

The Gospel is Offensive, those that Share it Should Not Be

*as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."
(Romans 9:33 ESV)*

Recently, during a Wednesday night Bible study a good point was made about sharing the gospel and how many Christians can be offensive in their manner of witness. They can hurt the evangelism process rather than help it. I thought this was a great point and one worth writing about because I think this topic is so relevant for today.

We live in a world where being offended is like a new trend, or popular hobby. If you do an internet search on frivolous lawsuits you will find many lists out there that will make you laugh and shake your head at people's propensity to find offense in anything. If we look at this in a purely religious focus, the tally is tremendously high for things that have changed in our society because people have taken offense. Prayer has been banned from school events, the Ten Commandments have been removed from courthouses, people are encouraged to say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas," and nativity scenes have been taken down, just to name a few. All this boils down is we are at war. This is one of the tactics of our enemy, it is to get the lost offended by something religious as to turn them off completely to the gospel and thereby ensure their lostness forever.

When I think about the topic of offense and how people get offended so easily, three truths come to mind. First is that fact that ***we can all be offended.*** This is part of our human nature and dwells in each of us. Jesus himself was offended when He saw the money changers in the temple making a mockery of all that God had instructed His people to do in the temple He reacted by taking some thick cords and beating the money changers out of the temple area (John 2:13-17). So we can all be offended, it's a fact, but it is one that we should be consciously aware of that we might not hurt our ministry. (I'll talk a little more about this later)

Second is the fact that ***the gospel is offensive.*** The rock of offense that is mentioned in Romans 9:33 is Christ Jesus. The gospel is something that is an offensive thought and idea to those that would understand and still reject it. The message of God is one that states our life without Christ is reprehensible to God, and anything we might do that is good is worthless and has no chance of bringing us salvation. The gospel tells us that without Christ our father is the devil (John 8:44), that we have no nature to do good (Romans 3:9-20), and are dead in our trespasses and sins as children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3). That does not paint a pretty picture of humanity, but it is an accurate, true, and biblical description of humanity. The gospel goes on to say that we deserve eternity away from God in the depths of hell because we have offended Him. Again, not the most uplifting or pleasant news. The great news of the gospel centers around Jesus Christ and His redemptive work of dying on the cross in our place, and rising again victorious. Anyone who would come to Him in faith would have their sins forgiven and be adopted into the family of God. Therein is the gospel and it is an offensive and divisive message. It is a message that tells others that their work is as filthy rags in God's sight and many people are repulsed by that idea. They reject the idea that a Jewish carpenter is who they must entrust their soul. ***This is also the only message the church has and it is the only message that gives real hope to our world.***

With that being said the last truth that comes to mind and hopefully ties the first two together is that Christians should not be what offends people about Christianity. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that Christians should be an over accommodating, accepting of anything, people so as not to offend or make people upset. To the contrary, I believe that Christians should keep to a biblical ethic and moral standard as outlined in God's Word. As Christians we should live out, speak out, and stand up for the Truth. However, we should do it in such a way that our love is unmistakable, and our actions are unquestionably kind and respectful to others. ***The church's goal should be that if someone is asked why they are not a Christian, the answer would be because the gospel offends me, not because Christians offend me.***

To be honest, I have known many people who are not Christians that fall back on the reason that they had a terrible experience with the church or church members and that is why they want nothing to do with Christ. I cannot recall anyone however, even after thinking for quite awhile about it, who has told me they rejected Christ simply based on the offensive nature of the gospel. Now, realistically many of the people who have rejected Christ are just using the bad experience as a reason or a convenient excuse to not expose an unforgiving and sinful heart. In fact, there are many that will use whatever little thing they can cling to as their excuse for rejecting Christ. However, the sad fact remains that there are millions with very real and sad stories of how they were hurt, offended, angered, neglected, or even hated by those that identify themselves as Christians.

Jesus never intended this to characterize His people. Neither did He give this as a strategy to win the lost and establish His kingdom within the hearts of others. We are to be known by our love for the brethren and others, not for our dislike, hatred, hurtfulness, and indifference to the lost. We are to be known for our desire to help others out of the mire of sin and our zeal for obedience to the Word not callous comments made about sin and sinful people. ***We should be known for calm patient intelligence in talking about issues of politics, science, and religion, not an over zealous nature in winning a debate.***

People marveled at what Jesus said when He spoke about topics of the day (Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 12:17). As Christians, if we have the Word of God available to us and the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us, why can we not aspire to do the same with our words? The world has seen "Christians" who are great at stirring up strife, and insulting those in sin who know no better way to live because they are blind and dead to the ways of God. What if they saw Christians with things to say that really made this world think about their lives? What if they saw true unselfish unbridled love from the church? What if the only reason someone had to saying no to Jesus was the gospel offends me?

Let me begin my conclusion with a story that I read in the book "The 10 Dumbest Things Christians Do" by Mark Atteberry. He recounts one man's conversion that was quite unique. This gentleman had a wife who was active in her church where she brought her children. This man was not a churchgoer but would attend occasionally at Easter and Christmas. He was not interested in coming and being part of the church nor was he interested in being a christian which was why everyone was shocked to see him one Sunday, walk down the aisle during the invitation and give his life to Christ. Upon being asked "Why did you come down to give your life to Christ?" he replied "I guess I just ran out of excuses. Everyone here has shown me such love, respect, and been Christlike in their witness to me I had no excuse left to give as to why I would not accept Christ."

Let us strive for such things to occur in our lives and in our church. In this there would be no obstacle or excuse handed to the lost by our words but let there be a clear path given to those on their journey to Christ Jesus.

In closing, let me give simple prayers to help guide our thoughts as we ask the Lord to mold and shape us into vessels that would clearly and lovingly share the gospel with others.

“Lord help me love the lost as You love them, without prejudice or contempt for what they have done or how they hold to their sin that put You upon the cross. Lord help me to understand the lost and realize that they are blind to Your truth and Your ways. Let my words draw them to You and not push them away. Let me show compassion and love as I present You as the Light of the world. Lord, let me love Your Word and rely upon it for my message and my guidance. Let me understand it that I might teach it to others. Lord, increase my love for You that my passion might be Your passion, and allow me to have a heart that trusts in You for others to come to know You as Lord and Savior. Amen”