**“Less and More”- Personal Goals for 2020**

I realize the common phrase is “More or less,” but as I introspectively reflect on 2019 and set some personal goals for whatever portion of 2020 the Lord allows, “Less and more” seems to fit better. Please understand that what follows is about *me,* and is only shared for whatever potential benefit it may hold for *you* as determined by you. So, in 2020, I want to be:

1. **Less *offended...***

Matt.15:12, *“offended”* is translated from *skandalizo,* which isto *put a stumblingblock or impediment in the way*; to *entice to sin*; to *cause a person to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust*; to *cause to fall away*. So, unless someone: 1) Actually *sins against me* (and thereby endangers *their* soul), cf. Matt.18:15 (marginal/alternative reading based on some manuscripts); 2) Puts a *real stumblingblock/impediment* in my way that *entices me to sin* or, causes me to *distrust* and *disobey* God rather than to *trust* and *obey* Him, or causes me to *fall away,* **I’m going to try not to be offended!**

Just because “that/they hurt my feelings,” doesn’t necessarily mean I have a “right to be angry/offended,” cf. Gen.4:5-6; Jonah 4:4. After all, as I read online recently, “The difference between a stumbling-block and a stepping-stone is how high I raise my foot!” So, I *can* chose NOT to be offended, and will endeavor to do so whenever possible.

 **And more *humble.***

In Matt.15:3-11, Jesus gave the Pharisees some much-needed *truth about themselves.* But because they were *hypocritical* rather than *humble,* cf.vv.1-2, they were *offended,* and ultimately *rejected,* vv.13-14.

Truth is sometimes hard to *chew,* hard to *swallow,* and hard to *digest.* Especially when it is about “me” and requires “me” to change.Humility helps tremendously. And so does being *“quick to hear”* and *“humble”* enough to consider rather than just being *offended,* becoming *defensive, self-justifying,* and ultimately *hypocritical,* cf. Jas.1:19-21.

1. **Less *offensive****…*

As we’ve just seen in Matt.15, there are times when truth must be spoken plainly, directly, and firmly. But these occasions do not provide license to be *harsh, mean-spirited,* or just plain *rude* at (all) other occasions. Note Matt.17:27 where Jesus did not want to *give unnecessary offense.* Though He could have “blasted” the tax collector with the same sound logic He explained to Peter, He took care and *went the extra mile* so to speak, *“lest we give offense.”*

I, and perhaps others, need to be less *impatient* and less *self-centered* so I can be less *offensive-* since those seem to be contributing factors. But whatever the cause(s), less *offensive* is a good thing, Col.4:5-6.

 **And more *educational, edifying,* and *encouraging*.**

These are usually, especially in our hyper-sensitive society, inversely proportional to being *offensive.* That is, if someone thinks I might be even a little *offensive* with my manner or words, the opportunities to *educate, edify,* and/or *encourage* typically evaporate quickly if not immediately. So, I need to take great care to be the *least offensive* that I can be given the situation, Eph.4:15,29-32 (certainly without compromising Truth, Its principles, or Its requirements).

1. **Less *critical…***

We live in a world of minutiae. Even our sporting events are scrutinized to the nth degree on every play (and replay). Our news cycles are filled with “discoveries” of the slightest variations that are portrayed as tectonic shifts. Our eyes (and the minds attached to them) have been trained to spot the smallest of problems or faults- oh we’re good at finding *“specks”* or *“splinters,”* Matt.7:3! As a result, we are a society that constantly looks for *gnats* and is willing to spend and be expended in efforts to *strain* or point them out*,* Matt.23:24.

I don’t want to be the kind of person who *ignores the obvious,* but neither do I want to be the one who constantly *looks for something to criticize* or *with which to disagree.*  Such *hyper-criticism* surely leads one to *hypocrisy,* Matt.7:1-5.

**And more *supportive.***

Christ is the *chief cornerstone* in the *building* of God (the *church*), and each Christian is a *stone* in that structure, Eph.2:19-22. But I need to remember that this is *stone* building not a *brick* one. *Brick* are all the same *shape, size,* *content,* and *consistency,* and are therefore easier with which to build. But *stones* vary in *shape, size, content,* and *consistency,* and are, therefore, more challenging materials with which to build… but *stones* we are nonetheless. So I have to work at *fitting together* with other stones in the building. How do I do this?

In addition to everything previously mentioned, I need to be *more supportive.* What does that mean? For me, it means to be *supportive:*  1) even if it is not “the way I would do it;” or even, 2) “the way I think it should be done” whenever possible, cf. Eph.4:1-3. In short, this means looking for (and taking) ways to *agree with* and *support* my brethren whenever possible rather than looking ways to *disagree* and *tear down*, Rom.12:18; 14:1ff; 15:1-3.

1. **Less *patriotic to my country*…**

I need to remember that Jonah had a “God’s country” attitude **that was wrong,** Jonah 4:1-11. God doesn’t have a country, He has “people” of every race and every place, Acts 10:34-35. So as much as I may love my country, I must adopt the *alien/pilgrim mentality* that it is NOT my home. I must remember that 1Pet.2:9-10 is not about the U.S.A. but Christianity…and those two are NOT synonymous. I can love and work for the improvement of my country, but CANNOT become more devoted to it than to God’s *people/nation.*

 **And more *patriotic to my King.***

While I want to be less devoted to “my” country, I want to be more devoted to my “King.” I don’t know what will happen to this or “my” country, but I know what will be accomplished by “my” King and His people, Rev.17:14! It is so easy to get caught up in “country” (and its leaders) so that we’re more concerned with what happens to it than we are about the *eternal kingdom* and its *King.* Which really comes first for me? For you? I’ve stopped (a while back, actually) posting about *politics* online. I don’t want to be known for my politics more than my religion.

**Conclusion**

**To sum up my personal goals for 2020: Less about *me,* and more *about Him* (*personally, professionally,* and *patriotically*).**

* **Less *offended,* more *humble.***
* **Less *offensive,* more *educational, edifying,* and *encouraging.***
* **Less *critical,* more *supportive.***
* **Less *patriotic to my country,* more *patriotic to my King* (and *His* people).**