

February 16, 2008 ©Homer Kizer

Commentary — From the Margins

Cause No Offence

So, whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Co 10:31–11:1)

Did Christ cause offense? Did He provoke the leaders of the temple when He cast out the moneychangers, not once, but certainly twice and probably three times? He caused a tempest in the temple. So how is a disciple to imitate Christ and not cause offense? Besides all in Asia had left Paul while he still lived (2 Tim 1:15). The saints at Corinth were questioning whether Paul was of God; the saints at Galatia had abandoned what Paul taught and were physically circumcising themselves; Jews and Jewish converts were attempting to kill Paul, who certainly had caused much offense wherever he preached.

Elijah caused offense: “When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, ‘Is it you, you troubler of Israel?’ And he [Elijah] answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father’s house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all of Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table’” (1 Kings 18:17-19).

To King Ahab, Elijah was a troublemaker, a source of offense, and the cause of a three year drought so severe that the historical trace of an 8th-Century BCE emigration from Samaria and Phoenicia into the western part of the Mediterranean can be found in multiple texts today. However, Elijah claimed he wasn’t the cause of Israel’s troubles, but Ahab was because Ahab had abandoned the laws of God and had thereby caused Israel to sin greatly against the Most High. And by this reasoning, Jesus was not the cause of offense when He drove out the moneychangers, but temple officials were for they were allowing the house of God to be turned into a den of thieves. By extension, Paul was not a cause of trouble for he had committed no offense against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar (Acts 25:8), meaning that Paul broke no commandment of the Lord.

Is the “Paul” who committed no offense against the law or against the temple the same Paul

who is preached in Sunday morning sermons?

Pause and consider: Paul's testimony about himself was that he committed no offense against the law even though when he wanted to do right, evil lay close at hand: his delight was in the law of God in his inner being, but his members responded to a contrary law, that of sin and death (Rom 7:21-22). Paul was not seeking release from the law, but was appalled that his mind could not fully rule over his flesh. His liberty was not from the law, but from sin—his mind desired to keep the law. He wanted to keep the law, for he was no longer mentally under bondage to sin despite sin still dwelling in his flesh. His liberation was not complete, but was only of the inner self, a new creature born of Spirit as a son of God.

So how is it possible that the "Paul" who committed no offense against the law can be preached in Sunday sermons without causing offense against Jews and against the church of God? How is it possible to teach a gospel of lawlessness, of deliberate transgression of the law, of ignoring the law because Christ kept it and use Paul's epistle as theological justification for this [anomian] gospel, especially considering that Jesus will deny in their resurrection all who teach this gospel?

It is not possible! To be preaching on Sunday morning (except in observation of the Wave Sheaf Offering) is an offense against both the law and the temple (against Jews), and against the church of God. Yes, it is. For the one who would teach Israel will not be preaching a weekly service on the day after when Israel is to enter into God's rest. Rather, it is the one condemned by God for his or her unbelief that attempts to enter God's rest on the following day (Num chap 14).

Among scholars the idea seems to exist that to be viable a belief paradigm must be able to move past its origin. One of their supporting proofs is that in order to survive in the Hellenistic world of the 1st-Century Near East, the teachings of the Jesus Movement moved past what Jesus taught. The Jesus Movement left Jesus, and with considerable effort, adapted [twisted] the epistles of Paul into a theology of forgiveness that allowed neo-Platonic Greek philosophers to transport their immortal souls to heaven with entrance guaranteed through uttering belief in a single name, that of Jesus of Nazareth. The magic of the Jesus Movement did what the best of pagan philosophers had previously been unable to do: Set a standard that allowed for sinners to escape the flames of hell.

Those 1st and 2nd Century CE Greek scholars moved past what Paul taught, what Peter taught, what John taught. They moved until they embraced the difficulties of the era; they adapted and adopted. And foremost in the adaptations was modification of what Jesus taught, for His gospel was an anti-family message:

Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"

(Matt 10:34-37).

If Jesus came to bring a sword, not peace (v. 34), He came to make trouble, with this trouble beginning in a person's own family. Yet to become a marketable religion to Hellenistic Greeks, family values and family bonds had to be elevated; so in the first centuries of Christendom, the anti-family message Jesus preached was morphed into a family values message that has come down through time as the "Christian message," with the L.D.S. [Mormon] teaching about family ties forming celestial relationships that seal families in heaven being the logical extension of the transformed message that long ago swerved away from Jesus.

Yes, Christendom left Jesus in the dust, with this dust trail reaching into heaven where it gags the Father and the Son. It should gag disciples everywhere, but unfortunately, too many are spiritually dead themselves.

The Apostle Paul taught that disciples were set free from disobedience—he taught that sin no longer had dominion over disciples (Rom 6:14)—and once set free, disciples could keep the commandments which they had not previously been able to do. But this message of being set free to keep the law and thereby live uncircumcised as a Jew was an unpopular message with Hellenists; so Paul's message was morphed into another message, credited to Paul, about disciples being set free from the law so that disciples did not have to keep the commandments. What was black was called white; what was unrighteous and ungodly was renamed righteousness. But with the renaming of evil as goodness, the Christianity taught by Jesus of Nazareth left its origins and became the Christianity of Augustine and others, lawless men who covered their lawlessness with the shades of hell.

To Ahab and his Phoenician wife Jezebel, Elijah became a major cause of offense when he slew the prophets of Baal by the brook Kishon (1 Kings 18:40) ... Elijah did not trouble the king and queen in a small way, but in a way that frightened even him for Jezebel promised, within a day, to do to Elijah what he had done to the prophets of Baal (19:2-3).

The temple officials condemned Christ and had Him killed. Paul is believed to have been executed in Rome; so there is a price to be paid for causing offense, that price including the morphing of message from keeping the commandments to "Jesus kept the commandments so His disciples can be saved by their on-going lawlessness." The actual message Jesus proclaimed died (although it remained recorded in Scripture) within a century, but "Christianity" lived by having moved beyond its origin, Christ Jesus, that good man who brought a gospel of peace to this world. What is taught about Jesus in Sunday services should be enough to cause any Christian to barf, for these messages are lies told about the only Son of the Creator who came as a man to live without sin so that His disciples could also live without sin.

Can a disciple live in peace with this world, causing no offense, and still hold to the principles of God? The answer is a strong, NO! To live in peace with this world, principles must be compromised, and lies must be told to oneself, if not to others.

If a disciple does not keep the commandments of God, the disciple causes offense to Jews and to the church of God, but not to Greeks who were perfectly satisfied to live in sin. Nor will a disciple who does not keep the commandments offend most self-identified “Christians” in Sunday morning services—these “Christians” are spiritual Greeks.

The Amish are peaceful folk, quietly living by their quaint beliefs in a world hurriedly plunging into utter darkness. They are proud of their high German ancestry. They would never identify themselves as spiritual Greeks, but though their desire is to serve God, they want to serve God on their terms and under their conditions, with one of their conditions being continuation of the Greek and Latin Church custom of Sunday worship. They don’t want to be labeled as a quaint sect of Judaism; so their hubris devours their faith, leaving them naked and defiled before God—and they are in far better shape than is most of Christendom.

The church of God that Paul referenced is not today’s Christendom, but is, rather, a sect of Judaism that began when Jesus breathed on ten of His disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22) ... according to the Mishnah, a new synagogue could be formed anywhere by ten male Jews. Jesus’ ten disciples were male Jews. Thus, the ten upon whom Jesus breathed were a newly formed synagogue that “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer [proseuche]” (Acts 1:14 – cf. Acts 16:13, 16). The Greek linguistic icon used by Luke is also the word used for the regular prayer assemblies of the synagogue. The disciples of Jesus were (and functioned as) a synagogue within greater Judaism.

When Paul was on trial before Felix at Caesarea, Tertullus accused Paul of being a ringleader for “the sect [hairexis] of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Paul answered that he was indeed of The Way that the Jews called a sect [hairexis] (v. 14). The Sadducees were also described as a sect [hairexis] (Acts 15:5 – was used by Paul in Acts 26:5). So, yes, the early Church functioned as a competing sect of Judaism within greater Judaism, and its assemblies were meetings of a newly formed synagogue.

Jews and the church of God should be offended by sin, by transgression of the commandments; whereas Hellenistic Greeks would have been offended by hospitality lapses, by displays of conspicuous consumption, by chaste women appearing in public bareheaded, by variant forms of the “sins” Evangelical Christendom rails against today, including “legalism.”

Only philosophical Greeks are not today offended by broken commandments of God.

If Jesus came to turn a son against his father and a daughter against her mother, then Jesus did not come in the 1st-Century to turn the hearts of fathers to their children or the hearts of children to their fathers. That job was given to John the Baptist—and to the last Elijah.

If Elijah was not the cause of lawless Israel’s troubles, then the last Elijah will not be the cause of lawless Israel’s troubles, with this latter Israel being a nation circumcised of heart ... the sword of Elijah has morphed into fiery rhetoric, swung with the intent to slay the

lawless while their spirit still has life and perhaps has the opportunity to repent. And the Christianity that moved away from Jesus—that outgrew its origin—is a philosophical and theological nation of Greeks, ruled by the demonic king of Greece. It is the avowed enemy of the church of God. While it can tolerate Jews, it has no tolerance for the church of God; for the “legalism” of the church of God convicts Christendom of rebellion against God.

A simple choice is offered to every “Christian”: believe Jesus and become part of the synagogue formed by Christ, or believe men who will die or have died and who remain dead and lifeless. But the offer of this choice has a time limit attached to it—and unfortunately, for many self-identified Christians, the offer has already expired for they did not enter into God’s rest when the promise of entrance stood (Heb 4:1). They did not begin to keep the Sabbath when they could, and now, they will not for a delusion prevents them from repenting of their lawlessness. They did not love God or the truth enough to, by faith, keep the commandments of God when they could have done so. And now they cannot keep the commandments—not because they physically can’t, but because they won’t. They mentally cannot enter into obedience. They have been sculpted into vessels of wrath to be endured for a season.

The Apostle Paul wrote Timothy: “Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work” (2 Tim 2:20-21).

Gold and silver vessels are not used for dishonorable purposes; nor are all wood and clay vessels used for dishonorable purposes. Rather, some wood and some clay vessels are for honored usage and some are for dishonored usage. By analogy those who keep the commandments of God and who teach others to do likewise and who will be called great (Matt 5:19) are the gold and silver vessels; whereas those who relax the least of the commandments and who teach others to do likewise and who will be called least are like the wood and clay vessels, with some of these who are least being given honored usage and some reserved for dishonorable use.

Gold and silver vessels are called the great vessels in a household whereas the wood and clay vessels are valued least. Those disciples who will be gold and silver vessels keep the commandments and teach others to do likewise. So it is among disciples who relax the least of the commandments, with this commandment usually being the Sabbath commandment and with their relaxation of this commandment being their devout keeping of Sunday as the Sabbath, that some will be destined for honored usage and some for dishonored use as vessels of God’s wrath doomed to be destroyed when the temple is dedicated.

But the pious disciple who deliberately transgresses the commandments—this transgression is usually of the Sabbath commandment—is guaranteed to be a vessel set apart for dishonorable use. He or she is a vessel intended for destruction, a vessel full of excrement and all sorts of defilements. This is a vessel that causes offense to Jews and to the church

of God.

Yes, you, if you knowingly transgress the commandments of God, are only fit for breaking when the temple of God is dedicated in heavenly Jerusalem.

Again, those disciples who will be called least in the kingdom of heaven because they have relaxed the least of the commandments are wood and clay vessels that can be either for honored or dishonorable usage. The plain folk who believe that they faithfully keep the commandments but do not are vessels of wood or clay, their usage to be determined by their faith.

So the royal *we* shall sally forth in the manner foreshadowed by Elijah slaying the prophets of Baal with a sword, our weapon being whetted ideas imbedded in hard rhetoric. We shall pickup the gauntlet of “legalism” that has been cast at our feet, and we shall use this gauntlet over a fist of iron to smash the lawlessness of the synagogue of Satan, formed from the ten horns on the head of Death, the fourth beast, the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse. *We* shall take on all comers, for to joust now might be to save a life when no sacrifice remains for the lawless.

* * *

"Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."