

# Offended, Yet Not Offended

By John R. Gibson

Pajama pants in public. Bathroom tissue hung so that it rolls off from underneath. People stopping in the round-about. Racism. Abortion.

What do these five things have in common? While the last two involve sin, the first two merely reflect personal choices or preferences, and the middle one is a danger to us all, the common link is that I find all five *offensive*, yet none of these *offend* me.

You may have stopped and read that last phrase a couple of times and concluded that I have made another typo, but allow me to explain. All the things listed above are things I don't like and would prefer they come to an end. (And I'm confident the Lord feels the same way about racism and abortion. Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; Acts 10:34-35) However, not one of these offends me in the sense that the Bible warns against our offending others in Matt. 18:6; Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 8:13; et al.

Though the English word offend is often used today to signify being bothered, displeased, or even angered, it once carried the idea of to cause to stumble or lead one to sin and that is the way it is used in Scripture. For example while the KJV warns against offending a brother in 1 Cor. 8:13, the NKJV tells us not to cause him to stumble. The offenses of Matt. 18:7 are rendered as temptations in the ESV and the NKJV marginal note has "enticements to sin." I don't like pajama pants in public, abortion sickens me, and I find both offensive in the modern usage of the word, but neither offends me in the biblical sense of causing me to stumble, unless of course I choose to become angry (Col. 3:8).

Now what is the point of this? I have three key concerns for us all to consider.

First, if we are doing things which might cause another to sin or put a stumbling block before them, it needs to stop immediately. To lead others to sin is something for which we will be held accountable. "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!" Matt. 18:5-7 (ESV)

There is a lot of judgment involved in this next part because we are not slaves to the strange notions of others, and such things as how you hang your bathroom tissue may irritate some, but are truly insignificant, trivial matters. Yet in order to maximize our influence for good we may need to minimize the number of things we do that others dislike or find offensive (Matt. 5:14-16; 2 Cor. 8:20-21). Let's all strive to be a refreshment to others and not an irritant (Phile. 1:7, 20). Of course if we are doing things that may not cause another to sin, but yet bother some people because they are displeasing to the Lord, i.e. sin, then immediate repentance is called for (2 Pet. 3:9).

Finally, how do we deal with things "offensive," i.e. troubling, to us, even if they don't offend in the biblical sense of causing us to stumble? If we are certain that the troubling conduct is sinful and not just something we don't like, we need to address it with Scripture and seek to lead them to repentance (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; et al). But we also need to realize that some Christians are misusing Scripture and without justification seeking to control others by insisting they stop "offending" us, when in reality they are only making choices we don't like. Our likes and dislikes are not the same as God's standard, but if we seek to bind them on others with the "you offend me" charge, we may ultimately be the ones who genuinely offend, i.e. cause someone to stumble because of our discouragement.

To sum it up: Do nothing that would cause another to sin. Maximize your influence for good.  
Don't confuse dislike for sin.

Unless noted, all quotes from the New King James Version.