The Little Church in the Pines

 TO STAY OFFENDED IS OFFENSIVE ~ to the Lord!

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This message is not exactly what one might expect for the second Sunday of a New Year…. but, one that I believe we all need to hear. There is no one in particular that this message is meant for. GOT THAT? So, no speculation is warranted. (smile)

Therefore, today’s subject matter I chose because of its sensitivity, and sometimes impact on all of us when it happens. I am going to try to bring it in a straightforward manner while hoping that you will not be offended by my doing so. It is to teach all of us the impact and the importance of words….and tongue. James 3:6 “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

That…is what I call straight-forward.

James was an elder of the church and known for his wisdom and ability to intercede in church strife…which yes, was in the church way back then.

As I move forward, please recall the source of these words, and the impact they should have on all of us, especially when we are tempted to ignore them.

There is I guess what we could call a spiritual song more than a hymn, that became popular I believe back in the ’70s.

Lord, I want to be more like you, like you,

I want to be a vessel you work through

I want to be more like you……………!

As a Christian, this should be one of the bottom lines of our faith, and if successful, sets in motion all the good that we can accomplish in our Christian walk.

To be like Him…. will always mean changes in our acceptance of self, and changes in how we interact with those around us, including family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and strangers.

To be like His. There will definitely be areas of lives, that the Holy Spirit and the written word will reveal to us. Then we call upon the Holy Spirit once recognized, to help us accomplish our goal(s).

For those among us, or those we know who have struggled with, as an example, alcohol. The first thing we must do is recognize there is a need for change. The second step then is our ability to move forward with the Spirts’ help, and the help of friends and family. This will often mean taking corrective steps of action. And if, and when, we fail…and we certainly may, then once again, get up on feet learning from that failure, and moving forward in the direction the Lord has shown us.

I have preached on this topic one time in each of the churches I have pastored. To my way of thinking and through my experience of pastoring, and counseling, it is one of the most hurtful and damaging sins a person can commit.

Let’s hear what Jesus and a few disciples have to say about this topic.

The first I already spoke of, and that coming from James.

The topic is centered more on not so much the offense itself, but, and on holding onto offense.

Offense, offending, offended, offensive, and offend start with the letter word “off,” something is off, something is wrong…off-ended.

These multiple words all describe the essence of wrongness. It is an adjective, which is described in several words. We can choose to be resentful, annoyed, and even outraged. Typically, as a result of a ‘perceived’ or a deliberate and intentional insult. It can be personal or aimed at someone else.

James 4:17 reads, “Remember, it is a sin to know what you ought to do, then not do it.” This simply says that “sin” is also not doing the right thing or things when given the choice.

So, how do we show Him we love Him? He tells us in John 14:23, “All who love Me will do what I say!”

A perceived or deliberate offense is to be handled in this way. In humility, not in outrage. Matthew 23:12. “But those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Also, please remember, humility is not being weak, it is deliberate and controlled strength.

“Tact is the unsaid part of what you are thinking.”

This now is one of my favorite verses and encompasses every aspect of our lives. Matthew 5:43-44 and can only be achieved when we are like Him. “You have heard it said Jesus says, “to hate your enemies, but I say to you, Love your enemies and do good to those that persecute you.” (in word or in deed) my addition. He goes on to say, “you will be acting as true children of your Father who is in heaven if you do as He says.” “Lord, I want to be more like You” (Let’s say it together).

These next verses are the essence of it all, and the summation of what it truly would be like to be like Jesus. Matthew 7:12, straight from the mouth of the Savior Himself. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (Let’s say this together also).

At best…staying offended is one of the most pointless and devastating emotional indulgences possible. At its worst, it is the very seed of potential violence, persecution, and separation. To “stay offended” should never be welcome in the Christian vernacular. There is not one virtue in being indignant, and we have as Christians, no “right” according to our Lord, to hold on to an offense. We all have initially been offended and sometimes with a very good reason or reasons, but to get to the root of the issue and make peace, is of exceptional importance in being like Him.

The Lord was hurled all sorts of offensive words and actions, and the only response He had to these, was to use the Word of God, Scriptures in almost every instance in response, and use them He did in just the right manner. He though never held on to them as He hung on the Cross and said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they have done.” As He was consistently an example to us…. we too must do and be as He was…. with His help and His guidance.

There was one major offense that He took, but that was not personal, and that offense we know very well was where He proclaimed that He was offended for His Father, because the Jewish leadership, permitted the Temple of God to be used for personal gain and corruption.

His outrage was expressed in Luke 19:46. Then Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people selling animals for sacrifices. He said to them, “The Scriptures declare, “My Temple shall be called a house of prayer; but YOU, have turned it into a den of thieves.”

TO HOLD ON TO OFFENSE TOWARD A PERSON, MEANS YOU HAVE NOT GRASPED OR INCORPORATED INTO YOUR LIFE THE REALITY AND UNDERSTANDING OF GRACE.

Wednesday…. I was actually deeply hurt by someone….and it took me half a day to understand, that indeed I had truly done nothing to deserve it…but it was simply the easiest way for them to accomplish their goal…and that was to exit themselves from my life. I still do not understand why, but right now that is not important. The important thing is that I had to let it go, or it would have poisoned me spiritually and physically, emotionally and mentally. I JUST HAD TO LET IT GO….and put it into His hands to resolve, if ever it would be. I took a deep breath upon this recognition and from that moment on a HEAVY burden lifted off of me even though I was left with residual sadness. I will remain open to reconciliation if indeed the opportunity comes.

We Christians are to be ministers of reconciliation, peacemakers, with understanding, tolerance, justice, mercy, kindness, and finally forgiveness if necessary, and then restoration.

These are the virtues that Jesus exhibited and asks us to exhibit no matter how we feel.

How we would change the world if we just quit being self-righteous and full of indignation, speaking of all the wrongs that have been, or perceived, to have been done to us, instead of simply giving it all over to HIM.

If indeed we are to be useful to Jesus, we must learn to be “shockproof.” How can we go out into the world and serve “the least of these” if we insist the world first meets OUR expectations and criteria? It is bad out there…you all know that. Even when confronting actual lawlessness and sin, and corruption, our hearts must be ready (just as the early church was) ready to be an example of our Lord, who only condemned the self-righteous.

In talking to my son, a police detective and SWAT team member, also Chaplin of the Police Department, often sees the darkest of deeds, and people who perform them. His greatest pain he says is when it involves innocent children.

David says he first, always attempts to treat them with dignity and understanding, but it seldom works. If their response is aggressive or manipulative…he has to immediately, move into the offensive mode. To keep his soul healthy, he does not give into condemnation, because some very bad things have brought them to where they are…at that moment.

If…there is a conflict involving us…. we have to make sure; we are not the one who accelerates it, but in as much as possible, bring it to a peaceful resolution with the potential for restoration.

Please…… listen closely to these words and act accordingly with the TRUTHS we know. No one can push our buttons if we don’t have any. Being humble which I have said before is controlled strength.

Today, the news agencies, reporters, and others rely on we Christians to generate press. It seems they know how to rile us up and by design, can manipulate us to respond with a knee-jerk reaction…creating more negative news that is our fault.

Does all this mean nothing should bother us, convict us to action, or require confrontation? Of course not, but there is a huge difference between acting and reacting, in a healthy and even godly manner, instead of an unchecked emotional response. Our goal in any situation, be it at home, at work, at play, in our churches, amongst ourselves, should be to find avenues of reconciliation. First, to bring peace within ourselves, healing, and compassion within and without. Whenever we enter a confrontation, be it personal or not, let us be certain we are not the ACCELEERANT, but instead the fire extinguisher, as James wrote and with which I started this message.

James 3:6. “And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness corrupting your entire body. It can set our whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.”

But instead, let us live out the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law” to prevent them from being what we lead with, every-day!

Amen!