

The Offence of the Cross

by Ray Comfort

The message of the Gospel is offensive to those who are living in sin and don't want to change their ways, but it's the message that's the problem, not the messenger.

Scripture: Acts 13:45, Acts 14:5, Acts 16:23, Acts 19:26, 1 Thessalonians 2:4

Topics: "The Cross", "Evangelism"

Description

Ray Comfort discusses the importance of preaching the Gospel boldly, even when it leads to opposition and anger from the listeners. He emphasizes the need to stay true to the message of repentance and salvation, regardless of the negative reactions faced. Comfort shares personal encounters where he faced physical attacks and verbal abuse while proclaiming the truth of God's Word, highlighting the spiritual battle that occurs when the Gospel is preached. He contrasts his approach with others who dilute the message to avoid offense, stressing the biblical example of Paul facing afflictions and opposition when he preached the Gospel.

Transcript

When the Ten Commandments are used in open air preaching often people come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Some may try and deal with their conviction through anger. It is easy to forget that behind the flesh and blood is a seething demonic realm (see Ephesians 6:12). That's why it is wise to use words "seasoned with salt." There have been times where I haven't been as wise as I should, and have suffered the consequences. Take for instance the time an attractive woman in her mid-twenties angrily hollered out the "f" word at me. When she did it again I said, "Ma'am, could you watch your language? There are ladies present." She looked at me with disdain and said, "I'm a lady!" I answered, "Ma'am. You may be a woman, but you're not a 'lady.'" At that she rushed at me like a bat out of heaven to prove the truth of what I had just said. As she began hitting me I noticed that it wasn't in the typical womanly fashion. She was laying into me as though she was a prizefighter, with blows to the ribs, mouth and upper torso. She was so quick, she managed to land about six good punches before members of our team were able to rescue me from her fists. As they held her back, she said that she wanted to pick up her purse, so they let her go. That's when she landed a powerful kidney punch. After she left I was able to continue preaching (she actually doubled my crowd). It took two weeks for the bruises to go away.

One other time a woman approached me and used the same word to describe what I had been saying. I looked at her and said, "Ma'am...it sounds like there are some demons in there." At that, she slapped my

face (understandably). I looked at her and said, "Any more where that came from?" There was. She then punched me in the mouth and walked off.

I don't always wait to be hit by women. Late in 2000, one angry lady tried to hit me just after I had finished speaking. A friend was preaching at the time and I thought that the sight of a preacher being beaten by a woman would distract from the Gospel, so I moved away. The woman didn't leave it there--she chased me around the crowd. Then she went to the police and told them that I had punched her in the face. The police questioned me and when I informed them that my associate had video-taped the chase scene, they looked, laughed, and left.

While outbreaks of anger are reasonably common, it is usually verbal or taken out on the microphone or Lazarus (a dummy used for fake funerals). It was because of this regular contention that two pastors set up a lunch appointment with me. Over lunch they gently told me that they were offended by my way of preaching. They said that they had received numerous complaints from non-Christians and some from Christians about how I stirred up the crowd and made them angry. They also said that I was condescending, condemning and judgmental. They said that that was the reason the crowd was offended. I told them that I strived to be gentle, show respect, and that love was my sole motivation. I also mentioned that other Christians who were more gracious than me received the same venomous response. I told them that it was the message that was offensive and the normal result is that those who are offended take their anger out on the messenger.

After some time, I asked how one of the pastors presented the Gospel to sinners. He said, "I tell them that God loves them and that He wants to be their friend--that He has a mansion in Heaven for them...I tell them that the thing that is stopping them from going there is the wages of their human nature." He said that he tried to avoid any words that caused sinners to stumble. I gave some examples, "Your mean 'sin, righteousness, judgment, repentance, etc.'" He said, "Yes."

I could see why he was offended by my preaching. I could also see why nobody would be offended by his.

The question then arises, Which method is right? Let's look to scripture and see what happened when Paul preached:

Acts 13:45: When he preached, the crowd began "contradicting and blaspheming."

Acts 13:50: Paul and Barnabas thrown out of the city.

Acts 14:5: The crowd began to stone them.

Acts 14:9: Paul was stoned and left for dead.

Acts 16:23: Both Paul and Barnabas were beaten with "many stripes."

Acts 18:6: Paul's hearers "opposed themselves and blasphemed."

Acts 19:26-28: Paul preached against their idolatry (violation of the First and Second of the Ten Commandments) and his hearers were "full of wrath."

Acts 20:23: Paul was told that afflictions awaited him wherever he preached the Gospel.

Acts 22:21-22: The apostle's preaching caused his hearers to call for his death.

Acts 23:1: As soon as he began to speak, he was smacked in the mouth.

Acts 23:10. After he spoke there was "great dissension."

Acts 23:10: The crowd were so angry Paul was nearly "pulled in pieces."

Acts 23:11: A crowd conspired to murder him.

Acts 24:5: He is called a "pestilent fellow," a "mover of sedition," a ringleader" of a "sect."

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he said that when he preached the Gospel to them they "received the word in much affliction" (1 Thessalonians:5). Scripture gives us the content of his message. He preached against their idolatry (verse 9), as he did at Athens. He said that they were "shamefully treated" and that the Gospel was received with "much contention" (1 Thessalonians 2:1). Now listen to Paul's words: "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not pleasing men but God, who tries our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as you know..." (verses 4-5, italics added).

If we do betray our trust, flatter our hearers, and adulterate the Word of God, we will not only fill the Church with false converts, but we will have similar experiences to that of Art Neyland, from Great Falls, Montana. In 1986, he used a man-centered approach and told a man that God loved him and that He wanted to give him assurance that when he died he would go to Heaven. Then he led the man in a "sinner's prayer."

The following Sunday he arrived at his new convert's house to take him to church. When the man's wife let him in the house, he was nowhere to be found. She said, "Where did John go? He was here a minute ago." She then opened the closet door, and there was an embarrassed John, hiding in the closet. Art said, "I take it that this means you don't want to go to church?" He didn't.

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