

Christ, An Offense To Men
Luke 2:33-40

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Christian friends, through this Christmas season you are urged and invited to rejoice in the birth of the Savior. But was this necessary? Wouldn't we have better spent our time if we had simply urged sinful men to be holy and follow Christ in humility?

You see, we find it difficult to believe that someone would take an offense at God's love in the birth of Christ. Instead, one should rejoice, be glad, and try to amend your life to be more like the life of Jesus.

Even though it appears to be so unbelievable, it is true. Our hearts are by nature, so corrupt and hardened that even God's great love does not warm them. As look closely at our text, we will see a picture of "Christ, An Offense to Men." And in doing so, we will see that all men, by nature, take offense at Christ. It is also true that it is by God's grace alone, that one is freed from offense.

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed .” (Luke 2:34) In these words Simeon prophecies that this is how men will receive Christ. He says, "Many in Israel," not to show that only the Israelites will feel this way, but to point out that if God's chosen people feel this way, then many more of the rest of the world will take offense at Jesus.

That's the way it is. Not only did Christ offend most as He lay in the manger, but He is today, after the world has seen His glory, still "a sign that is opposed." Many appear to have the noblest attitude as long as Christ is not preached, but as soon as Christ is preached, Simeon's prophecy is fulfilled in many, for in Christ Himself, "thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

You see, the more the truth about Christ is preached, the more He becomes a stumbling block and an offense. In other words, to preach Christ – and to stir up the world against Christ – are the same thing. As soon as Christ is preached, opposition rises up from all sides. Human reason hears this preaching with horror. All hearts rise up against this unbelievable doctrine.

Yet we should not think that only great unbelievers oppose Christ. Do not be mistaken! If we were to take a close look at our own hearts, even we who joyfully heard the angel's message of the new-born Christ Child, will also hear a voice that constantly and clearly opposes Christ.

I ask you, when you heard that the true God who created heaven and earth was a little Child in Bethlehem, did you question this at all? And when you were shown that God's love is so infinite that even the angels cannot understand it, didn't you hear a voice in your heart ask, "Is this really true? Is it really true that God would humble Himself to the point of sending His only begotten Son for the sake of us fallen sinners? Would God really send His own Son, His only Son, to die for men?"

Who hasn't felt a twinge of doubt during the Christmas season? Or maybe outright offense this

Christmas? Certainly, we all have. We'll rejoice in the birth of Christ, but don't mention that He was born for the purpose of dying to free us from our sins. Yes, we see the proof of the truth of Simeon's prophecy in our own hearts, Christ is destined to be "a sign that is opposed."

So why would God give men a Savior that is so offensive to our reason? Why doesn't God preach a Gospel that even the worldly would find agreeable? Why did God send His Son in a form, and with a teaching that offends everyone?

The reason is simply this: This is the only way that we can be renewed to the image of God and be saved! If God had wanted to give the world the kind of Gospel and Savior it wanted, then He would have had to send them an earthly Messiah who would feed and clothe them, protect and free them from their earthly enemies. That is the type of Messiah that the Jews expected and still expect to this day. That would be the type of Savior that the world would want and, which a natural heart would not oppose.

But how would that have helped us sinners? We would have only fallen deeper into sin and only become more unfit for heaven, for we cannot save ourselves from sin, no matter how hard we may try.

No, if we are to be helped at all, God would have to send a Savior that offends our natural heart. In short, the kind of Savior He is, and no other kind. Keep in mind, it is our own natural reason and virtue, our trust in our own imagined wisdom and righteousness, that causes God's wisdom to be an offense. It is our trust in self that shuts us out from God and His blessed Communion, as long as we remain in it. Therefore, the true Savior must be the kind that destroys all our false wisdom, reason, virtue and righteousness.

Do not be surprised then, that your reason, heart and mind oppose the preaching of the Christmas Gospel. Instead, remember that your corrupt heart, without the Gospel could not save you. Know this, the the very opposition of your heart to God's Gospel message shows that this message is not human, but Divine. God's Gospel in Christ has not come from the heart of sinful man, but from the merciful heart of God.

How then are we freed from our natural offense at Christ? Dear friends in Christ, for this to take place, two things must be worked in us. First, we must confess our resentment toward Christ. Second, we must be filled with dissatisfaction with ourselves.

Many Christians think that they already rejoice in Christ. That is the chief reason why Christ comes in vain for them. There are many who diligently read God's Word and who listen to the Christmas story explained. They praise the preaching of Christ but think that they do not need any admonishment to confess their sinfulness. They think, who shouldn't rejoice in Christ?

When they think that way, their heart is not like the heart of Simeon or Anna. It still clings to the earthly. Their greatest concern is for the temporal. Their greatest joy is only for that which they enjoy on earth. They still have sins that they love and cherish, from which they cannot free themselves. Jesus has not yet become their one and all. His grace is not the treasure that they joyfully carry in their heart. His righteousness is not the one they boast of, and in which they are

happy and blessed.

Oh, how we deceive ourselves! Believe this: If Jesus doesn't live alone in your hearts; if you would not gladly give up everything so that you could only have Jesus; if He still cannot make you happy in misfortune, joyful in tribulation, content in poverty, and willing to even die and leave this world with its goods and joys as soon as possible. If you do not have these things in your heart, then you still haven't found your true joy in Christ. He still offends you. It is your resentment toward Christ that you must confess most of all, if you want to receive in your heart, true joy in Him.

If a person is satisfied with himself; if he does not confess that he is a deeply fallen sinner and feel the trouble of his soul; if he does not fear God's judgement or wait day and night for the comfort of Israel; in other words, if he still thinks a lot of himself, then on such a heart the sweetness of the Gospel is only wasted. That person will find no true joy in Christ.

If one does not recognize their total depravity, the hopelessness of their situation, and inability to do anything about it; then they will never appreciate what God has done for them in Jesus Christ. It would be like showing a beautiful picture to someone who is blind, or playing the most beautiful songs to someone who is deaf.

But if someone is sorrowful over their sinfulness, the Gospel is the sweetest honey to the one who is dying of starvation. It is pardon for the imprisoned and the opening of the doors to heaven to him that struggles with death.

If you don't find that kind of dissatisfaction with yourself, then don't be amazed if Christmas passed you by without a trace. Your heart was locked and Christ could not enter.

Tell me, do you want to lock yourself out completely? Do you want to begin the new year, having ended last year without Jesus? Then understand this, only God can accomplish these things in you through His Word. Therefore, first look in the mirror of the divine Law. Meditate on its demands and threats and then compare your heart and life with it.

At the same time, turn to God with heartfelt sighs and beg Him to open the deep spiritual intent of His Law. Picture your utterly hopeless situation. Then hunger and thirst after His grace. How gladly God will hear you!

But do not remain only with the Law, for it is the letter that kills. If you are to rejoice in Christ, then, after you have looked into the Law and seen God's wrath, you must quickly take the Gospel in your hand and there, in faith, see the comforting picture of the Savior of the world ... and therefore your Savior as well. Then you will have a far different attitude toward Him. Then true joy in Him will enter your heart.

As Simeon took the Savior into his arms, take Him also in your arms of faith. If at first He was a stumbling block and an offense, now He will become the rock in whom you will rise and fall. Then, as the prophetess Anna, it will also be your desire to serve Christ night and day. And you will find in your Savior a rest, a peace, a joy that the whole world with all its treasures could

never give to you. Finally, when your death comes, you will fall asleep in sweet peace and will wake up happy and blessed in God's bosom.

Today again find the Babe lying in the manger of the Word, freeing you from your sin. Gaze upon and receive His very body and blood, wrapped in the swaddling clothes of bread and wine, granting you salvation and peace.

Let God's great gift to you of His Son be the reason for your rejoicing today, and every day, as He makes you ready to join Him in His eternal kingdom. Amen.