

Unoffendable

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"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26)

God has a new heart for us that cannot be offended, an "unoffendable" heart. Beloved, possessing an unoffendable heart is not an option or a luxury; it's not a little thing. Consider: Jesus warns that, as we near the end of the age, a majority of people will be offended to such a degree that they fall away from the faith. Listen carefully to His warning:

"Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another . . . and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:10-12 kjv)

"Many" will be offended; the love of "many" will grow cold. My prayer is that we will hear His words with holy fear.

When we allow an offense to remain in our hearts, it causes serious spiritual consequences. In the above verse Jesus named three dangerous results: betrayal, hatred and cold love. When we are offended with someone, even someone we care for, we must go to them. Otherwise, we begin to betray that relationship, talking maliciously behind their back to others, exposing their weaknesses and sins. We may mask our betrayal by saying we are just looking for advice or counsel, but when we look back, we see we have spoken negatively to far too many people. Our real goal was not to get spiritual help for ourselves but to seek revenge toward the one who offended us. How is such action not a manifestation of hatred? For an offended soul, cold love, betrayal and hatred go hand-in-hand.

People don't usually stumble over boulders; they stumble over stones, relatively small things. It may be that the personality of someone in authority bothers us and soon we are offended. Or, a friend or family member fails to meet our expectations, and we take an offense into our soul. Beloved, if we will "endure to the end," we will have to confront the things that bother us.

When Jesus warns that we need endurance, He is saying that it is easier to begin the race than finish it. Between now and the day you die, there will be major times of offense that you will need to overcome. You might be in such a time right now. Do not minimize the danger of harboring an offense.

No one plans on falling away; no one ever says, "Today, I think I'll try to develop a hardened, cold heart." Such things enter our souls through stealth and it is only naiveté that assumes it couldn't happen to us. I know many people who consistently become offended about one thing or another. Instead of dealing with the offenses, these people carry them until the weight disables their walk with God. You may be doing fine today,

but I guarantee you, tomorrow something will happen that will inevitably disappoint or wound you; some injustice will strike you, demanding you retaliate in the flesh.

The Root Of Offense

An offense can strike at our virtues or sins, our values or our pride. It can penetrate and wound any dimension of the soul, both good and evil. I once brought a series of messages about gossip. Most people saw their sin and repented, but a core group of gossips were greatly offended and ultimately left the church. When the Holy Spirit exposes sin in someone's soul, if we refuse the opportunity to repent, we often become offended at the person who brought the teaching. Instead of humbling our hearts, we are outraged at the pastor or teachers in the church. Truthfully, most of the time, I have no idea who specifically needs to hear what I'm teaching, but God knows.

Paul told Timothy to "reprove, rebuke, exhort" (see 2 Tim 4:2). He didn't say, "exhort, exhort, exhort," but exhortation is what we receive in most churches. Certainly, we need to be encouraged, but there are also times, beloved, when we need to be reproved and rebuked. Today, there are preachers who are afraid to preach truth for fear people will react and leave the church. The end result is a church of easily offended people who cannot grow beyond their inability to accept correction.

People don't change by exhortation alone. There are areas in all of us that need to be confronted and disciplined. The pastor who refuses to discipline and correct those in sin is in disobedience to God. He is unable to lead people into any truly transforming changes in their lives; they will not "endure to the end" if they cannot be corrected (see Matt 24).

We need to become a people who say, "Lord, show me what needs to change in me." I'm talking about growing up. A wise man will receive a rebuke and he will prosper. But a fool rejects his father's discipline (see Prov 15:5).

Personal Offense

An offense can wound our pride when we are not recognized for our good works or ministry. This happened to my wife and I long ago while in California. We were young pastors at a conference when the main leader decided to personally greet each minister and wife. He greeted the couple on our right and then turned to his staff to ask a question. A moment later he returned, but passed us by and went to the couple on our left.

Everyone around us saw we were bypassed. We were embarrassed and offended. But my wife wisely observed that we could allow this thing to hurt us or we could see it as an investment in sensitivity toward other people's feelings. The offense taught us how others feel when they are ignored. Do you see this? You must make that offense become an opportunity to become more Christlike.

The occasions for taking offense are practically endless. Indeed, we are daily given the opportunity to either be offended by something or to possess an unoffendable heart. The Lord's promise is that He's given us a new heart: a soft, entreatable heart that can be filled

with His Spirit and abound with His love.

Lord, forgive me for being so easily offended and for carrying offenses. Father, my heart is foolish and weak. Grant me the unoffendable heart of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Unoffendable (part 2)

“Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another . . . and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt 24:10-12 KJV).

The Sequence That Leads To Apostasy

In our last teaching we looked at offenses and examined the lethal effect an offended spirit could have upon our lives. We discussed how the only way to not be permanently offended was to attain the unoffendable heart of Jesus Christ.

Attaining Christ's heart is not a minor issue. Remember, Jesus warned that, in the last days, “many” would be offended. A wounded spirit is not the same thing as an offended spirit - an offense occurs when we do not process our wounds in a Christlike manner. Indeed, an offended spirit, left unattended and brooding in our minds, will soon manifest as betrayal, hatred and cold love. Jesus said offenses would be the ultimate cause that leads many to fall from faith. Listen well: Jesus linked the real cause of apostasy not to wrong doctrines, but wrong reactions.

Aren't right doctrines important? Of course, but we can have right information and still have a wrong response. Doctrinal information can be upgraded and refined, but Proverbs warns that someone “offended is harder to be won than a strong city,” and “contentions” between people “are like the bars of a castle” (Prov 18:19).

Yes, beware of false leaders, but more deceitful than false prophets or teachers is our own heart when it is offended (Jer 17:9). Are you living with an offended heart? If so, you are gradually slipping away from true Christianity, which is known for its agape love.

Thus, dealing with an offended heart is vital in maintaining ongoing spiritual maturity. For this reason, we need to look again at the things which offend us.

False Expectations

Unrealistic or exaggerated expectations inevitably will cause others to fall short and offend us. Some desire their spouse or pastor or friends to meet their every need. However, at the deepest level, our soul was created to find its security in God, not man. When the Almighty truly becomes our security, our peace flows from our awareness of His love and unlimited capabilities. As people who put their confidence in God, we can live comfortably with imperfect people around us.

Still, the very power of our expectations can choke out the sweetness of a personal relationship. Suppose that, instead of burdening people with our expectations, we simply learned to appreciate them for themselves - no strings attached. What if we approach family and friends with gratitude for what they are doing rather than disappointment for what they failed to do?

Suppose that a husband, instead of expecting a full course dinner from his wife each night, learned to appreciate whatever she was able to offer him? Then, instead of his failed expectation degrading into an offense, there would be a living, sincere appreciation for the food his wife prepared. I know we have arrangements by common consent, but in reality, a wife is under no obligation to cook special meals or do housekeeping. You did not marry her to be your housekeeper, but to become one with her.

Or imagine a husband who works a long, tiring job. However, his wife expects that he will work another two hours at home or go shopping with her or listen attentively about her problems. What if, instead, she welcomed him at the door and sincerely thanked him for daily giving himself to support their family? What if she met him, not with demands, but with appreciation? Perhaps she might even massage his shoulders and, because of love, have his favorite meal prepared.

You see, expectations can seem like legitimate aspects of a relationship, but they can also cause us to be disappointed and offended when people fall short. I have known situations in the past where my expectations actually blinded me to the efforts being made by a loved one. They were trying to improve in an area I was unaware of because my focus was preset upon a different expectation. I should have been grateful and encouraging.

Of course, today I discuss issues and expectations with those close to me, but the weight of my expectation is not on others, but upon myself to be Christlike and sensitive to those around me. I put a premium upon enjoying the uniqueness of others, sincerely thanking God for their contribution to my life.

When God Himself Offends Us

The fact is, false expectations can become a source of many deep offenses. However, one of the worst offenses we can suffer is when God Himself purposely offends us.

In 2 Kings 5, we read the story of when Naaman, a Syrian general, sought to be healed of leprosy by Elisha, the prophet. When Naaman and his entourage arrived at Elisha's house, Elisha didn't greet him personally, but instead sent his servant with a word/cure for Naaman. It was a simple assignment for the military leader: wash seven times in the Jordan River. However, the cure offended Naaman. Why didn't the prophet himself come out? Why this muddy Jordan? Scripture says that "Naaman was furious."

An offended spirit is an angry spirit. In this case, Naaman was beyond mad; he was furious. Do you find that you are always mad at a particular person? It's because they have offended you and you haven't forgiven them. Naaman was offended at Elisha, but

what was the real cause of Naaman's offense? Listen to his words. He said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper'" (verse 11).

Catch the phrase, "Behold, I thought . . ." In truth, Naaman was not offended by Elisha, but by his own failed expectations. He probably spent many hours envisioning the moment of healing. He even pictured himself testifying of how the man of God healed him. When it didn't happen according to his plan, he was offended.

Friends, before the Lord heals you or assigns you some new, elevated position of service, He will often offend you. Why? What is it that gets offended in us? Usually, it is our pride. We come to God desiring physical healing, but the Lord wants us, not only to be healed, but to be humble. Yes, God heals us through our faith, but there are times when our own pride keeps us from receiving the method of God's healing. The Lord offends us to humble us, so He can give us grace. Faith works through grace, but God only gives grace to the humble.

Look at how often Jesus offended people before He healed them. Once, He actually spit on the ground, made mud and put it on a blind man's eyes, and then told him to walk across town that way! Imagine if you were next in the healing line and saw what the guy before you had to do. Admit it, we each would be looking for another healing ministry, one that is a little less offensive! On another occasion He told a woman who came seeking her daughter's healing that she was an unclean dog; another time, He stuck His fingers in the ears of a man to heal his deafness. The Lord often offended people before He healed them.

If we would learn to humble ourselves in the offense, we would discover that the apparent offense was, in reality, a door that led into the manifest power of God. When Jesus called the Canaanite woman a "dog," instead of being offended, she said, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs" (Matt 15:27). When Jesus told the man to walk across town with mud in his eyes, the man didn't argue or ask for a more dignified healing; he humbled himself and came back seeing. When Elisha told Naaman to dip in the Jordan seven times, the offense wounded him. Yet, when he humbled himself, his leprosy was replaced with the skin of a little child. His skin became as a child, because his heart, through humility, became as a child.

Maybe you haven't received your healing or breakthrough yet because to walk the path set before you is beneath your dignity. Maybe you need to get rid of your dignity and go to that Pentecostal or Baptist church you've been making fun of, then ask them to pray for you. God wants to heal you, but He also wants to renew and transform you with His grace.

Overcome Offenses

When we study what Jesus taught, it is obvious that He came to make us "unoffendable." Consider: He says that if someone slaps you on one cheek, offer him the other. He said to love our enemies and bless those who curse us. What He's really doing is showing us how

an unoffendable heart of love overcomes all adversity.

We pray, "Lord, I want to change." To answer our prayer, He sometimes must put us in situations that perfectly offend us. The offense itself awakens our need of grace. Thus, the Lord precipitates change by first offending the area of our soul He desires to transform. He does not expect us to merely survive this adversity, but to become Christlike in it. Ask Joseph in the Old Testament: the "land of offense" became the land of his anointing and power. Listen my friends: the destiny God has for man unfolds or dies at the junction of offense. How we handle offense is the key to our tomorrow.

"Those who love [God's] law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Ps 119:165).

Lord, grant me that new creation heart that can walk as Jesus walked, through a world of offenses without stumbling. I want to see everything as an opportunity to pray, everything as an opportunity to become Christlike. Lord help me to interpret offenses as opportunities that lead to transformations. Grant me, Lord Jesus, the pulse and beat of Your unoffendable heart. Amen .