

TC Ministries

Equipping the Church for the Work of Ministry

Dealing with OFFENSE In the Church

What Christians Believe Series

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Why shouldn't I be offended?



Why must I confront my offence?



Why doesn't God deal with the other guy?



What does it mean when we say, "Offended people offend God?"



If you want to know more about this topic, or have any questions about the Christian faith:

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THE ISSUE OF OFFENCE

Offence can be a great problem for many churches. Nothing quite affects a local church community more negatively than offence. Together with its close allies - unrepentance and unforgiveness - offence can be very destructive.

Offence is a condition of the heart which corrupts the soul and clouds the judgment of those deeply infected with this deadly spiritual disease. We are a people who have been forgiven by the grace of God, washed in the blood of Christ, and filled with the Holy Spirit. We have no eternal worth outside of these wonderful gifts, and we can too easily forget that it is our sin that offended God in the first place, and which Jesus came to pay the price for. We are required by the laws of grace to maintain a repentant heart and a forgiving attitude in order to keep our own relationship with God intact and functional. Otherwise God is unable to forgive and receive us in turn (Matt 6:15)!

Many churches ignore the problem of offence, hoping that perhaps God will deal with it, or it will not be a big problem. This is not always the best approach, especially if someone has had their heart hardened by offense. Jesus says when a brother sins, rebuke him, and when he repents, forgive him (Luke 17:3). If without repentance, forgiveness is still mandatory (Mark 11:25).

Offended people must address the issues through which the sin of offence is allowed to enter and flourish, and through responsibility and accountability gain forgiveness, acceptance and release.

A Brother Offended

“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle” (Prov 18:19)

Clinging to offence as if our lives depended on it is damaging to ourselves and those around us. For those unfortunate enough to be caught up in its sticky web, offence can be the identifying focus of their lives, actions and reactions constantly reflecting pain and unforgiveness. They may not even recognise this themselves.

Jesus Understands

Offence reared its ugly head among the disciples more than once, tainting Judas to the point where he was willing to let offence lead him into ultimate betrayal - an act which he later regretted but was not able to undo. When Jesus was teaching His disciples about judging others He instructed them not to look at the splinter in someone else's eye when there is a log sticking out of their own (Matt 7:1-5)!

“A stumbling block and a rock of offence” (1 Pet 2:8)

Jesus was called a “rock of offence”, often offending people, yet He was innocent of any wrongdoing, and still chose to die for the sins of the world.

Paul instructed us not to bring offence (1 Cor 10:32), but that doesn't stop people being offended. Whether the offence is real or imagined, the effect is the same.

“And coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?’... And they took offense at him” (Matt 13:54-57)

Jesus was never guilty of any wrongdoing, yet even His hometown rejected his teaching, as did Judas and the Pharisees (Matt 5:12). The same can happen with us. We may make every attempt to be unoffensive, respectful and kind, always speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15), yet offense is a stumbling block for many.

Stumbling Block

With offence being such a major stumbling block in many people's lives, it is important to have a strategy as a church for dealing with situations as they arise, and a Bible-based philosophy to place before people who find this area difficult, but who wish to pursue a healthier and more productive Christian walk.

There will always be those who choose to hold offence, and remain offended, even at the cost of their liberty and freedom in Christ.

People leave churches all the time for one reason or another, but when offence is the culprit, nothing but repentance and forgiveness will bring healing and restoration. If we can help them to realise this, and lead towards healing and restoration, we should do so.

We cannot really help an offended person by responding to their offence because at the root of their issue lies unforgiveness, and it may be that they are not so much in need of sympathy as they of instruction, or even correction.

OFFENDED PEOPLE OFFEND GOD

This is a blunt statement, but nevertheless true. Offended people not only offend others, they risk offending God, and if not ultimately resolved, incur His judgment!

They also carry within themselves a capacity to be judgmental, unforgiving, unrepentant, uncooperative and rebellious, impairing the capacity of the Holy Spirit to guide them into truth and freedom. They can also place at risk every department of the church they are able to integrate themselves into. So, awareness and discernment is required. Offended people often present as stubborn, self-willed, unyielding and difficult to deal with. The offences committed against them, real or imagined, can appear petty and insignificant. Even when they are not, it is still wrong to remain offended and unforgiving for any length of time.

Offence is such an insidious thing. It creeps up on believers with the stealth of a snake, looking for fertile ground to take root in our minds and emotions. It builds cages of unforgiveness around the unfortunate soul under its deadly sway and is, in effect, a spiritual disease. Left unchecked, offence has a tendency to seep into a church through secret gossip, tale-bearing and hidden agendas. It can certainly disrupt the flow of anointing and seriously jeopardise the long-term success of any church where offence is properly addressed.

A Strong Stance

Most communities have their share of offended believers no longer flowing in the river of God's grace, who often go from church to church in their search for likeminded souls. However, not all offended people are bad, or unredeemable. Jesus said it is in receiving and knowing truth that ultimately sets us free.

However, a biblical philosophy of love, acceptance and forgiveness should not overlook accountability for words, deeds and attitudes that may need addressing.

My wife was a veterinary surgeon for 25 years, and she'll tell you that you cannot grab a wounded animal by the tail without it trying to bite you, so great care and a degree of skill and maturity is required before tackling an offended believer.

However, the gain can be worth the effort, as many who have been delivered from such a terrible burden can testify. For those who come through to victory, and find healing and deliverance, their testimony is often extraordinary, and well worth the effort it might take to bring healing and deliverance to the offended soul.

BASIC GROUND RULES

In an ideal world, a local church should:

- ***Walk in harmony and agreement at all levels.***
- ***Offer a safe and supportive space where those who might struggle with unforgiveness or offense can find healing and restoration.***

Some basic ground rules which may help when dealing with offence, especially if we desire to be a part of the healing process of our church in dealing with this sensitive area:

- ♦ **Do not be intimidated by offensive behaviour.** It is generally a smoke screen covering a wounded and insecure person. Above all, do not be offended yourself! Most people who live with offense will try and draw you into their web by getting you to agree with them. Avoid this trap! Do not allow them to uncover a brother or sister without cause, and be on your guard at all times.
- ♦ **Do not fear confrontation.** Truth will always prevail, setting people free who want to be free (John 8:32). Be loving in the application of the process. Most people will tell you, when pushed, that they want to be, free but the proof of the pudding is their ability to submit to counsel and accept personal accountability for their actions, feelings and attitudes.
- ♦ **Be cautious accepting an accusation against a leader.** Offended people often put down pastors or leaders. Satan is the accuser of the brethren and undermining authority is one of his major strategies against the church. Offended people often operate as willing tools of the enemy, and have great difficulty in seeing their situation as being anything but right! Their faith in their deception often keeps them going against all reason and sound advice.
- ♦ **Do not participate in negative or malicious gossip.** We all participate in gossip occasionally, but if it becomes negative or malicious we may need to make a stand for truth and righteousness, or end up being a part of the problem. You may even be blamed, when you make a stand, as yet another cause of offence. This was also Jesus' experience, so you're in good company!
- ♦ **Understand your church's philosophy.** Check their stance on any situation you might have to face, and be wise and informed before you act. Perhaps you should share the issue with them beforehand.

“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense” (Prov 19:11)

We must guard our own hearts at all times and refrain from being offended by offensive people.

Dealing with offence can be challenging, and risky at times. There are those who believe that “*loving one another*” means never addressing sin or challenging someone who is wrong. It is one thing to address a friend about offense, or someone close to us, but quite another to approach a stranger or someone we don't know well, who may not trust us enough to receive advice or counsel.

We all want to see the Holy Spirit move in our midst in freedom and without restriction. A church working in harmony and agreement is a powerful conduit for the power of God to flow through (Matt 18:19-20).

At all times to be sensitive to those who seek help, who want to grow and mature in the things of God. Extend grace and comfort wherever we can, and do not compromise either our principles or integrity along the way.