

Giving Offense

This topic came up at our Vineyard prayer group this evening. St Paul and the other disciples 'gave offense' when they preached the gospel.

Let's have a look at this word with its various meanings and context. The noun 'offense' comes from the Latin word *offendere*, which means 'strike against'. An 'offender' is someone who breaks a rule, either civil or criminal, and may be punished in a variety of ways.

Can we 'give offense?' Is it better to say 'cause offense'? Deliberacy is not always meant ... She unwittingly caused offense when she made a statement'. However, when So -and-so acted offensively when they spoke out of turn, this was done deliberately. This means that a person was aware of what they were doing but did it nevertheless as they were careless of the effect it would have or perhaps wanted to take revenge or cause harm.

In this politically correct day and age, the slightest diversion of views, or the mention of certain topics, can be perceived as being 'racist' and therefore offensive. However this may be due to the ignorance or laziness or prejudice or indeed fear in the recipient. There are however inconsistencies in this approach. If a black person calls me a white person, I am not offended because I know a) it is true and b) I am secure in my whiteness. c) I consider this a description not a racist comment.

On the other hand if I call a person of colour a 'black' person I can be accused of 'racism'. Is this because of a feeling of inferiority or insecurity in the black person that I have stirred up? Just imagine a person like the entertainer Lenny Henry being told he was black. He would just make a joke out of it. Why? He is secure in his identity.

It behooves the witness or indeed the object of the description whether the words are meant pejoratively or descriptively.

As William Shakespeare said

This above all: **to thine own self be true, And it must follow,
as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.**

If they don't like what you say in truth then they must deal with it.