves of my gun and my hatred/fear of Muslims." And others think to themselves, "Jesus tells Christians to carry guns and hate me."

That is a lie, a gross misrepresentation of Jesus and his teachings. Yet it is a lie that far too many embrace. And those of us who are followers of Jesus have been terribly negligent in allowing such lies to go unchallenged. As my Muslim friends know well, challenging those who co-opt faith for their own agendas of hate is no easy task. Challenging the lies of others does not mean that people stop accepting those lies as truth. Yet followers of Jesus are called to be people of truth.

It is common in America to hear calls for moderate Muslims to do more to repudiate radical Islam. (No amount of such repudiation is sufficient for some.) But American Christianity needs to take a long, hard look in the mirror on this issue of misrepresenting the faith.

From time to time, I'm made the case for retiring the term *Christian*. I think it largely meaningless, a paper-thin veneer that too often implies nothing in the way of actually following Jesus' teachings. I am constantly amazed at the ways so-called Christians on both the left and right trivialize the faith and imagine it lines up neatly with their own personal and political preferences.

I'm not speaking of how we fail to do all that Jesus asks of us. (We all fall short on this.) Rather I'm speaking of a failure to see the many ways that Jesus' call is incompatible with our culture, our politics, our fears, our aspirations, etc.

Jerry Falwell Jr. may well be a Christian. He may well "believe in Jesus," though I'm never quite sure what that means. But I am convinced that he is not following Jesus. And he is sullyng the Savior's name in the process.

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