

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

YOUR PREACHING IS OFFENSIVE TO ME

By Tom Roberts

“Then His disciples came and said to Him, ‘Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?’” (Matt. 15:12).

The history of *“speaking the oracles of God”* (1 Pet. 4:11) is a history of controversy. There is an inimical and hostile difference between truth and error that is reflective of the difference between God and the Devil. Di-metrical opposites, truth and error will never be compatible, nor should they be. Christians should not be ambivalent about our attitude toward truth and error, God and Satan. We have enlisted in a war, have had our weapons issued by God, have engaged the enemy and there can be no quarter given (2 Cor. 10:3-6; Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 4:7). Though the analogy of *“warfare”* is figurative, the battle is real. We are not talking about Don Quixote tilting at windmills, as in a farce. A spiritual battle is no less real because it is not physical; though not material, it is nevertheless actual. Carnal battles maim and kill for life; spiritual battles have eternal consequences. Only to the ignorant and apathetic does the fight seem melodramatic. Only the faint-hearted plead for peace conferences with the enemy. Our foe is implacable, unrelenting and without mercy. Only the *“sword of the Spirit”* with all the other God-given weaponry can prevail against the Devil. It is wishful thinking to suppose we will have peace in this life.

Speaking the truth is offensive to those in error, whether they be aliens or brethren in the Lord. Truth cuts because it is a *“two-edged sword”* (Heb. 4:12). Nathan used it on David, when he said *“Thou art the man”* (2 Sam. 12:7). Stephen used it on his rebellious brethren, who put him to death for it (Acts 7, 8). Paul used it on the brethren at Corinth who were in sin (1 Cor. 5). Jesus used it through John to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2, 3).

A sword is intended to be used. Though there are decorative swords to be worn only at ceremonies and rituals, such is not true of the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. The word of God is to remain unsheathed, on the attack. *“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching...”* (2 Tim. 4:2).

Truth Offends

Preaching the word of God is going to be offensive to many in the secular world, no matter how loving and kind the preacher may be. One cannot expose darkness without incurring the wrath of those who love darkness: *“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God”* (Jn. 3:19-21).

No matter how genteel the preacher:

The liquor dealer hates to hear the truth about alcohol (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Pet. 4:3-4).

The pornographer will hate the truth about lust (Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:2; Col. 3:5ff).

The fornicator will hate those who expose illicit passion (1 Cor. 6:13, 18; 7:2; 10:8; Gal. 5:19; 1 Thess. 4:3; Col. 3:5).

Preaching the word of God is going to be offensive to many in the denominational world:

Baptists will hate to hear the error of faith only exposed (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Jas. 2:17-26). They will also hate to hear the error of “once saved, always saved” exposed: (1 Cor. 10:1-12; Gal. 5:1-4; 6:1; Heb. 6:4-6; 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Catholics will hate to hear the error of Mariolatry (Mk. 3:31-35); of calling men **“Father”** (Matt. 23:9); of the Mass (Matt. 26; 1 Cor. 11); of the false organization of hierarchy (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23; Titus 1; 1 Tim. 3); etc.

All denominations will hate to hear the truth about unity in truth (Jn. 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10ff; 2 Jn. 9-11; Jude 3).

God Has Not Spared His Own People

As disconcerting as it may be, a diligent reader of the Bible will recognize that not only has God waged war against the alien who has given up the knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18-32), but He has also waged war against His rebellious children (Rom. 2:1-3). Any casual reader of the Old Testament will quickly note that as soon as Israel became a nation, it departed into idolatry at the foot of Sinai. The Jews fell in the wilderness during the 40 years’ wandering as punishment for their lack of faith. After the kingdom of Israel was constituted, many of the kings were ungodly and led the people into sin. Even while there were faithful priests and prophets, there were false priests and false prophets. Israel went into captivity to the Assyrians c. 722 B.C. and Judah followed not long after (606 B.C.). The prophetic office was raised up, not only to speak God’s mind in revelation of law, but also to reprove and rebuke the oft-rebellious nation. God fought his people, slaying them with sword, famine, pestilence and captivity. Jews killed Jews. Prophets rained down curses on the heads of the people. As the prophets stated **“Hear the word of the Lord”** countless times, the message was often one of condemnation, censure and damnation. Ezekiel was to have a *forehead “harder than adamant stone”* (3:19) because he had to preach to a hard-headed people. Surely, they were offended at Ezekiel, as they were at all the faithful prophets of God who spoke as God commanded them to speak. All of this is revealed for a reason!

Sin Is An Affront To God’s Holiness

We need to be reminded that God is a holy God, a God of sanctification. **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”** (Isa. 6:3); **“I am the Lord, your holy one, the Creator of Israel, your King”** (Isa. 43:15). In God’s service, we are to be a sanctified people. Even one of the names we wear is that of **“saint”** (sanctified one). In the Old Testament: **“So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests”** (Ex. 28:41). In the New Testament: **“Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth”** (Jn. 17:17); **“...just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word...”** (Eph. 5:25-26); **“Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work”** (2 Tim. 2:21).

God hates Sin! **“Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way”** (Ps. 119:104). **“Hate evil; love good”** (Amos 5:15); **“Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity”** (Heb. 1:9).

And sin is not more palatable to God among Christians than it is among aliens, pagans, and sectarians. We fool ourselves if we think we can sin with impunity, simply because we are the children of God.

Why Should Truth Offend God’s People?

The fact that the Pharisees were offended at Jesus’ teaching (Matt. 15:12) is completely understandable: the Jews hated Jesus because they had taken on the characteristics of darkness. They hated the light of truth which he shed upon their actions and doctrines, they did not want their practices opened and their hypocrisy exposed.

What this tells us is significant. God’s people, who get caught up in sin and become impenitent, will hate the truth just like those outside the body of Christ. One does not have to be a liquor dealer, a pornographer, a fornicator to hate truth. One does not have to be a sectarian in practice; he can be a sectarian at heart and yet hate the

truth. This is the reason that people in the Lord's church sometimes hate truth and truth-tellers just as vehemently and violently as those outside the church.

“Truth Doesn't Offend; You Offend!”

“But,” we are told, “I don't hate the truth. The way you present it offends me.”

The charge is often made that some preachers are “offensive” in the sense of “displeasing, annoying,” rather than “serving as a means of attack” (*Funk & Wagnalls Std. Dict.*). It is implied that there is a better way to preach the truth than what is being done. Some are too hard, too harsh. They are not loving enough, kind enough, sweet tempered enough. Some, we are told, are too quick to jump, rash, head-strong and divisive. Some have accused others of “turning off a whole generation of young preachers” because of being too hard in presentation. One brother even raised the question of whether or not these hard preachers are driving good men away from the truth by “manufacturing enemies out of friends.” We are told that “much is lost and nothing gained by making war against those who are not the ‘real enemy’.”

It does not take much humility to admit that poor judgment is sometimes employed by preachers in their zeal to fight the enemy.

It must be admitted that the ranks of gospel preachers are known to include a few hypocrites, ne'er-do-wells, incompetent and inept men who ought to be tending store somewhere instead of preaching. However, I would suppose that these kinds of flaws characterize the ranks of those who are “offended” as well as those who “offend.” Or must we believe that those who are “offended” are all enlightened, wise, cautious, always sweet-tempered and paragons of virtue? We are more than a little tired of the moral superiority of some who claim to have cornered the market on civility and kindness, even while accusing others, in the sweetest tones, of being “brotherhood watchdogs,” “journalistic jingoists,” “vultures,” who are looking for “carrion,” “guilty of spiritual murder,” and who are “dividing the Lord's army.” Is all this not offensive? Is poor judgment only one-sided?

We should all agree that it is wrong, even sinful, to willfully offend a brother. We are told: to **“maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”** (Eph. 4:3). **“Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”** (Heb. 12:14). **“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men”** (Rom. 12:18). Brethren, these passages are not optional! They are as essential as the plan of salvation.

We should all agree that our presentation of truth should be as wise as possible. The holy message of salvation should be treated with the respect due it: the word of God. Yet, even with the best of motives, the wisest of actions and the best choice of words, truth will offend those in sin, both within and without the church.

But What Is Offensive Today?

Was Elijah offensive on Mount Carmel when he taunted the prophets of Baal? Was Isaiah offensive when he jabbed the makers of idols with the irony of cutting down a tree and making an idol with part of it while cooking their food with another part? Was Nehemiah offensive when he **“contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair”** (13:25)? Was John the Baptist offensive when he delivered public rebuke to Herod and Herodias for their adulterous marriage? Was Paul offensive when he said of the Circumcision: **“I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!”** (Gal. 5:12). These kinds of examples can be multiplied throughout the scriptures. Are we being too easily offended today? Was Jesus wrong when he **“offended”** the Pharisees?

The Real Issue

While truly seeking to avoid being offensive to good brethren, truth must yet be presented. And to those who are in the process of going into error or holding to error on fellowship (unity in diversity), there is absolutely no way to preach the truth while failing to offend you.

It is a fact that some have sought publicly, diligently, and over a period of years, to promote fellowship with error on adulterous marriages. Our preaching is going to offend you.

It is a fact that some have insisted that we have fellowship with those who teach this error. Our preaching is going to offend you.

It is a fact that articles have been written (and now put into tract form) that promote fellowship with differences of “considerable moral and doctrinal differences.” This is an open invitation to a wider application of unity in diversity. Our preaching is going to offend you.

It is a fact that some are broadening fellowship to include issues about drinking, gambling and immodesty, as well as instrumental music, premillennialism and sectarianism. Our preaching is going to offend you.

It is a fact that nearly all efforts to meet and discuss these matters have been denied by those who continue to push and promote error. Our preaching is going to offend you.

It is a fact that invitations to debate this issue have been universally denied. Our preaching is going to offend you.

Knowing in advance that gospel preaching is going to offend those in error, let us emphasize that the purpose of preaching is not to offend. The purpose of gospel preaching is to bring men face to face with the word of God. The message of the cross to those in sin is “*repent.*” Jesus himself said “*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*” (Jn. 3:17). Even so, to the disciples, Jesus said, “*All of you will be offended because of me this night...*” (Mk. 14:27). Jesus could not do the Father’s will and fail to offend the Pharisees, and even his apostles.

A true disciple never preaches to offend. But a true disciple must be ready for the truth to offend, if need be. If the truth offends you, you must repent. Faithful preachers will not temper their message to salve the feelings of sinners, however close and fraternal they may be. As one who has been accused of giving offense, I have the responsibility to watch myself, my attitudes, my motives. As Peter stated: “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed*” (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

A Final Suggestion

To those who register a complaint that our preaching is too plain, too harsh, (in a word) too offensive, let me ask something of you. Since you say that you are preaching the same truth that we preach but we are faulty in our approach, and you can do it better, why not get at it? Where are the public teachings from these men that bring adulterous marriages before the bar of God’s justice? Where are the places where the “same truth that we teach” about fellowship with sin is being clearly declared? Where are the sermons that are showing the error of unity in diversity? Where are the sermons being taught that are saying the same truth that we are saying, but doing it in a better way? Some have expressed a willingness to debate Romans 14 and Fellowship (though none have signed a debate proposition yet). If we are teaching the same truth on fellowship with sin, why do you want to debate us? If we are teaching the same truth (only we are not doing it as well as you are able), why is it that more and more compromising preachers are looking to you as champions of their cause? When some want to have fellowship with gamblers, immodest dress advocates, adulterous marriages, social drinkers, loose doctrinal positions, etc., etc., why is it that they look to you as ones who defend their positions?

The truth of the matter is that style and form of preaching is not the issue. If there is room in the Lord’s church for all kinds of methods of preaching (and there is), why is the “*watchman*” method (a Biblical approach: Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:14-15) not acceptable? What needs to be stressed is that a compromising spirit has affected many who actually object to truth being taught. When it is taught, they are offended and cry “*Peace, peace, when there is no peace*” (Jer. 6:14). However, there are still men who have the attitude of Isaiah: “*For Zion’s sake, I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest...*” (62:1). If you had lived in Jesus’ time of earthly ministry, would His message have offended you, as it did the Pharisees? ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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