

THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS



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I wonder how often the way we share the gospel ends up creating unnecessary offense.

Different believers share the gospel in different ways. Some who hear the message respond to one approach, others respond

to another approach, or not at all. While it is always the work of the Holy Spirit when one believes, we shouldn't forget the root idea behind the word "gospel" is that it is good news. The Greek word that is translated as gospel often includes the idea of joy—such as in an announcement of birth. For instance, in Luke 2:10, the Greek literally says, "I evangelize you to great joy."

Mat. 11:5-6 gives us a picture of what the Lord's Servant (from Isaiah) will do: "The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them. Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." That last phrase is key. It ties in with Gen. 12:1-3 and the blessing of all the families of the earth.

Shouldn't these ideas of blessing and good news more frequently guide our approach to sharing the gospel?

We read in 1 Pet. 2 that Jesus is a cornerstone; those who do not believe will stumble over him because of disobedience. Jesus tells us in

Mat. 18 that stumbling blocks will come... but woe to those through whom they come. Paul says that we should not "give anyone an occasion for taking offense at anything so that no fault may be found in our ministry" 2 Cor. 6:3. This is a sobering verse to any serious believer.

Paul also talks in 1 Cor. 10 about doing everything to the glory of God. In verses 32-33 he writes: "Do not give offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also try to please everyone in all things. I do not seek my own benefit, but the benefit of many, so that they may be saved." In 1 Cor. 1:18 we read that "the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." And in verse 23, that "Christ crucified is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks."

Only a few of my friends who believe in Jesus have had parents or friends reject them or their faith. Why do we so often *expect* family rejection when Jews, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists believe? A recent testimony from a former Muslim that was written up in a Christian magazine serves as an example. While I don't know the man's specific situation, the subtitle asked the wrong question: Would Jesus really ask me to forsake my Muslim family?

The answer to that question is "No!" It may be that family rejection will result. But Jesus asks us to believe by faith. Any individual might expect a certain reaction from their family and friends, but couldn't the gospel be good news to his parents also, even if they don't agree or understand him yet?

What if instead of expecting rejection, he had talked to his father like this: "I told my father that he was a good father, that he taught me how to live the best he knew how, that I knew he desired only the best for me. He helped me to see spiritual things, and now I've seen that, as the Qur'an says, we should highly regard Jesus, and read the Gospels. So that is what I am going to do. My father may not understand why faith in Jesus is so important, but I hope and pray that in time he will as he processes new ideas and sees my character radically change for the good."

For many people, the reaction to the good news will in part depend on how that news is viewed and explained. If we take the "clash of civilizations" or the "clash of religions" approach, rejection will certainly be the norm.

But we are not talking about religion when we talk about faith in Christ. Jesus did not come to set up "Christianity." In our polarized world, we often add an entire "religious system" to a confession of faith. Are we really interested in people trusting in Christ by faith through grace alone?

Every new believer will have to work through his or her faith biblically. It is my prayer that more often—whenever it is possible—the good news will be communicated and understood as good news to entire families—even as the promise of blessing in Genesis 12 was pronounced on all the families of the earth. 

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