

Should We Offend?

No one has the right to be stupid in his presentation of the faith.

The homosexual community has spent the last 20 years carrying out a masterful media strategy. Gay characters didn't just pop up on the TV screen. Someone wrote scripts and included them. And when gays and lesbians were denied access to network TV, they didn't protest the industry. Gay writers, directors and actors worked their way into Hollywood and are respected today as excellent artists.

Here's how they did it. First we were introduced to a character who didn't date but was lovable, and we liked him. Next, the character became more effeminate—not offensive, but extremely funny. Once again, we loved him. The masterminds behind the homosexual agenda crossed one line, and another, and another until today, gay actors enjoy mainstream success on network television.

I've always felt there was something in their approach that could help Christians in media achieve influential positions and engage the culture rather than protest or boycott it. But I have to admit that the message of Christ is an offense to the culture.

I'm currently reading Dorothy Sayers' *Letters to the Diminished Church*. Sayers (1893-1957) was one of the famous "Inklings"—a group of writers at Oxford University that included C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. In her book, she writes: "First, I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming with no offense to it. Seeing that Christ went about the world giving the most violent offense to all kinds of people, it would seem absurd

to expect that the doctrine of his person can be so presented as to offend nobody. We cannot blink at the fact that gentle Jesus, meek and mild, was so stiff in his opinions and so inflammatory in his language that he was thrown out of church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted as a firebrand and a public danger."

I wonder if, in our efforts not to offend, we have taken some of the distinctiveness out of our faith. Granted, most people offended by Jesus were religious folks.

When He confronted sinners or reached out to suffering people, He was far more tender and gracious. He saved His most fiery volleys for hypocrites in the church.

But when I talk about offending people, I don't mean for stupid reasons. Wildly colored hair, prosperity preaching, hawking Jesus junk products and cheesy, out-of-date approaches and styles to the gospel have no place in ministry.

No one has the right to be stupid in his presentation of the Christian faith. In fact, I'll fight against bad hair and gaudy-looking gold furniture on Christian TV until the day I die.

What I'm talking about here is presenting the reality of the Christian faith. One of the great memories I have of Billy Graham's messages is hearing him constantly say, "The Bible says, ..., " as if to claim, "Hey, these aren't my rules, they come from a bigger source than myself."

But today we see pastors pulling out everything in their arsenals to defend a doctrine without actually citing the Bible. We think the audience will better relate to it, but

we're actually positioning the Christian faith as another "lifestyle choice" and not the raging fire that transformed the Western world.

I wonder if in our zeal to embrace the culture we're not losing the very heart of the greatest story ever told. Are we trying so hard to be hip and contemporary that we've lost sight of the fact that the Christian faith is compelling, not because it's nice, cool or positive, but simply because it's true? If we really believed that, it would dramatically change the way we present the gospel.

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