

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who speaks to us in the Word? Many Christians know the basic Sunday School answer: Jesus! And that is true. He speaks in the Word to us. Jesus is both the speaker and the content of the Word.

Jesus said to the Jews in John eight, "Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My Word. ... He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." Jesus says that to not hear His Word is to not hear God's Word. As the Father and the Son are one, so the word of the Son is the same as the Word of the Father. To hear the Word of God is to hear Christ speaking.

Good Christians hear this gladly. We love the voice of our shepherd. He is gracious and loving, and so is His Word. We dearly love to hear the voice of Jesus. Whatever else we may suffer for the sake of hearing the Word is worth it, because nothing is more important than hearing Jesus.

It should be that simple. But it is not. The devil comes in and wants to confuse things. The devil created unbelief in the Jews to whom Jesus was speaking. They did not want to believe that Jesus was the one and only way to the Father. They did not want to believe that there was something wrong with them, namely, sin. They did not want to believe that sin made them slaves. They did not want to believe that they needed a savior.

That is how this increasingly heated discussion between Jesus and the Jews started. They took offense at His Word because they did not like what it said. But they could not admit that they were disbelieving the Word of God. So, they aimed the finger of accusation at Jesus. He

was the problem, not them. The more He talked, the more they took offense. Those who believed in Him earlier in the chapter later called Him demon-possessed and a Samaritan, then picked up rocks to stone Him.

Note that they started out believing, but then moved to unbelief. In us as well, faith can turn to hatred of Jesus if we take offense at His Word. We will not want to admit that we hate Jesus, probably not even to ourselves. We may say it is some other person's fault. Someone was teaching falsely, or someone was too unloving for us. We may claim that we still love Jesus, but avoid His Word, if we allow the devil to have his way in our lives. Or we may go to another church where they teach things more to our liking, which would mean that what we listen to is not really the Word, but what we like.

In our sinful heart, there is a huge potential to take offense. Offense is so dangerous because it flows from a self-righteous place. It makes us feel as if we are righteous, yet we are poor, innocent victims of someone else's lovelessness. Beware of taking offense, for it is one of the devil's most powerful and most irresistible tools.

The Jews whom Jesus spoke to became more hateful towards Him as they flung unjust names at Him. But Jesus was not all that gentle, either. He clearly told them that the devil was their father. He also said that they did not honor or believe in God. Now, this does not sound loving to many modern ears. But we know that Jesus our Lord is always loving and never commits a sin. His words were truthful. He was accurately showing them their dangerous position and warning them that they had turned away from God. Surely, He hoped that they would repent. But He had to sternly warn them.

Sometimes when the Word of Jesus is on our lips, it must sternly warn someone. That does not make us comfortable. But remember

who is really speaking: Jesus. If we must warn someone, it is really Jesus who is telling them that they should repent of their sinful ways. So long as we are accurately speaking the Word of Jesus, it is not our fault if offense is taken. Jesus will always find offense among people who hear Him. They will be offended at the doctrine of sin. They will be offended at the Cross. They will be offended at His teaching about Himself.

See how the Jews were offended when Jesus told them that Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day in faith. See how the Jews were offended that Jesus identified Himself as far more than the prophets and fathers of the faith. He did not conceal the truth, but revealed Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when He said, "Before Abraham was, I Am." That Jesus is the eternal and holy Son of God is offensive to every man's sinful flesh. Perhaps it can be accepted that He is one son of God among many, or perhaps a wise teacher, or a good, loving man. But THE Son of God? That is exclusive and hateful, or so the world thinks.

But we who have the gift of faith are delighted that Jesus is the Son of God. Here is the Man who can save us - because He is more than merely a Man. Here is the Man who rescues from death. We shall not see death because we keep His Word. We do not keep it by perfectly obeying it, for no such man but Jesus has ever lived. But we keep it by believing it, because we trust in the promises of Jesus that rescue us from death. We also try to obey the Word of Jesus, and then repent when we fail. When our sin conflicts with His Word, we confess that He is truthful, rather than reject His Word because it hurts our feelings when it condemns us.

Because we have this God-given faith, we will not see death. The true terror of death, which is hell, cannot claim us. When our body falls

asleep in death, it will not utterly destroy us. For Jesus has rescued us from the terrors of death on the Cross and Empty Tomb. As we face death, we need not be afraid. We will feel some fear as we face that old enemy. But the sting of death is gone because of Jesus. Our sins are forgiven, so we have a greater destiny than the grave. We look forward to resurrection and life immortal.

So, death will try to grasp us and hold onto us, but we will slip out of its grasp. Death will try to claim us, but we will be snatched out of its clutches. For One who is far greater than death has a hold of us, and no one can steal us out of His grasp. For this reason, we are overjoyed that our Savior is true God and true Man. May we always faithfully confess His Word with our lips, whatever offense may come. In His Name and to His glory and honor alone, with the Father and the Spirit. Amen.