

THE ABUNDANT
LIFE

LIVING THE SPIRITUAL
DISCIPLINES

WEEK 1 OVERCOMING OFFENSE

LESSON OUTLINE

1. How can we define Offense?
2. How common are offenses?
3. Common causes of offenses
4. What are the results of offenses?
5. Why should we strive against offenses?
6. The importance of not offending
7. How should one respond?
8. What does the Bible say?
9. Suggested steps to healing.
10. Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

We have all experienced offenses. Each of us have been responsible for offending others, as well as having been offended ourselves, knowingly, or unknowingly.

Often offenses are little more than minor injustices and misunderstandings. At other times, they are severe and long lasting. Sometime offenses are unintentional; at other times they are deliberate and malicious.

Regardless of the nature of the offense, the Bible teaches us to respond to this problem in a righteous manner.

NEWAYS



HOW CAN WE DEFINE OFFENSE?

An offense can be defined as "a feeling of being insulted, slighted, or wronged." It is an emotional response to an injustice or indignity.

When we are offended we often experience hurt feelings, resentment, anger, contempt, and personal outrage. Offenses are usually the result of being unfairly treated, or feeling that our rights have been violated.

The word "offense" is found in the scriptures. It originally meant a trap or snare. It simply means a "stumbling block". Offenses are anything which becomes a hinderance or obstacle to ourself or to another.



HOW COMMON ARE OFFENSES?

Life is filled with potential offenses. Offenses are inevitable. Jesus confirmed this when He stated: "**IT IS IMPOSSIBLE THAT NO OFFENSES SHOULD COME**" (Luke 17:1).

Not only do we repeatedly experience them, but we are all guilty of causing offenses in the lives of others. James proved this when he wrote, "**For in many things we offend all**" (James 3:2, KJV).

Many things can cause an offense. They can range from a thoughtless word, to a failure to greet someone. They can arise from a slanderous tongue, to something as simple as a passing glance. On the next few pages, we will consider some of the most predominant causes of offense.



COMMON CAUSES OF OFFENSE

I. THE TONGUE

The most common source of offense is the tongue: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (James 3:2, KJV).

Since none of us have reached perfection, we all tend to offend with our mouths. Occasionally, we have all failed to avoid words which have caused others to be offended.

The tongue can be used creatively or destructively: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). It is an unruly member which can inflict injury upon others: "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God . . . and with it we curse men" (James 3:8, 9).

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II. AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT

When we fail to exercise a forgiving spirit, offenses often result. The tendency to hold a grudge, nurse a grievance, or keep a record of wrongs is a common cause of offense. For this reason, Jesus admonished us to forgive: ". . . if you have anything against anyone, forgive him . . ." (Mark 11:25).

In fact, Jesus told Peter that we were responsible to forgive our brother for as many as 490 offenses in one day! (Matthew 18:22).

One of the greatest safeguards against possible offense is the willingness to forgive and forget quickly. This is at the very heart of Christian love: "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER**, just as God in Christ also forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

V. A FAILURE TO YIELD OUR RIGHTS

When we demand our rights at any cost, we set the stage for offense. **If we have not yielded our rights to God, we may be offended if they are violated or ignored.**

When we go through life expecting everything to go our way and for everyone to respect our rights, we are bound for offense. **The opposite of an unyielded spirit is a meek spirit.** It is a quality of humility and yieldedness of our personal rights which is more concerned with another's welfare.

Paul captured this thought when he stated, "*Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being*" (I Cor. 10:24). The love of Christ "*does not seek its own*" (I Cor. 13:5). God's love, embodied in meekness, is primarily concerned with others, not in demanding our own rights and way. **If we embrace this same spirit of meekness towards other, we soon discover that "YIELDING PACIFIETH GREAT OFFENCES"** (Eccles. 10:4, KJV).

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VI. A BITTER SPIRIT

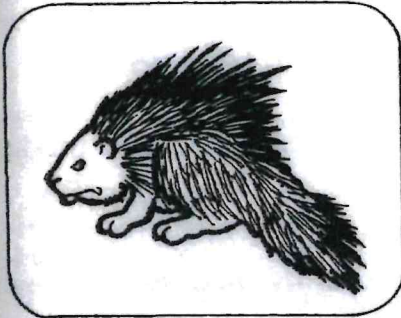
A root of bitterness can often contribute to the rise of further offense. Bitterness is a common source of continuing offense in a person's life.

The Bible tells us that a "*root of bitterness*" defiles many (Heb. 12:15). **If we harbor unresolved resentment in our hearts, it negatively effects every area of our life and pollutes our relationships and attitudes towards others.**

Past bitterness which has not been confessed and cleared up is like an open sore. It is a touchy area which causes a person to be overly sensitive and respond quickly to further offenses, especially when it is similar to the unhealed offenses from our past. Bitterness is a deadly and destructive condition which is an underlying cause of much of the offenses we experience.



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III. OVERLY SENSITIVE

Some people are just too quick to be offended, even for the slightest reason. The Bible refers to some who are easily offended: *"Immediately they are offended"* (Mark 4:17, KJV).

Some offenses are blatant and deliberate, and people are offended for obvious reasons. But too often, offenses are not justifiable. Some people are prone toward offense. **They are overly touchy and sensitive.** They tend to view every infraction as a grounds for offense. They wear their feelings on their sleeves, just waiting for the slightest brush.

It is good to be sensitive, but not so sensitive that we are overly suspicious, critical, or temperamental. Undue sensitivity is an imbalance which needs to be corrected. A failure to do so is a common cause of needless offense.

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IV. INSENSITIVITY TO OTHERS

The opposite of sensitivity is insensitivity. **Some people are insensitive to the feelings of others.** They have not learned to avoid wrong actions, attitudes, or words which contribute to offending others. They tend to be rude, pushy, and indifferent to the sensitivities of others. They often lack tact and courtesy.

This callous and sometimes belligerent attitude is contrary to the Spirit of Christ and the character of God's love. **The Bible teaches us that the love of God "does not behave rudely"** (I Cor. 13:5).

God's love is not ill-mannered, discourteous, or rude. It is respectful and considerate of the proper time and place for its actions. **The love of Christ compels us to care for the feelings of others rather than carelessly and mindlessly trampling upon them.**

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WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF OFFENSES?

Offenses can have many undesirable consequences. They can produce many detrimental side effects:

1. They generate **resentments** and deepen a root of **bitterness**.
2. They contribute to an atmosphere of **hatred, hostility, and tension** within the church.
3. They reinforce a spirit of **distrust, suspicion, and misunderstanding** among the brethren.
4. They develop an **unforgiving spirit** which is quick to see the faults in others, and equally as quick to condemn.
5. **They grieve the Holy Spirit** and quench the "*fruit of the Spirit*" in our lives.

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6. They generate **slander, backbiting, and gossip** which further contribute to the cycle of offense by involving others in the offense.
7. They build a **critical, judgmental attitude** towards those who have wronged us.
8. **They tend to harden our hearts** against others and God, and produce a **callous spirit** which rejects conviction.
9. They instill a **sense of guilt** and **nagging condemnation** in our hearts because of the unresolved sin.
10. **They create physical, mental, and emotional problems** as a result of the **inner stress** from unresolved offense.

As we can see, offenses can lead to many destructive consequences in our relationship with God and others.

WHY SHOULD WE STRIVE AGAINST OFFENSE?

★Because offenses are so destructive. They damage our relationships with others, grieve the Holy Spirit, and mar the testimony of the kingdom of God. The Bible teaches us that the kingdom of God is "... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

An important ingredient in kingdom living is right relationships with others. Offenses hinder this. They are a breach in the Spirit, and a source of discord and disharmony. One of the guarantees for maintaining right relationships in the kingdom is to diligently guard ourselves from being a cause of offense and injury to others, and in committing ourselves to healing offenses promptly when they occur.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT OFFENDING

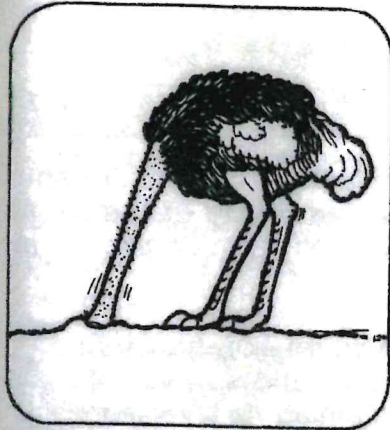
This goal was extremely important to Paul. He constantly strove to keep his life clear of offenses: "*This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men*" (Acts 24:16). He also stated that he endeavored to give "... *no offense in anything*" (II Cor. 6:3).

Paul's desire should also be reflected in our life, attitude, and testimony. It was his desire that we each fellowship this objective. This was his prayer for the church:

"... *that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ*" (Phil. 1:10).

If we also embrace this desire, we will do a lot towards preventing potential offenses.

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HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

In order to solve the problem of offense, we must not ignore it. We must respond to offenses in God's prescribed manner.

Even though offenses are a familiar experience, we find it very convenient to disregard them or deal with them superficially. This is because it is so uncomfortable to face up to them.

One of the greatest problems associated with offense is our reluctance and failure to face up to them and handle them in a godly manner. We often treat the problem like the proverbial ostrich who buries his head in the sand and simply hopes that it will go away.

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WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Overcoming offenses can be a difficult challenge: "*A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city*" (Proverbs 18:19).

The only way to heal offenses is to follow God's directions and willingly submit ourselves to His counsel. God's Word provides clear guidelines for healing offenses. Matthew 18:15 holds one of the most important keys: "*Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*"

We will examine the five steps to overcoming offenses on the following pages.

STEP ONE

"Moreover IF your brother sins against you . . ." (Matthew 18:15).

The first step in handling possible offenses is to **determine whether or not an offense has actually occurred**. As we have seen, some people are too sensitive. They tend to be too easily offended for the slightest reason. Often, minor offenses are completely innocent and unintentional.

In these instances, it is best to examine our own attitudes which may need to be challenged, and allow the longsuffering and love of Christ to prevail, realizing that *"love will cover a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8).

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STEP TWO

"Go and tell him his fault between you and him ALONE" (Matt. 18:15). If a real offense has occurred, commit yourself to approach your brother alone.

One of the greatest errors in handling offenses is the tendency to involve others. This only complicates the problem and magnifies the offense. **When others are needlessly involved, people take sides and further fan the flames of discord and misunderstanding.**

We must approach our brother privately and deal with the offense in a considerate and Christ-like manner between ourselves and "him alone". This is as strong safeguard against a wider sphere of offense.

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STEP THREE

*"If he hears you, you have **GAINED** your brother" (Matt. 18:15).*

Our primary objective should be to win our brother. We must earnestly desire reconciliation, simply because we are dealing with a brother in Christ and not an enemy.

We must not go in a harsh, unforgiving, or judgmental spirit, but in a sincere spirit of meekness and love. We should earnestly seek the ultimate restoration of the offender. **We must go with an attitude which is quick to forgive and ready to restore.**

Therefore, we must carefully examine our hearts and motives before we attempt to handle an offense.

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STEP FOUR

*"If you . . . remember that your brother has something **AGAINST** you . . . **GO YOUR WAY . . . BE RECONCILED TO YOUR BROTHER**" (Matthew 5:23,24).*

It may be that we have not been offended, but that we have offended others, or each party has been responsible for offending each other.

If this is the case, **we bear the personal responsibility, according to the Word of God, to take the initiative to go to those we have offended and seek reconciliation and forgiveness.** This requires a confession of our faults and a sincere clearing of any sin which has caused offense to another. A failure to do this will only result in a continuing offense.



STEP FIVE

In dealing with offenses, the real goal is not just in treating offenses when they occur, but endeavoring to walk in a way which does not cause offenses in the first place.

Our goals should be the same as Paul who stated: "**GIVE NO OFFENSE**, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God"

(I Cor. 10:32). We should strive to avoid any action, attitude, or word which would needlessly cause an offense to another.

To do this, we must covenant in our hearts to guard against all possible offenses before they occur. We must join with Job in our hearts and sincerely confess that, "*I will offend no more*" (Job 34:31).

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◀ CONCLUSION ▶

We have reviewed the basic steps for overcoming offenses. We have seen the importance of dealing with this problem promptly, and in the right spirit. If we follow God's prescription for this problem, we can successfully heal offenses whenever they occur.

◀ ASSIGNMENT ▶

If you are aware of any existing offense, you should commit yourself to go to the person, or persons involved and seek forgiveness. This will require a repentant attitude on your part, and a sincere desire to seek reconciliation and healing.