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Does This Offend You?

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Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Does This Offend You?

We are approaching the church's moment of truth. It is an awesome moment in history, but as is often the case, those looking on would be oblivious to it all. God was about to explain once again what it would take to please His heart. The confirmation of what He was about to do actually took place on a hillside while the frantic throngs searched for Him in vain and the confused disciples went boating, only to encounter one of life's typical storms.

Jesus had gone to be by Himself alone. The course of spiritual history was nearing a crossroads. The crowds were growing. The excitement was building. The disciples were dreaming of a kingdom in which Jesus would reign and they would rule.

Then it happened! The crowd conspired to make Him king! He had no choice but to withdraw to be by Himself alone, and thus confirm with His Father the terms of His new covenant with man.

It would not be at all what they thought they wanted.

It would not be anything like what the disciples expected.

But it was the only way.

The issue had been settled in eternity past between Father, Son and Spirit. It was confirmed anew on that hillside as God, the Son, clothed in human form, stayed quietly in the Father's presence as the divine course of eternity revealed itself again in the hearts of its Creators.

Now all that remained was for history to run its course and Christ to remain on course, totally at His Father's disposal. He has returned to the battlefield once again. As the curtain parts on this chapter of His life, the people He came to save are pushing and shoving about Him, clamoring for His attention.

"Miracles! Miracles! Give us more miracles," they cry. "Feed us again like you did on that hillside. Give us manna from Heaven like Moses did. Then, we'll believe."¹

¹ John 6:29,30 loose paraphrase

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It is “high noon” on God’s clock. Now the decisions confirmed on that mountain must be acted on in the valley of human reality. That’s the hardest part of all. The crowd chants again: “What can we do to do the works of God? How can we please Jehovah? Tell us, if you know Him so well.” “This is the work of God,” replies the Master, “believe.”² The two kingdoms must now become separate and distinct, once and for all. No confusion. No room for question. If they accept Christ on His terms, they will find eternal life. If they try to impose physical parameters on a spiritual kingdom, they’ll miss it. And they’ll press Him to change His message. If He does, the crowds will grow and His popularity will grow with them. If not, it could mean losing all the ground He’s gained in numbers and in acclaim.

As the second hand of history ticks its way to this moment of decision, Jesus addresses the cheering throng. We take up reading in John,

All the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me.

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day.

For My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day.

(John 6:37-40 NIV)

The chasm between what the people wanted to hear and what God wanted to say was beginning to widen. What they wanted to hear was what they could do for God. What God was trying to explain to them was what He had done for them.

The difference might appear to be slight. It wasn’t. Jesus was talking about the Father giving and His not losing anything of what He was given. He was talking about man looking and God raising up. It was a message of total dependence on the sovereignty of the Creator. Then Jesus made it worse. He began to tell them that He, in fact, was God, and as man inhabited by God, He was totally dependent on His Father for everything. First He told them that He was the bread come down from heaven. They understood what that meant. It meant He was God incarnate. Then He simply astounded them by acknowledging that as God incarnate, He made

² John 6:28,29 loose paraphrase

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no decisions, took no action, said no words on His own. His only purpose as man was to be led by God who inhabited Him. He had come to be a *doulos*, a slave of the Father.

He described Himself as “the Bread of Life.” The word “bread” meant that which sustains. The word “life” meant that which relates to God. Jesus was saying He was the One who creates and sustains fellowship with God. He would be man’s only source of spiritual sustenance. Then, to add insult to injury, He tells them He can’t do anything unless His Father does it. The Father draws, the Father calls, the Father gives. This made Jesus a puppet in their eyes and implied that if they were to follow Him, they would be puppets as well. This was offensive.

So the Jews did what we all do when we are confronted with truth we do not like. They murmured. They argued and whispered among themselves.

At this the Jews began to grumble about Him because He said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”

They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered.

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

It is written in the prophets: “They will all be taught by God.” Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to Me.

No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only He has seen the Father.

I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life,

I am the bread of life.

(John 6:41-47 NIV)

They refused to make the “spiritual switch”. To them, this guy didn’t have the credentials to speak for God, let alone *to be God*. They had seen Him playing on Joseph’s porch as a little child. They had watched Him work in His dad’s carpenter’s shop, seen Him obediently responding at the temple, observed Him working with, playing with, and learning with His brothers. He couldn’t be God. He had hands and feet, arms and legs. He walked like a man, talked like a man, and even looked like a man.

They were rejecting His message based on His manhood, but

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that was just a cover-up. Their real rejection was of what He said. Had He said, “I am God come to earth to give you freedom from Roman bondage, to set the slaves free from their masters, to give everyone food to eat, to heal everyone who is sick, to remove poverty and greed and corruption once and for all,” they might have believed He was who He said He was. Had He said, “I am God, I can do it, and you can do it, too,” they might have responded, “Go for it, Jesus, we’re with you.” No, Mary and Joseph were not the issue. His message was the issue.

And it got worse. Jesus, knowing they were murmuring, did not soften His words to accommodate their unbelief. He clarified and amplified on the very things they could not tolerate:

I am the bread of life.

Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died.

But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”

He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

(John 6:48-59 NIV)

Jesus aims for the heart and sends a stabbing message to these arrogant Jews who were battling God Himself, verbally, all the while missing the message and missing the mark. He said, “I AM the I AM.” Then He relates back to their “give us manna like Moses did” remark and asks them what happened to their fortunate forefathers who ate the free wafers that were sent Air Express.

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They're all dead. Big deal. Man plus manna equals nothing eternal. Jesus goes on to tell them that if they will just look a little higher in God's scheme of things they can find *eternal bread*, bread that satisfies man's need to have personal fellowship with God.

"This bread is My flesh which I will give for the life of the world. My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me and I in him." He repeats Himself one more time. "Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." In our generation, translated into our language, this whole sermon sounds a bit difficult to understand. But to the Jews in the crowd, the difficulty may not have been in understanding, but in accepting. The very language of this passage sounds offensive to us, but we must listen with their ears.

To anyone brought up in a culture familiar with the sacrifice of animals as a part of worship, what Jesus was saying offended, but not because it didn't make sense. In sacrificial worship, the entire animal would be offered up for worship, but only a token part would actually be burnt upon the altar. Part would be given to the priests and part would be given back to the one offering the sacrifice for himself and his friends.

At the feast itself, the god being worshipped was considered to be an honored guest. Once the flesh had been offered up, it was held that this god had literally entered into that offering and so when the worshiper ate the flesh, he was considered to be eating the god he bowed down to, assimilating that god into his innermost being. They believed that they left those feasts actually god-filled! It may sound horrible to us, but to those in that culture, it was an understandable analogy. Most of the mystery religions of that day allowed the worshiper to have some kind of communion with their gods, and this was one way it occurred.

So the striving to be intimate with their god through some form of sacrifice was not new to the minds of even these devout Jews. And when Jesus said they must eat His flesh and drink His blood, they understood that He meant that to be intimately involved with Jehovah God, they had to come through Him.

To some, this passage signifies two great truths: the humanity of Jesus and the life-giving power of Jesus. The flesh signified, in that society, the reality of humanity. God had come in the flesh. He thought His privileges as deity not something to be clutched at

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and laid them aside and was made in the likeness of man. They needed to grasp that. Yes, they could see Him, touch Him, hear Him. That did not make Him any less God. God had visited man in a body man could recognize and in a manner that would allow Him to experience the same temptations man experiences, yet without sin. They would have to understand that to accept His gift upon the Cross.

His blood, on the other hand, spoke of the life-giving power He possessed. From the beginning, the Jews understood that “the life is in the blood.”³ Jews could eat the flesh but not the blood contained therein.

But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.
(Genesis 9:4 NKJV)

The totality of what Jesus was saying, however, can be summed up like this: “If you want to partake of the living reality of having God inhabit you, you must come to Me. I am the bread and I am the water come down from God. Unless you eat of My flesh, and drink of my blood, you cannot know God.”

So Jesus had clearly identified Himself as God, as the only true God, and as the only avenue to experience God. That did it.

On hearing it, many of His disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you?” (John 6:60,61 NIV)

Jesus told it like it is, and they responded with anger. “This is a hard teaching, who can accept it?” they cried out. I would remind you again that it wasn’t hard to understand. It was hard to accept. The Greek word used here for “hard” is the word *skleros*. It means that which is understood but hard to tolerate. It is the word used in these verses.

It is hard for you to kick against the goads. (Acts 26:14 NIV)
...all their hard speeches... (Jude 15 KJV)

The problem wasn’t one of intellectual understanding, but of entering into agreement with what they understood Him to be saying. They couldn’t.

It was they that the Master asked that incredible question: “Does this offend you?” I wonder how many times He has wanted to ask that of us? We claim to want the truth at any cost. But

³ Deuteronomy 16:23

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when we hear it, so often the flesh cannot tolerate the unbelievable nature of what we have heard. God's precepts go so against the grain of the world's concepts that we recoil in disbelief or try to pretend we didn't hear it. In our spirits, if not with our lips, we can be heard to murmur. "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

You can almost hear the Master respond, "Does this offend you?" Are you turned off at the thought of the simplicity or the intensity of the gospel? Does the totality of the level of as opposed to us living for God sometimes cause you to shake your head? Do you often say, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Jesus concluded His discourse with:

What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before!

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

(John 6:62,63 NIV)

Jesus was going back to the Father. Would they believe if they witnessed that? Probably not. Their problem was not the absence of tangible proof of His ability to do the impossible. Their problem was that they were still trying to force spiritual truths into physical parameters. They didn't fit. They still don't. Jesus decided to make it perfectly clear. And in so doing, He emblazoned on the tablets of Scripture a statement that has produced anger in the hearts of religious zealots for 2,000 years. He said only the Spirit can produce anything that is eternal in nature. The flesh profits nothing. Nothing you can do has eternal merit. Nothing. Not any of your good works; not any of your acts of generosity; not even any of your acts of religious activity done in Jesus' name. Only what God produces through His indwelling Spirit will last for eternity. The very best we can do is store up wood, hay, and stubble that will burn at the day of judgment.

This meant that everything these Jewish leaders were doing and had been doing to earn God's favor amounted to nothing more than trash wrapped in ecclesiastical robes. It smelled to God. He didn't need their religiosity, they needed His Spirit. It means that the unbeliever can do nothing to earn God's favor, and it means that the believer can do nothing to store up eternal rewards in and of himself. Only God can produce eternal fruit. The flesh profits nothing. Nothing is a word that translates into English means nothing. No thing.

This was not what they wanted to hear. And they would not

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listen any longer. Gone were their dreams of a kingdom where they, by their mere position, earned favor with God. Gone was the promise of an earthly establishment that brought honor to God by the keeping of laws and rules. Everything was changed. Nothing was the same. This man Jesus hadn't come to make their lives easier after all. He had come with a message of surrender and commitment and servanthood that was lowly and humiliating and undesirable to the natural man. He wasn't the friend of the religious establishment at all. He had come to negate all they had labored for years to put in place in the name of Jehovah God. He had to go.

From that moment on, the crowds dissipated, the plaudits of men ceased to flow from the streets in the villages, and the size of the Master's congregation went from infinity to infinity. One minute, there were so many wanting in, He had to hide from them to get a moment alone. In a matter of seconds, the self-seeking masses would scurry for cover as though Jesus had just fired a scud missile, rather than a volley of spiritual truth. This was their response:

From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed him. (John 6:66 NIV)

The troops all remembered that sale at K-Mart in Jerusalem. They remembered that they left the microwave on when they left home. They forgot to set their VCR's to record "NFL Football" when they took off that morning. They turned back. They followed Him no more. You remember from previous studies how Jesus responded. He didn't run after them and beg them to come back, while offering them a "softer" gospel. Instead, He turned to the twelve and said:

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

(John 6:67-69 NIV)

Eleven of the twelve meant business. They didn't yet understand what He meant, but they knew He and He alone had the truth. Jesus had offended the rest. And His tour of duty as "Pastor of the Year" evaporated as the report went out to denominational headquarters that their number one church had just dwindled from thousands to twelve in one day. That didn't bother Jesus. He wasn't after

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crowds. He was after trophies of grace. A few who meant business, truly inhabited by and controlled by His Spirit, could change the world. Thousands of hangers-on, looking for something to elevate the flesh in the name of God, would possess no power at all.

So He let them go. He still will. He did not set out to offend them; He Himself was not offensive, nor was the way He presented His message offensive. Remember that. It was His Father's Word that offended them. It was too simple, too demanding, and too humiliating for the flesh to buy. So they were offended. And they left.

It appears that there is a lot we can learn from this incident in the Master's life about the mind of Christ in us. There are some things in this Book of Books that will offend. We must not try to soft-pedal them or avoid them at any cost. They offend because they deny the flesh the right to have any part in God's work of eternity. At least seven of them beckon for our attention out of this passage. We must engrave them on our hearts. Should our numbers shrink because people cannot tolerate these truths, we are on holy ground. We must love them as they leave, but never chase after them with another gospel. There is no other gospel. Hang tough on these seven things:

1- Jesus is God. Virtually every cult and false religion will attract people by denying this truth. The Trinity as Scripture teaches it irritates the flesh. God in three distinct persons with one nature? Man cannot buy that except for divine enabling. That is why

...no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

(I Corinthians 12:3 NIV)

The flesh cannot understand it, accept it, or repeat it. He is God and very God. Anything less than that is nothing. Either He is who He claims to be, or He is nothing He claims to be. Settle it in your heart. The truth of the Trinity and the Son's place in the godhead is essential. If it is offensive to you, you have a serious problem.

2- God is sovereign. He does whatsoever He pleases. He did it all. He does it all. He will do it all. He does not need us to bring in the kingdom. We need Him to enter the kingdom. Our salvation is His doing. He paid the price, then gave us as a gift to His son. The Son keeps us as a tribute to the Father's love and power.

not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us... (Titus 3:5a NKJV)

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3- Anyone can come. Jesus just told them the only entrance requirement to the Kingdom was that they come through the door. From this point on, whosoever will may come—no prejudices, no limitations, no favoritism. Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, Pharisee and publican, all may come. This is offensive to every cult. Satan hates it. Without man-made restrictions, God is free to bring into His presence those who in and of themselves have no merit at all. Hallelujah! That's us. If that offends you, you've missed the reality of God's great love.

4- The kingdom is spiritual. God isn't going to rearrange your life and make it comfortable because you've trusted Him. He may let the cannons of hell blast their fiery heat in your direction to refine you. This world is not where it is. This world is going to burn someday, and everything in it will go up in smoke. The world we live for is eternal, internal, and specific. We'd better get back to teaching on Heaven and how to get ready for it. No, you can't see the spiritual treasures, can you? And that's offensive to some. So be it.

5- We can do nothing apart from God. The flesh hates that. But then if the flesh can do no good thing, why listen to it? The message of the indwelling Christ-filled life offends the religious do-gooder who wants God to measure His spirituality by his works. Too bad. God won't do it. We can do no more apart from Him than He could apart from His Father. End of statement.

6- There is only one way to Heaven. Christianity is exclusive. The flesh thinks that to be unfair. The Bible says it is the epitome of fairness. Anyone can come, and the entrance requirements never vary. But there is only one door. Try to enter another way and you're a thief and a robber. That's offensive to many.

7- The Christian life is going to be hard. There's a cross to take up daily if we are to be His disciples. We are to "eat His flesh and drink His blood." We are to identify with Him in His humanity. He suffered and was rejected and persecuted. The servant is not above His Master. Therefore, the deeper the river, the richer the grace; the darker the storm clouds, the sweeter the wind of the Holy Spirit that blows against our lives comforting and transforming us. That is totally contrary to human reasoning and the flesh is offended by it. But we must never refrain from teaching it.

These are seven things the flesh cannot tolerate. Preach them and teach them and your crowds may not mushroom. The people

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may even be heard to whisper, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Jesus’ answer to them will ever be the same. “Does this offend you? Would you all like to go?” May we simply answer with Simon Peter,

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”
(John 6:68b NIV)

The gospel *will* offend some. Let it. We must not be offensive in our presentation. Then we become stumbling-blocks. But should God’s Word itself offend, we must not be tempted to alter its basic truths one iota. For the things that offend those who cannot bear them are the very things that will change our lives, if we’ll let them.

Come to Him today and ask Him to make these simple precepts real to you. His Spirit will enable you to understand them. His love will envelop you, His grace will direct you, and you need not be offended any more.

DOES THIS OFFEND YOU?

“Does this offend you?” the Master asked,
“Is this too hard for you?
Are these words too difficult?
Thus, are they not true?”

“Does this offend you, child of Mine?
One for whom I died.
Can you say, ‘Too hard for me.’
And watch Me crucified?”

“Does this offend you? Are my words
More than you can hear?
Then you do not understand
My Gethsemane prayer.”

“I have done it all, My child,
You have naught to do.
Let that not offend thee, child
I did it all for you.”

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