

They Upset the World

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When you read through, or studies the book of Acts, you cannot help but be impressed with the enthusiasm, diligence, and commitment of our brothers and sisters of the first century. Despite a great persecution against them, they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). However, the message they preached was not always well received or accepted (cf. Acts 19:23ff).

As a result of their determined efforts to serve the Lord and share the Gospel message of salvation, we are told that they had upset the world (Acts 17:6). Let's think about that statement for a moment. Contextually, the words are spoken about the efforts of Paul and Silas to preach the word in Thessalonica. However, it can be viewed as a general statement of the impact of Christianity on the world at that time. In some translations the words read, "... they have turned the world upside down" (ASV, KJV, NKJV).

The Gospel, while a message of how to be saved, is also a message that convicts men of their sin (Rom. 3:23). The Gospel is a message that says there is only one way to obtain eternal life (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Such a message is upsetting to many people. In their mind, the word of God is too narrow with its truth that there is only one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God (Eph. 4:4-6). Indeed, the Scriptures speak of a narrow way to eternal life (Matt. 7:13-14).

It is really no surprise that the Christians of the first century upset the world. In fact, it was prophesied that Jesus Himself would be an offense to the people (Isa. 8:13-15). In the New Testament, Peter, quoting from Isaiah, writes:

6 For this is contained in Scripture:

"Behold, I lay in Zion A choice stone, A precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone,"

8 and, "**A stone of stumbling and A rock of offense**"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

1 Peter 2:6-8 (Emphasis Mine)

The word offense in those verses is the Greek word scandalon. It is the word from which we get our English word, scandal. Jesus Christ was a scandal to to many of the Jews. Many were offended by Him (cf. Matt. 9:11; John 6:66). The Pharisees, it seemed, felt threatened by His popularity and His command of the Scriptures (cf. Matt. 22:46; John 11:47-48). The idea that the long-awaited Messiah should die on a cross was offensive to the Jews (cf. John 12:34; 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 3:13). It should go without saying that the followers of an offensive Messiah would also be considered offensive and scandalous.

Today, Christianity is still scandalous and offensive to many people. The word of God still convicts men of their sin, even though society has become accepting and numb to the *offensive* and *scandalous* behavior of sinful conduct.

As the Christians of old upset the world by the message of the Gospel, we must not become discouraged, or feel bad, when we are hated or called names for our beliefs. Jesus said to His followers:

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:11-12

In the same way, He also noted:

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.

Luke 6:26

The truth is we as Christians, should feel bad when we no longer offend! When we are afraid to upset and trouble the world, we should be upset and troubled with ourselves! So we are clear, I am not advocating a rude and obnoxious presentation of the Gospel. We must be considerate in the way we share the word of God. However, we must not compromise the truth by making the lost think they are right with God. That would not be an honest representation of the truth.

Sadly, it is frightening what some, in the name of God, have done to the cross of Jesus. The rough wood and bloody images of the death of Jesus have given way to shiny gold and silver crosses. In some respects, the cross has become something pleasant to look upon. The offense of the Gospel has been removed. Homosexuality and same-sex marriages are embraced by religious leaders who know better! The teaching found in various religious groups is such that it really doesn't matter what you believe or practice.

At the risk of being offensive, we, as the church of Jesus Christ today, must stand up for the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). We must remember, the Gospel is not going to be easy for many to accept. In some cases, accepting the truth will create trouble for an individual. Again, Jesus said:

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

35 For I came to set A man against his father, and A daughter against her mother, and A daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.

Matthew 10:34-36

The strange paradox in all of this is that while the Gospel can offend and be a stumbling block for many, it is also a wonderful message of peace, love, mercy, grace, and hope. Christians, while often regarded as insensitive and offensive people, are some of the most loving and caring people one could ever hope to meet.

So, at the risk of being called a name, or labeled offensive, let us take the truth of the Gospel to the world. It is man's only hope of finding real life. Let us today, like Paul and Silas, and indeed the rest of the church of the first century, turn the world upside down (cf. Rom. 1:16).