

Loving Jesus w/o Offense

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Introd.

1. A portion of this message came from a sermon preached by Mike Bickle entitled, "Loving Jesus w/o Offense."
2. A major hinderance to spiritual growth is being offended by Jesus. Pray: HS, reveal to me today any offense I have with Jesus.
3. The last two Christmas' & my spiritual journey. The loss of Bill Burnham & Lawrence Martin had a tremendous impact on my spiritual growth. A residue of offense was established in my heart b/c of disappointment with God's inactivity (by my perceptioin).
4. My observation of people older in the faith (a Christian 20+ years) who are either still fervent or have lost the fire. I noticed some who lost the fire had a cynical, worldly and sardonic attitude towards God's miraculous power. It seems that many had major setbacks in their walk with God, because He didn't respond as they desired during a time of need. Our questions aren't the problem, but it's the attitude behind them that is.
5. Many Christians are offended at Jesus' leadership in their lives and in the world. They question His goodness & wisdom (if He's good & all wise then why...?). There is huge disappointment, and even anger, over Jesus' leadership.
6. Offense at Js' leadership is huge during the end times. As He pours out His discipline on this planet, people are railing against Him and agreeing with Satan that God's leadership is bad. In Luke 18.8, he asks - when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?
7. We are living in difficult times and the love of God in people's lives is growing cold. Believers perceive that their expectations and prayers have gone unanswered and they have walked away from devotion to Christ. They still go to church, give and pray, but Christ is no longer their life, but He's just a part of your life that they define as their "church life."

Reasons Believers Get Offended At Jesus

1. We are offended by His claims. He claimed to be the Bread of Life (John 6), the I AM (John 8), the Son of God (Luke 22), able to forgive sins (Luke 5), the only way to God (John 14) etc. You may not be offended by His claims, but there is a growing movement within Western Christianity to water down the claims of Jesus, b/c they are so inflammatory. Western believers in an effort to be inoffensive are distilling the message of Jesus into one of hope, peace & compassion. They are eliminating the exclusive claims of Christ because they either don't believe them themselves or they don't want to sound prejudicial or ignorant.
2. We are offended when He questions our motives/lifestyle/decisions/actions/sin
 - a. Matt.15.1-14: Jesus addressing the way the religious leaders lived their life. Nobody had ever questioned their actions and now Jesus pulls back the curtain and reveals their heart. They grow offended at Jesus rather than deal with the heart issues.
 - b. God will use circumstances & people to reveal these dark places in us. We'll get mad at God for allowing the person or circumstance in our lives rather than looking at what it unearthed in us.
 - i. Ex of running into some people who had said & done some offensive things. I asked, "God, why did you allow me to run across these people again?" Then a thought ran across my mind, "You thought you were further along than you actually were." I saw bitterness and the lack of love. I could've been fuming at God wondering why He hasn't done something to that person or changed that situation.
3. We are offended when He doesn't respond the way we desire - Mt.11.2-6.
 - a. John & his followers were looking for someone in a little different package. John was fully certain of Jesus' place early on - John 1, Matt.3 - but now during a time of stress &

discouragement he's uncertain. Jesus wasn't living up to John's expectations.

- b. This is KEY. It was while John was disillusioned & discouraged about the events in his life that he called into question Jesus' activity. Fatigue, sickness and hardship are fertile ground for offense to grow.
 - c. John probably heard that Jesus had referred to John as Elijah. He might've assumed that meant, like Elijah, he would usher in a new King to Israel and see the wicked religious & gov't establishments overthrown. Life wasn't unwinding that way.
 - d. Likewise, some of you thought your life or a particular part of your life would unfold a certain way, but that isn't the case. You're stuck in a prison of sorts (bad marriage, tough family, dead end job, financial hardship) and you're asking, "Is this it? This is the way my life will play out? I thought you said it would be different?."
4. We are offended when He doesn't give us the answer we want/like – John 6.52–66.
- a. Jesus gives them a hard word and He doesn't explain Himself. He doesn't try to soft peddle His answer. It's as though He makes these statements to intentionally cull the disciples. He doesn't run after the people and try to clarify it.
 - b. Even today, when the Lord gives us an answer to a problem through His Word or other means, we recoil and say, "That's not what I wanted to hear." You know what the Lord is saying, but you've decided against it. You've not moved or acted on it. You say, "I'm safe where I am; the risk is too great; cost is too much; etc."
 - c. Jesus is giving you a choice to in faith, obey Him, or to remain stuck or worse walk away in unbelief.
 - d. You are offended by what He asks you to do
5. Conclusion: Much of the offense is because we either begin with the wrong assumptions or have the wrong information. We are driven more by our experience and limited view of God than by the whole counsel of Truth found in both His Word & His people.

- a. We think we know the Word in an unbiased way, but we know it through our experience. We won't allow God to use other people to bring His wisdom b/c our experience is a better experience than most. We think, "What can that person offer me...?"
- b. So, we remain angry, frustrated or offended at God.

How Offense Manifest Itself In Our Lives

1. We question God's goodness & wisdom.
 - a. This is devilish. Satan plants doubt in your mind about His goodness & wisdom. "If God is so good & God is so wise, then why didn't He...or why did He...?"
 - i. "You believed God would answer your prayers...you had all these promises...and look at where you are today...still waiting...completely disappointed."
 - ii. "You thought this was God's answer to your prayers and look how it turned out"
 - b. The devil takes ground when we allow offense to fester. He begins to construct this fortress of doubt & unbelief in our heart. He uses it as a base of operations against all God's activity in our lives.
 - i. Ex of a disappointment which leads us to begin to question whether or not God will take care of other areas in our lives. Or, we believe He will take of certain things, but not others, i.e., my spiritual life, but not my finances. We segment God out of our lives.
 - c. Eventually, we question the core of our faith. The root of much atheism is not rooted upon scientific fact, but rather upon grievances with God's activity or inactivity.
 - d. We get to the point where we can't really trust God & His leadership.
2. We become guarded in our love for God
 - a. We are cordial but cool towards God. We are respectful but not fully attached. We might embrace church activities but

not deeply pursue Him. You think, “I did that and I got burned.”

- i. It becomes kind of like trusting a politician. You start out with a lot of idealism and a belief that he will do what he says, but then he doesn't follow through with his promises. You eventually grow disenchanted. Your attitude is “respect the office, but don't bank on the person.” Your philosophy is to believe in God, but live like everything depends on you.
 - b. You don't really believe in His extravagant love. You acknowledge His love, but you're not sure where you stand with him. You don't know if He's completely for you or He's holding out on you or halfway angry with you.
 - i. Ex of a relationship where you have burned time and again. You want to love the person and be loved, but you aren't sure you can trust Him b/c of past (with God, perceived) offenses.
 - c. We get annoyed at those who have fervency. We look at them like their little kids who still believe in fairies or leprocauns (“when will you grow up?”). Our attitude becomes that we need to learn about God and love Him, but don't get too close
 - d. Encourage you to read, “The Shack”. It will be offensive to some of you and you will not get past it to see the core of the story.
3. We are cynical and/or critical of God's promises
- a. You doubt God's ability to come through for you. Because of perceived injustices from God, you look at God's promises almost like wishes. God's promises are seen as inspirational truths that can't withstand the test of empirical data. In other words, you compare the promise to the actual outcome and, from your vantage, you see a huge gap. In your mind, God's promises are “Chicken Soup for the Soul” platitudes which have a lot of broth, but very little substance.

- b. You don't step out in faith. You won't take risks with God. Your obedience and service is conditional and/or momentary. "I'll say, 'Yes', but when God isn't doing His part then I'm pulling out."
- c. Or, your obedience & service is for the church or person or activity, but you aren't risking it for God, b/c he has let you down. It's not an action of faith, but rather a gesture of kindness or obligation.
- d. Offense keeps you from really digging for the truth and holding onto God's promises. Offense causes you to view his promises like a treasure map which leads from one clue to the next with nothing really to show for it except sacrifice, hurt and misplaced expectations.
- e. You don't really trust the promises of God or the testimony of others.

Living Beyond Offense

1. Childlike trust in the goodness & wisdom of God
 - a. Look at the big picture. Look around at what God has done both in general and in your life. Recount the activity of God. Look at all the good gifts that God has provided.
 - i. Ex of a gift that the Watkins and others made for my family. What does that gift say to me? It says more than they are powerful and creative people who can make things with their hands. It says, "I love and care for you." When I'm eating the bread the Winnifords made me, I don't primarily think, "Wow, the Winnifords are such smart people and such good cooks," which is true, but rather, "Wow, they love me."
 - ii. It's the same with the natural order and spiritual realities. These are gifts that God provide which have stamped underneath them, "B/c I love you."
 - b. Give up your demand to understand. A child doesn't demand to have all the answers before he trusts in God. (Recent

article about how children naturally believe in God. You have to unteach them to not believe in God.) You may think that it's easy for kids b/c they don't know all the injustices of this life and don't have any real experience. When Jesus calls us to be childlike, He's not telling us to pretend all the bad stuff doesn't exist, but that despite its existence we still believe in His goodness & wisdom. It's not that children don't see the injustices, it's that they suspend judgment and continue to believe in God's goodness.

- i. You can't possess the peace that passes understanding until you relinquish your demand for understanding. You must embrace the truth of 1 Cor.13.12
- ii. A child sees the reality of starving children and gross violence, but that doesn't keep him from believing in the goodness and wisdom of God. He deals with the tension by just believing that God will make sense of it one day.

2. Childlike devotion and affection for Jesus

- a. Let praise & gratitude flow freely. Phil.4.4–9. Note the interconnectedness between praising God, practicing obedience, fixing our thought life on what is good and peace from God. When I do the opposite – lack praise, spotty obedience, fix my thoughts upon injustices or unanswered prayers – I get the opposite.
- b. Don't withhold yourself from Him. A child naturally runs to Jesus and His Kingdom.
- c. Some have this attitude towards the fervent ones which says, "You'll learn; it won't turn out the way you suppose; you'll get burned and then you'll have a more realistic view of God."
- d. Let's live under the blessing of John 20.29 to the fullest degree in this life. In the next life, I won't have the opportunity to live under this blessing b/c I will see God. I need more faith now than I will in the next life.
- e. Give yourself fully to HIM!
- f. Rest in Him – Mt.11.29–31

3. Look deeper than the surface
 - a. Put in the right information and have the correct assumptions.
 - i. John 1.45f; 7.40–44, 50–52. They didn't scratch below the surface about Jesus' origin. They made some huge assumptions which led the crowd & religious leaders to make some terrible decisions. They rejected Him w/o truly searching for the answer.
4. Our standard is the Word of God not our disappointments. We can't allow our unanswered prayers or misconceptions to determine our level of faith in God & His word. Our faith must come up to the level of the Word; we must not bring the Word down to the level of our experience.
5. Don't attribute to God the activity of satan or the fallenness of man.
 - a. But understand, we live in the tension of three mysteries that interrelate: the sovereignty of God, the sinfulness of man & the assault of the enemy.
 - b. Some of what happens isn't the will of God, but God can turn it around for good.
 - i. Gen.50.20 – Joseph & his brothers. Was it God's will for his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery and to upset their father by telling him he was dead? No. But God turned it around for good.
6. Break agreement with Satan.
 - a. Quit agreeing with Satan about God's goodness & wisdom. Rev.13.6f.
 - i. Seek God's forgiveness; repent (change your mind) of your attitude & thinking; close the door & demand he get out; ask for the fullness of the HS to wash over you.
 - b. We must declare that Jesus is worthy of our unqualified trust & sacrificial obedience – Rev.5.12.

- c. We must declare that God is good and His leadership in our lives and the world is impeccable – Rev.12.11. This is the way we gain victory both personally and collectively.