

Some responses to the Word of God:

Believe the Word:

1TH 2:13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Study the Word:

2TI 2:15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Honor the Word:

PSA 138:2 I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

Love the Word:

PSA 119:47 And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.

PSA 119:97 MEM. O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

Obey the Word:

JOS 1:7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

JOS 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Contend for the Word:

JUD 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Proclaim/Preach the Word:

2TI 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

The Culture of Offendedness--A Christian Challenge

By Al Mohler

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A new and unprecedented right is now the central focus of legal, procedural, and cultural concern in many corridors--a supposed right not to be offended. The cultural momentum behind this purported "right" is growing fast, and the logic of this movement has taken hold in many universities, legal circles, and interest groups.

The larger world received a rude introduction to the logic of offendedness when riots broke out in many European cities, prompted by a Dutch newspaper's publishing of cartoons that reportedly mocked the Prophet Muhammad. The logic of the riots was that Muslims deserved never to be offended by any insult, real or perceived, directed to their belief system. Unthinking Christians may fall into the same pattern of claiming offendedness whenever we face opposition to our faith or criticism of our beliefs. The risk of being offended is simply part of what it means to live in a diverse culture that honors and celebrates free speech. A right to free speech means a right to offend, otherwise the right would need no protection.

These days, it is the secularists who seem to be most intent on pushing a proposed right never to be offended by confrontation with the Christian Gospel, Christian witness, or Christian speech and symbolism. This motivation lies behind the incessant effort to remove all symbols, representations, references, and images related to Christianity from the public square. The very existence of a large cross, placed on government property as a memorial, outside San Diego, California, has become a major issue in the courts, and now in Congress. Those pressing for the removal of the cross claim that they are offended by the fact that they are forced to see this Christian symbol from time to time.

We should note carefully that this notion of offendedness is highly emotive in character. In other words, those who now claim to be offended are generally speaking of an emotional state that has resulted from some real or perceived insult to their belief system or from contact with someone else's belief system. In this sense, being offended does not necessarily involve any real harm but points instead to the fact that the mere presence of such an argument, image, or symbol evokes an emotional response of offendedness.

The distinguished Christian philosopher Paul Helm addresses this issue in an article published in the Summer 2006 edition of *The Salisbury Review*, published in Great Britain. As Professor Helm argues, "Historically, being offended has been a very serious matter. To be offended is to be caused to stumble so as to fall, to fail, to apostasize, to be brought down, to be crushed." As evidence for this claim, Professor Helm points to the language of the King James Bible in which Jesus says to his disciples: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast in to hell" [Matthew 5:29].

Likewise, Jesus also speaks a warning against those who would "offend" the "little ones." As Professor Helm summarizes, "So to 'offend' in this robust sense is to be an agent of destruction. And to be offended is to be placed in desperate straits."

The desperate straits are no longer required in order for an individual or group to claim the emotional status of offendedness. This shift in the meaning of the word and in its cultural usage is subtle but extremely significant.

Offering a rather robust definition of this new usage, Professor Helm describes this new notion of offendedness as "that one is offended when the words and actions of another produce a feeling of hurt, or shame, or humiliation on account of what is said of oneself about one's deepest attachments."

Professor Helm's definition is rather generous, offering more substantial content to this modern notion than may be present in the claims of many persons. Many persons who claim to be offended are speaking merely of the vaguest notion of emotional distaste at what another has said, done, proposed, or presented. This leads to inevitable conflict.

"People have always been upset by insensitivity and negligence, but the profile of offendedness, understood in this modern sense, is being immeasurably heightened," suggests Professor Helm. "The right never to be offended, never to suffer feelings of hurt or shame, is being touted and promoted both by the media and by the government and interest in it is being continually excited." Thus, "Claims to be hurt or shamed are noticed. They are likely to be rewarded."

The very idea of civil society assumes the very real possibility that individuals may at any time be offended by another member of the community. Civilization thrives when individuals and groups seek to minimize unnecessary offendedness, while recognizing that some degree of real or perceived offendedness is the cost the society must pay for the right to enjoy the free exchange of ideas and the freedom to speak one's mind.

Professor Helm is surely right when he argues that the "social value" of offendedness is now increasing. All that is necessary for a claim to be taken seriously is for the claim to be offered. After all, if the essence of the offendedness is an emotional state or response, how can any individual deny that a claimant has been genuinely offended? Professor Helm is right to worry that this will lead to the fracturing of society. "We all hear things we don't like said about people and causes that we are fond of but in the changed social atmosphere we are being encouraged to give public notice if such language offends us. I am now being repeatedly told that I am entitled not to be offended. So--from now on--not offended is what I intend to be. Does this heightening of sensitivity make for social cohesion? Does not such cohesion depend rather on enduring what we don't like, and doing so in an adult way? Does not the glue of civic peace rest on such intangibles as the ability to laugh at oneself, to take a joke about even the deepest things? And is it not a measure of the strength of a person's religion that they tolerate the unpleasant conversation of others? Isn't playing the offendedness card going to result in an

enfeebling of the culture, the development of oversensitive and precious members of the 'caring society'? Whatever happened to toleration?"

Given our mandate to share the Gospel and to speak openly and publicly about Jesus Christ and the Christian faith, Christians must understand a particular responsibility to protect free speech and to resist this culture of offendedness that threatens to shut down all public discourse.

Of course, the right for Christians to speak publicly about Jesus Christ necessarily means that adherents of other belief systems will be equally free to present their truth claims in an equally public manner. This is simply the cost of religious liberty.

An interesting witness to this point is Salman Rushdie, the novelist who was once put under a Muslim sentence of death because he had insulted Muslim sensibilities in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. Mr. Rushdie presents an argument that Christians must take seriously.

"The idea that any kind of free society can be constructed in which people will never be offended or insulted is absurd. So too is the notion that people should have the right to call on the law to defend them against being offended or insulted. A fundamental decision needs to be made: do we want to live in a free society or not? Democracy is not a tea party where people sit around making polite conversation. In democracies people get extremely upset with each other. They argue vehemently against each other's positions," Rushdie insists.

As the novelist continues: "People have the fundamental right to take an argument to the point where somebody is offended by what they say. It is no trick to support the free speech of somebody you agree with or to whose opinion you are indifferent. The defense of free speech begins at the point where people say something you can't stand. If you can't defend their right to say it, then you don't believe in free speech. You only believe in free speech as long as it doesn't get up your nose."

As the Apostle Paul made clear in writing to the Corinthians, the preaching of the Gospel has always been considered offensive by those who reject it. When Paul spoke of the cross as "foolishness" and a "stumbling block" [1 Corinthians 1:23] he was pointing to this very reality--a reality that would lead to his own stoning, flogging, imprisonment, and execution.

At the same time, Paul did not want to offend persons on the basis of anything *other* than the cross of Christ and the essence of the Christian Gospel. For this reason, he would write to the Corinthians about becoming "all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" [1 Corinthians 9:22].

Without doubt, many Christians manage to be offensive for reasons other than the offense of the Gospel. This is to our shame and to the injury of our Gospel witness. Nevertheless, there is no way for a faithful Christian to avoid offending those who are offended by

Jesus Christ and His cross. The truth claims of Christianity, by their very particularity and exclusivity, are inherently offensive to those who would demand some other gospel.

Christians must not only contend for the preservation and protection of free speech--essential for the cause of the Gospel--we must also make certain that we do not fall into the trap of claiming offendedness for ourselves. We must not claim a right not to be offended, even as we must insist that there is no such right and that the social construction of such a right will mean the death of individual liberty, free speech, and the free exchange of ideas.

Once we begin playing the game of offendedness, there is no end to the matter. There simply is no right *not* to be offended, and we should be offended by the very notion that such a right could exist.



Restoration of Truth and Revival

by C. H. Spurgeon
From the December 1887 *Sword and Trowel*

H for a great and general revival of true religion! Not a burst of mere excitement, but a real awakening, a work of the Eternal Spirit. This would be a glorious reply to skepticism, and would act like a strong wind in clearing the air, and driving away the miasmata which lurk in the stagnant atmosphere. There would then be small honor paid to men who mar the gospel of our Lord, and truth, which has fallen in our streets, would again ascend her throne. Let us pray for such a visitation of the Holy Ghost with our whole souls. It is not only desirable, it is essential; we must either be revived by the Lord himself, or the churches will descend until error and ungodliness swallow them up. This calamity shall not happen but only divine grace can avert it.

At the same time, we cannot expect a gracious revival till we are clear of complicity with the deadening influences which are all around us. A man of God writes us: "You cannot well overstate the spiritual death and dearth which prevail in the provinces. Where the 'minister is successful' no Unitarian would be offended with the preaching, and where 'not successful,' we see a miserably superficial handling of the Word, without power. Of course there are valuable exceptions. What can be expected as to spirituality in the church when deacons are better acquainted with 'Hamlet,' and Irving's actings, than with the Word of God? And what about the next age, when the children are treated to pantomimes, and a taste is created for these things?" This brother's lamentation is of a piece with hosts of others which load our table. They come from men who are second to none in spiritual weight. Either these brethren are dreaming, or they are located in specially bad places; or else there is grievous cause for humiliation. We will not go deep into this question, it is too painful. The extent to which sheer frivolity and utterly inane amusement have been carried in connection with some places of worship would almost exceed belief. We call the attention of our readers to the fact that *doctrine* has been the ground of battle in the Down-Grade struggle which has been chosen by our opponents, but on the matter of prayer-meetings and worldliness they have been prudently silent. Certain of them have in this affair exhibited that discretion which is the better part of valor.

If any of our churches have been guilty in this respect, how can they expect the divine Spirit to work with them? Wherever the statement which we have quoted, or a similar one, can be proved, we are at a loss to know how conversions can be looked for. The Lord our God is holy, and he cannot compromise his own glorious name by working with persons whose groveling tastes lead them to go to Egypt—we had almost said to Sodom—for their recreations. Is this walking with God? Is this the manner in which Enochs are produced?

It is a heart-sorrow to have to mention such things, but the work of the Lord must be done faithfully, and this evil must be laid bare. There can be no doubt that all sorts of entertainments, as nearly as possible approximating to stage-plays, have been carried on in connection with places of worship, and are, at this present time, in high favor. Can these things promote holiness, or help in communion with God? Can men come away from such things and plead with God for the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of believers? We loathe to touch the unhallowed subject; it seems so far removed from the walk of faith, and the way of heavenly fellowship. In some cases the follies complained of are even beneath the dignity of manhood, and fitter for the region of the imbecile than for thoughtful men.

Brethren in Christ, in every church let us purge out the things which weaken and pollute. It is clear to every one who is willing to see it that laxity of doctrine is either the parent of worldliness, or is in some other way very near akin to it. The men who give up the old faith are the same persons who plead for latitude as to general conduct. The Puritan is not more notorious for his orthodoxy than for his separateness from the world. Liberal divines do not always command the respect of the public, but they gain a certain popularity by pandering to prevailing tastes. The ungodly world is so far on their side that it commends them for their liberality, and rails at the orthodox as bigots and kill-joys. It is a very suspicious circumstance that very often the less a man knows of the inner life, and the less he even cares to speak of it, the more heartily he is for the new theology, the theory of evolution, and the condemnation of all settled doctrine. Those who would have a blessing from the Lord must avoid all this, and determine to follow the Lord fully. Not only must they quit false doctrine, but they must receive the gospel, not as dogma, but as vital truth. Only as the truth is attended with living faith will it prove its own royal power. Believers must also sweep the house of the leaven of worldliness, and the frivolities of a giddy generation. The evil which is now current eats as doth a canker, and there is no hope for healthy godliness until it is cut out of the body of the church by her again repenting, and doing her first works.

Those who through divine grace have not defiled their garments must not content themselves with censuring others, but must arouse themselves to seek a

fuller baptism of the Spirit of God. Perhaps these evils are permitted that they may act as a sieve upon the heap gathered on the Lord's threshing-floor. Possibly they are allowed that our apathetic churches may be aroused. We know already of several cases in which true ministers have gone over the foundation truths again with their people, and have preached the saving Word with clearer emphasis. In other cases churches have been summoned to special prayer about this matter. This is a good beginning: let it be carried out on the widest scale. As one man let us cry mightily unto the Lord our God, that he would arise and plead his own cause. Now, if never before, let those who are loyal to Jesus and his Word be up and doing. A boundless blessing is waiting for the asking. We believe in prayer. LET US PRAY LIKE ELIJAH'S.

In reference to the Down-Grade controversy and the Baptist Union, we are urged to further action; but it would be far easier to take a foolish step than to retrace it. We will move when we are moved, and not before. Conferences, societies, and leagues are proposed: all are admirable, no doubt; but which out of many suggestions is the most suitable? We do not see our way. May the Lord himself direct his people! Meanwhile, to redouble our prayers, and to seek a revival in all our churches, cannot possibly be a mistake. Prayer, mighty prayer, can do wonders. This is *the* work of the present hour. Pray without ceasing, and preach the faithful Word in clearer terms than ever. Such a course of conduct may seem to some to be a sort of standing still and doing nothing, but in very truth it is bringing God into the battle; and when HE comes to avenge the quarrel of his covenant, he will make short work of it. "Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause!"