

THE OFFENSE

By

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“Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (Rom. 9:33).

To every person who hears the Gospel, Jesus is either a rock of salvation, or a rock of offense, a stone over which he stumbles. He said, “Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me” (Mt. 11:6). Now, why did He say that?

On the night before His arrest and crucifixion, He said, “All of you shall be offended in me this night” (Mt. 26:31). Why should His very chosen apostles be offended in Him, their Lord and personal friend? Peter answered, “If all shall be offended in you, I will never be offended” (Mt. 26:33). Indeed, why would anyone be offended in the incomparable Christ?

One reason is that the world considers the Gospel of Christ foolishness. Of course, they do not say that Jesus was a foolish man. The folly of such a statement would be too obvious. But the Gospel, the claims that Jesus made and that we make about Him, these are foolish. The sophisticated intellectual of today rejects the simplicity of the cross. It is too earthly, too realistic, too simple! “For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness” (I Cor. 1:18).

That’s why it offends so many today, because it is simple enough for everyone to understand it without a university degree. We live in the day of experts. Many of these “specialists” resent anyone else, without credentials, claiming to know something in that special field. For the unaccredited to explain in simple elementary style the mean’s of man’s eternal salvation stirs the coals of jealousy in the proud heart of the intellectual. It exposes his spiritual snobbery and wounds his ego. He would prefer that religion be mystical, so it can be controlled by the experts and doled out piece-by-piece to the groveling supplicant.

He doesn’t want any suffering Savior taking his part and dying his death. The very thought that he should deserve such treatment is the highest of insults, and he is offended. Such an idea is foolishness to him, and he goes unsaved.

Another offending factor is the intolerance of the cross, or rather the intolerance of Christ, even God. This is the age of tolerance. Anything goes. “One faith is as good as another.” “Everyone is working for the same place.” This is generally true except for that small minority of Christians who believe in the truth and desire to receive immortality.

The cross is intolerant. It is the only way given by God. It says that if you are not saved from eternal death by Christ’s death on the cross, then you simply aren’t saved. Jesus Himself said that it was the only way. “No man comes unto the father but by me” (John 14:6). The Word says, “He that believes on the Son has eternal life; but he that does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:26). The so-called “liberal” insists that we recognize other ways. For example, he want to include the Jews in salvation, and calls our religion “Judeo-Christian,” even when the Jews reject Christ. He likes to talk about the “brotherhood of man” as if all men are saved, whether Jew, Moslem, Buddhist or something else. He is offended when the

Christian says that Christ's way is the only one. The narrow way is repudiated today. Anyone who says there is only one way is branded as a bigot and a narrow-minded extremist. God is not supposed to discriminate, but He does. In fact the Gospel is the most discriminatory system known to man; it says that God will not tolerate any but His own and will apply the death penalty to all who oppose Him. Such intolerance is intolerable to modern man.

Perhaps the biggest offense of all is God's sovereignty, the fact that God claims the right to do as He pleases with His creation and has set the plan of salvation as it pleases Him. It says that you cannot save yourself by your works, your morals and your personal accomplishments. The standard of perfect "goodness" is God Himself. It is in "His image" that He measures man. "None is good save one, God" (Mark 10:18). The measure of God's perfection makes every man a sinner, unfit for God's presence and subject to the penalty of sin: **death**.

This is the Gospel message. It says that no matter how big you are, you deserve death, and at the judgment day you will be cast into the lake of fire and burned up like so much chaff (Mt. 3:12, 13:40-42).

Think of the great industrial tycoon, the multi-million a year executive, the honored doctor of law or philosophy, the high and mighty who control thousands of lives and by whose manipulations and ingenuity whole nations move; think of the movie star whose name is a household word; or think of the fellow shuffling down the alley living out of the garbage can or the criminal behind bars. God's sovereign law puts them all in the same category: sinners. All have sinned, and all are consigned to destruction. Only Christ can save. Everyone, the high and mighty as well as the weak and lowly, must come through faith and repentance. No wonder it is so hard for the rich man to enter! The higher his pile of money, the greater the status gap, and hence the higher the offence.

And what of the Christian who loves the praise of men? Is he willing to bear the offense of the cross and confess the name of Jesus when it is being blasphemed in the office and the club room? Men do not like to be reminded of the imperialism of the Gospel, especially when they've got it going so good all by their own steam and when, in the world's eyes, they are the good guys.

God's sovereignty is an offense to many religious leaders. The mails bring their letters insisting that unless their particular program is supported God's work will collapse. In a sense these are threatening letters, but I'm not sure whether they threaten me or God!

One letter informed me that all who did not support a certain Bible College were not cooperating in God's program. It was news to me that God had founded the Bible College and a shock to know that all Christian minister had no part in God's work if they didn't support that school. Hardly a day goes by that we don't receive word that God will suffer a terrible defeat if we do not support some campaign or mission or school.

But the promoters and campaigners have got it all backwards. God is not dependent upon them. He is sovereign. He can raise up supporters, campaigners and promoters from the stones, if He so desires. If He cannot use Judas, He will find a Paul. But woe unto Judas, who would not be God's servant. No, I'm not fearful of God's program collapsing if I do not serve. God can find another servant. But what condemnation would be mine were I to refuse? God is not dependent upon man, but man is eternally dependent upon God.

God's sovereignty is offensive. It is a stumbling block in the way of true unity. Adherents to each party feel that their group is the one essential. To suggest that Christ did not found their particular denomination and that He might not give a whit for their traditions and honored hierarchy is highly offensive. Hence, they cannot give up their organization unless it is to join a bigger one whereby they can assail the citadel of God with even greater force of their own creation. Anything except surrender to God's sovereign way: the way of the Cross!

These are the days the Scriptures call "perilous. The enemy has subtly convinced the world that the Cross is foolishness, narrow-minded, intolerant and imperialistic — all bad words these days. Indeed, "the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God." We know that he "foolishness of God is wiser than men" (I Cor. 1:18, 25). The word of God to today's Christian is: "Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth..." (Eph. 6:14). And the promise of Jesus is: "Blessed is he who is not offended in me."

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