

I'm Offended! by Gene McCoy



Today's mail contained a solicitation that was abrupt and offensive. The salutation reads, and I quote, "Dear Senior Citizen." Thinking the postman had inadvertently left someone else's mail in my box, I quickly reviewed the address label. But, alas, it was addressed to me — by name! Before the product could even be presented, the decision had been made not to purchase.

Swallowing hard and taking a deep breath, I acquiesced and decided to graciously consider their message. That's when I became very offended, because it was an offer to help pay for my final expenses!! First, they tell me I'm old. Then they insinuate that my death is imminent!

What nerve! How insensitive of them to confront me with . . . well . . . stark reality! I know I'm getting older. But to call me a "senior citizen" and to bring up the unpleasant consciousness of my mortality crossed the line.

But then I was struck by my own hypocrisy. (I hate it when that happens!) I recalled the fact that my favorite restaurant always gives me the Senior's Discount. That is one reason it is my favorite restaurant! I have never asked for the discount, nor implied or insinuated that I am even close to the age of qualification. Well, unless taking off my cap to reveal my white and thinning — alright, disappearing — hair could possibly be interpreted as a play for the discount!

But I have never complained about it, demanding that they charge me the full price. I confess I have smiled with pretended pity that they would even think that I might qualify. I have figured that I

deserve the discount as consideration for their insult or their inability to accurately judge one's age.

The nature of my offense parallels that which occurs at church many times. The preacher fulfills his God-ordained duty by declaring the full purpose of God, by exposing false teachers and their damning doctrines, and by confronting people with what they *need* to hear as opposed to what they *want* to hear (1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:27). The result many times is that the hearer is offended when confronted by truth. The truth can *hurt*. But it can also *heal*.

The scribes and Pharisees responded to Jesus' teaching of truth with allegations of blasphemy (e.g., Matt. 9:3). The inhabitants of His home town were offended by His teaching (Matt. 13:53-58), and His claims to be the Messiah prompted them to cast Him out of their city, where they threatened to kill Him (Luke 4:29). The rich

young man who inquired of Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life was apparently offended by

the reply (Mark 10:17-22). At least, the Bible says he went away grieving, not liking what he heard. Even Peter was offended by Jesus' predictions of His unjust demise at the hands of wicked men (Matt. 16:21-23), whereupon Jesus had to sternly rebuke him.

The point is that our response to truth says more about us than it does about the message or the

messenger. It may say we aren't honest. It could reveal willful deception. Perhaps it just says we are stubborn. But it doesn't change the truth!

Maybe I could think of more sensitive ways the insurance company could have begun their solicitation of my business than by addressing me as "Dear Senior Citizen." But the cold, bare fact of the matter is . . . well, . . . I'm close enough to that category that clerks at restaurants are giving me the benefit of doubt. If I am going to accept the benefits, I should also accept the reality.

When the preacher declares the whole counsel of God, you may not like the part about guilt and deserved punishment. But don't reject it, because he also happily reports that God's grace is greater than our sin (Rom. 5:20) and that there is no sinner beyond the reach of His arms of mercy.

That is a message we are eager to receive. But it is good news in the context of and by contrast with

the truth that we are sinners deserving of God's wrath. The preacher must tell the whole story to be a "good servant of Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 4:6).

For the listener to be a good servant of Jesus Christ, he must accept the truth that is lovingly delivered and not reject the Lord's call for repentance and holiness. Don't be offended. Everyone who lives long enough will grow old and sin. Face reality in the reassuring realization of God's mercy and grace.

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