

The Life-Giving Offense of the Gospel (John 6:60-71)

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It seems the worst thing you can do to someone today is offend them. In a culture where victimhood is the new morality, I apparently have an inalienable right to not hear or experience something I dislike or that strikes me as offensive. Being offended justifies my anger. Being offended excuses my actions. And I'm entitled to use whatever means necessary to make you stop.

At root, it's not a tolerance problem. It's a truth problem. Truth has become the handmaiden of our passions, a construct of our desires, aided by the absolute autonomy of the individual. There is no normative or objective standard outside of us. There's only what you want to believe, what I want to believe, and when our subjective definitions of "truth" inevitably collide, whoever shouts the loudest wins.

We are all prone, even as Christians, to accept something as true not based on whether it is actually true but based on whether we want it to be true, whether we like it, whether it affirms the things we want to affirm. I don't really care whether it's wise for me to watch that movie. I want to see it, so I told my parents it was fine. I don't really care what God has to say about my gender and sexuality. I know how I want to live, so I'm going to surround myself with "supportive" people who will say what I want to hear.

It's the inevitable result of severing ourselves from our Creator, from the God who reveals the truth because he is the truth. Until our relationship with him is restored, the truth will always feel offensive, pushing and prodding us to confess what we hate to admit – he is God, and we are not.

And that, my friends, is why Jesus' words rarely went over well, not just with the crowds, but even among his closest followers. The Scripture we just read comes at the end of a long conversation centered on Jesus' self-revelation in Jn 6:32. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." He's not putting himself forward as a religious option among many sources of life. There is no life, Jesus says, apart from exclusive dependence on the Author of Life.

Jesus never lets us come to him on our own terms. He defines the terms, leaving us with a simple choice. Will you believe him or not? Will you cling to him as your only source of life? Or will you keep chasing a life of your own making? How you respond to Jesus is determined by how you respond to his words for it is through his words that King Jesus

has revealed himself to us. The last part of Jn 6 tells us exactly what we need to know about them.

1) THE WORDS OF JESUS ARE OFFENSIVE TO THE PRIDE OF MEN (vv. 60-62)

In v. 60, the crowd of Jesus "disciples" or followers say either to themselves or one another, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" Enigmas abounded in Jesus' words, especially for those who couldn't perceive their true, spiritual meaning. Case in point, v. 53. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." The emphasis in v. 60, however, is not on something that is hard to understand, but rather on something that is hard to accept or swallow, not on something that is unclear, but something that is deeply offensive.

They were offended by Jesus' spiritual focus. They wanted free food and deliverance from Roman oppression. They were offended by Jesus' refusal to comply with the dictates of human reason. Why should we believe your assertion of deity when we know your mom and dad? They were offended by his claim to have life-giving power greater than their forefather Moses. And they were offended by the scandal of being told to eat his flesh and drink his blood. A good teacher? Maybe. This exclusive giver of life business? Yeah, I don't think so.

To which Jesus says, "You think my teaching is offensive?" V. 62, "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" Jesus knew the only path home to heaven was a path of suffering, culminating in his crucifixion. If the Jews were scandalized by his claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God sent by the Father to make right everything our sin made wrong, how much more would they be scandalized by a crucified Messiah? That's ridiculous. When our anointed deliverer arrives, he won't be crucified. He's going to reign in power and destroy our enemies!

1 Cor 1:22–23, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles..." the true gospel is terribly offensive. It was back then and still is today. The gospel is offensive because it says I'm accountable to someone other than myself, namely, the God who created me, and that because I have willfully and repeatedly violated his commands I deserve to die.

The gospel is offensive because it says I can't earn my way back into God's good graces. Nothing I do is good enough. Only Jesus can make me right with God. The gospel is offensive because it says there are things God is doing in the universe that defy the logic of human wisdom. Why did my child die? Why do I have chronic pain? Why am I still

single? Why would God allow himself to be brutally murdered by his enemies? It was the greatest act of evil, yet he used it for the greatest conceivable good.

The gospel is offensive because it says I am not my own – my body, my money, my time, my gifts and abilities, even my kids. If you're a Christian, you are a slave of Christ, bought with a price. Jesus isn't a roommate with whom you negotiate. He is a master to whom you are obligated to obey. The gospel is offensive because it says this world is not our home. It calls us to embrace a purpose for life that looks weak and foolish in the eyes of our family and friends, to live for a day that has yet to come, for a glory we have yet to see, to walk by faith in this world as exiles of the kingdom of heaven.

Friend, if you don't perceive the offense of the gospel, the way it contradicts and fiercely opposes all we naturally hold dear, then either you don't understand the gospel, or you have forgotten the comprehensive claim Christ crucified makes on every aspect of your life. The most unloving thing you can do when talking to a non-Christian friend about Jesus is soften the hard edges of the gospel into something more palatable. Don't do it, brothers and sisters. Be honest. Speak the truth.

And if you have felt the offense of the gospel and rejected Jesus, I warn you. To deny anything that doesn't make you feel good about yourself is to sign your own death warrant, friend. The God who created you is committed to something of infinitely greater weight than what makes you comfortable. He is committed to his glory. And because he is committed to his glory, his judgments will prevail. Don't ask Jesus to affirm you. Ask Jesus to rescue you from yourself, because his words are offensive to the pride of men.

2) THE WORDS OF JESUS BRING LIFE THROUGH THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT (vv. 63-65)

Imagine you actually witnessed the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Would that make it any easier to believe or trust him? Jesus' answer in v. 63 is a resounding no. Why not? Because the great obstacle to faith in Jesus isn't what we see with our eyes but what we love in our hearts. We don't need more evidence for God. We need to have our hearts transformed by God. Only God the Holy Spirit can overcome the pride in our hearts and enable us to see and savor Jesus as eminently worthy of our trust. V. 63, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all."

When Jesus speaks of "the flesh" in v. 63 he's talking about all the capacities of our human nature, all the power of our mind, affections, and will. He sees all of that – all you

know, all you feel, all you do – and what does he conclude? Not one bit of it – past, present, or future – offers even the slightest bit of help in producing or securing spiritual life for ourselves or anyone else. We don't even get partial credit! "The flesh," Jesus says, "is of no help at all."

I don't like that. I don't like feeling powerless. I certainly don't like being told there's nothing I can do to fix something that's wrong in my world. My flesh needs a little help from the Spirit? Sure. We all need a helping hand now and then. But that's not what Jesus says, is it? He says my flesh, your flesh, our flesh, is "no help at all," or as the NKJ says, the flesh "profits nothing." Why not? Because I don't want to be a creature. I want to be the Creator. I want to roll up my sleeves and implement my will, my plans, and my goals. I think I know what's best.

You might feel like your flesh is kicking it strong in all sorts of areas in your life. People respect you. People appreciate you. People like you because you get things done. But how's your marriage going, friend? How are your kids doing? What about the anxiety in your soul, the gnawing sense that if you slow down the pace, your entire world will crumble and fall? Can you quiet the pangs in your conscience? Have you found a joy that endures longer than your last achievement, your last purchase, your last high, or your last sexual release? Can you give yourself peace in the midst of death, confidence on the day of judgment, or assurance that it's well with your soul?

What do many of us do when we realize we can't? We throw our hands up in despair or busy ourselves with the things we still feel like we can control. Here's what you need to learn, friend. God gave you a flesh that is "no help at all" not to frustrate you but to lead you back to the joy of dependence on him. Joy in a broken world doesn't come from leveraging our power to create life for ourselves or others. Joy comes from resting in the Spirit's power and the Spirit's faithfulness to grant what the Spirit alone can provide.

The Spirit enables us to see ourselves clearly, the poverty of our earthly treasures, and our need for a Savior. The Spirit enables us to see Jesus clearly, to despair of commending ourselves to God and to trust the work of the Son in his life and death to make us right with the Father. The Spirit grants us love for our enemies, joy in our poverty, peace in adversity, patience in suffering, kindness under oppression, goodness in the midst of evil, faithfulness when we are weak, gentleness instead of anger, and self-control when all we want is to feel better.

Remembering it's the Spirit who gives life and the flesh is of no help at all, guards us from pride when we feel able and fear when we realize we're not. It makes us a people

who are at once humble and hopeful. So how does he do it? How does the Spirit take hearts like ours that are so often cold toward God and give us the joy of trusting and obeying Jesus? He does it through the power of Jesus' words. V. 63, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

The primary means by which the Spirit makes all that is wrong in the world right, starting in our relationship with God, is through the power of God's Word, centered on the good news of salvation Jesus proclaimed. When the Word of God preached, the Spirit is working. When you open your Bible and read, the Spirit is working. When you open your mouth and tell your friend what Jesus has said, the Spirit is working. The Spirit gives us life in Jesus by illuminating and applying the words of Jesus such that we see him for who he is, trust because of who he is, and obey him accordingly.

God's Word doesn't just tell us what's true. Through the work of the Spirit, it changes us from the inside out. So how come one person hears or reads God's Word and nothing happens, while another person does the same and is convicted, comforted, and transformed? Because faith to believe Jesus and experience life in him accordingly is a gift from God. V. 65, "No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

Did that stop Jesus from boldly proclaiming the gospel in the power of the Spirit? Not in the least! Should that stop you, Christian, from diligently reading and meditating on God's Word until you feel a sudden compulsion to do so? Absolutely not. Trust the power of the Spirit, rest in the sovereignty of the Father, and persevere in proclaiming and meditating on the truth about Jesus. The words of Jesus bring life through the work of the Spirit.

3) THE WORDS OF JESUS COMPEL US TO REMAIN WITH JESUS (vv. 66-71)

At this point, many of Jesus' followers had enough. He wasn't giving them the kind of life in this world they wanted. So they "turned back" (v. 66) and "no longer walked with him." The very way John describes their decision makes a profound spiritual point. They didn't just stop following Jesus. They literally went away "to the behind things."

Every human being on the planet is a worshiper. We're all looking to something or someone to give us joy and life. Even when you're following Jesus, Christian, the temptation to return to the "behind things" never goes away. Where did you look to find life before coming to Jesus? Was it work? Was it sex? Did you disappear on YouTube? Did you pack your days with as many social events as possible or throw yourself into gaming or golf? Recognize the behind things that hold most attraction for



you, friend, and be on guard. The fact that you appear to be following Jesus right now does not guarantee you will in the future.

With former followers deserting him en masse, Jesus turns to his twelve closest disciples and asks a question that matters just as much today as it did then. V. 67, "So Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?'" Jesus isn't asking because he's unsure. The very form of the question presumes a negative answer. So what's Jesus doing? He's forcing his disciples to give careful attention to the choice before them.

How would you answer, friend? Maybe you're exploring the claims of Christianity. You're just getting to know Jesus. That's a good thing! But you cannot avoid making a decision. Will you humble yourself and follow Jesus or will you walk away? There is no middle ground. He leaves neither them nor us space for respectable uncertainty or understandable indecision. To postpone your decision is to make a decision. Either we are for him or against him.

And let's be honest. Even as Christian, there is a critical sense in which we face that question over and over again. The choice to follow Jesus no matter the cost is not a one-time decision. It is a daily, hourly, moment by moment decision.

Do you click the link or not? Do you go on the date or not? Do you slam the door or not? Do you file for divorce or not? Do you share what God has done in your life or not? Do you give generously or not? Do you close your mouth and let them get the last word or not? Do you step outside your comfort zone and expose your weakness or not? Will you stay with Jesus or walk away?

There are times in the Christian life when it feels more costly, more painful, more difficult, and even more risky to remain with Jesus, especially when a temporal blessing we long for is delayed or denied. Many of you know exactly what I mean. Your child dies and you're shaken by all manner of doubts and fears *because* you believe God is sovereign. Your financial stress increases *because* you turn down a higher-paying job to honor the Lord by spending more time with your wife and kids.

Maybe you're struggling with assurance of salvation or battling doubts that Jesus is real or the Bible is true. It feels like it would be easier emotionally to chuck it and walk away than to persevere in the fight for faith. Or maybe you're in a difficult marriage and don't have biblical grounds for divorce. It would be far easier to follow the advice of your "friends" who are saying you deserve better than to suffer for Jesus' sake.

In all of those situations, why should you choose to remain with Jesus when so many longings and affections within you pull in the opposite direction? Peter leads the way in v. 66. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life..."

It's not the voice of resignation, as if Peter wished there was another option but couldn't find one. It's the humble honesty of faith, a sober assessment that recognizes Jesus is the only one who can give our souls the life we desperately need. Every other gospel is a lie. Every other supposed path to joy makes promises it can't keep. Only Jesus offers a righteousness that won't make you arrogant, an identity that doesn't hinge on your performance, a justice that is full of mercy, a freedom that isn't selfish, the joy of relationship with a God who knows you fully and loves you completely, and the promise of a bodily resurrection in a world where sin and death are no more. Salvation is found in no one else!

Peter knew it. The rest of the twelve, save Judas, knew it. They had "believed" and "come to know" that Jesus was the Messiah, the "Holy One of God," that no one else but Him could satisfy their souls. Did he say things that offended them? Yes. Did he do things that troubled them? Yes. But this they knew. This they could not deny. In him was life. In following him was joy. They had tasted and seen that the Lord is good, not on account of the temporal blessings he gives, but on account of who he is, and they knew, as tempting as it was, that to turn away from him, to reject him, would be to exchange a fountain of living water for a broken cistern.

How did they come to know that? How did they come to believe that? Through the power of Jesus' words, words the Lord preserved for us and speaks to us in the pages of Scripture. Friend, if you are struggling to follow Jesus, if you are struggling to remain with Jesus, nourish your mind with the Word of God. Study the Word. Meditate on the Word. If you don't know how to do that, come to the Sunday school class I'm teaching next Sunday! For it is through the words of Jesus bearing witness to the truth about Jesus that we are compelled to remain with Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The life you need, the life everyone around you needs, comes from God alone. It's granted by the Father, given by the Spirit, and found in the Son. If you know that, if you've experienced that, don't pat yourself on the back or look down on those who don't. Jesus affirms the truth of Peter's confession. Yet what does he immediately say lest his disciples succumb to spiritual pride? V. 70, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve?"



The words of Jesus are offensive to the pride of men. But if they have also brought you life through the work of the Spirit, and compelled you to remain with him through many dangers, toils, and snares, remember this. You are a trophy of grace. In the majesty of his mercy, your sovereign Creator has turned your naturally proud heart back to him.

So no matter how hard the road or difficult the way, don't abandon the Lover of your Soul. Don't reject the Son of God who died to bring you home. Cling to him. Hold fast to him. Refuse to look away. For where else could we go? He alone is the bread of life.