

Offenses: A Mess NOT Worth Making
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We're in a series entitled "Relationships: A Mess Worth Making." We've learned that even though relationships are messy, they are a mess worth making... because we are created for relationship and we need each other. We learned that messy relationships are the very thing that God can use to make us more like Him.

Today I'm preaching on "Offenses: A Mess NOT Worth Making". If there's one mess you don't want in your relationships, it's offenses. I want you to understand something very important: Jesus said in Luke 17:1

"It is impossible that no offenses should come..."

The New American Standard says:

It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come...

Jesus is saying that offenses are inevitable in life. But He isn't saying that we have to be offended or stay offended.

Yes, the opportunity to be offended is part of life. This is not only true in the church – but in all relationships – family, work. It doesn't matter where you go or who you spend your time with, eventually offenses will come...and offenses are messy stuff.

The opportunities to get offended are endless and happen every day. Even people we expect better of. Even those who love us can offend us. Especially those who love us...because the closer you are to someone the easier it is to get offended. That's what David was saying in Psalm 55:12-14:

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.

So no matter how hard we try we can't avoid messes and we can't avoid offenses. Jesus said it's impossible that offenses will not come... But that does not mean we have to hold on to the offense – He isn't saying that we just accept that fact that we're going to be offended so that's that.

Yes, it's IMPOSSIBLE to avoid offenses but it is POSSIBLE to let go of the offense. The issue is not IF you will be offended, it's what you do with that offense. Yes, offenses will come but they don't have to stay.

You want to get rid of them.
 You want to clean up the mess...not live in it.
 You want to avoid being offended at all cost.
 Offenses are a mess NOT worth making.

You can either hold on to an offense or let it go. Your choice will determine your future. Here's some biblical examples:

God gave Joseph a dream. His brothers were jealous and offended so they sold him into slavery. When there was a famine in the land Joseph's brothers come to him for food. Joseph could have had them all killed but instead he gave them food. Joseph let go of his offense and showed kindness to the very ones – his own brothers - who offended him.

Then there's David. David served in King Saul's palace. When Saul realized David was becoming successful he became jealous and offended and so he tried to kill David. Obviously David let go of his offense because when he had the opportunity to kill Saul he refused to touch God's anointed.

You see it's possible to let go of offenses. However, there seems to be a spirit of offense in the church today where people are very easily offended. The least little thing happens and they get their feelings hurt. They are constantly offended about one thing or another. Instead of letting go of offenses, they hold on to them. Either they just don't know how to let go or they don't want to let go. Outwardly, they might act like everything is okay, but inwardly they are angry, hurt and offended.

It seem to me we are in a time of perpetual offense. Someone seems to be offended about something most of the time. This is a very dangerous place to be because offenses are lethal to relationships. This is why offenses are a mess NOT worth making. You see:

If you are easily offended – your relationships will really be a mess.
 If you are easily offended – you will be hurt or upset most of the time.
 If you are easily offended – life is miserable most of the time.
 If you are easily offended – life is going to be miserable for those who are close to you most of the time. They will constantly have to walk on egg shells – worried that everything they say may offend you.

Years ago I was in a work relationship with someone who was constantly offended. I'm telling you, it didn't matter what I did, I ended up offending her. I did everything in my power to avoid offending her, but it didn't matter. She always found something to be offended about.

One time I invited her to go to a work related seminar with me. I wanted to spend time with her. I paid for the seminar. I bought her lunch. We spent the whole day together but... she was offended because we drove separately.

I didn't go out of my way to pick her up. I didn't even realize she wanted me to pick her up. Then, she didn't tell me she was offended. She just gave me the cold shoulder all day. Finally at lunch I asked her if something was wrong and she told me. We worked it out but it wasn't long until she was offended again. It was very obvious that my friend was offended. Sometimes it is obvious and sometimes it's not.

Here are some warning signs that an offense has taken place:

- Irritation
- Frustration
- Defensiveness
- Putting up walls in a relationship
- Distancing ourselves from family, friends, or church activities.

Unfortunately, most of the time we don't go to them and work things out. Instead, we just hold on to the offense and separate ourselves from the person. That's what holding an offense does... it separates close friends.

This is what happened to Paul and Barnabas. They were going on a mission's trip and Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, but Paul didn't because John Mark had deserted them once before. Acts 15:39 says:

Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated.

Their disagreement resulted in going their own separate ways. Unresolved offenses separate people. That's why offenses are a mess NOT worth making.

Here's another thing about offenses. They seem to come when we least expect it and least deserve it. We might be just going about our business loving God and loving others and out of nowhere someone blindsides us and we're offended.

That's what happened with David's men in 2 Samuel Chapter 10. The King of the Ammonites had died, and his son Hanun had become king. So David decided to send some of his men to show kindness and sympathy to him. However, listen to what the Ammonites said in 2 Samuel 10:3 to King Hanun after David's men arrived.

Do you think David is honoring your father by sending men to you to express sympathy? Hasn't David sent them to you to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?

The Ammonites convinced their King that David's men meant to harm them...and here's what the King did. 2 Samuel 10:4 says,

So Hanun took David's servants and shaved off half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle as far as their hips, and sent them away.

The King ordered his men to shave off half of each man's beard...
 and to cut off their clothes in the middle of their bottoms...
 and then send them away.
 Basically, they sent them home with their rear ends exposed.
 This was an act of great humiliation and offense.

In the Old Testament beards represented dignity, honor and authority. To shave off half of the beard was to show disrespect and dishonor towards a person and their rank or authority.

You see when we are offensive to others we are trying to strip them of their honor, dignity and self-respect. We also may be disrespecting their position of authority over us.

David's men were obeying their King by showing kindness and sympathy to others. They were just doing what they were supposed to do. They weren't doing anything wrong.

You see you could be doing everything God asks you to do...
 You could be minding your own business and just loving everyone...
 And offenses will still come.
 No one is exempt from being offended.

The Bible also says these were David's mighty men... You can be a very strong person and still be susceptible to offenses.

So when David was told what happened, he knew his men would be humiliated so he sent messengers to tell them to stay at Jericho till their beards grew back. One of the meanings of Jericho is sweet. When his men were offended David told them to stay in a sweet place.

And that's what I'm telling you today. When someone offends you...stay sweet, be nice, be kind, and love them anyway. Don't pay back evil for evil. You have to fight that devil of offense. Don't give it place in your life. Let it go! Offenses are a mess NOT worth making.

Yes, relationships are a mess worth making but that doesn't mean we stay in the mess...get out of that mess. Clean it up...let it go. And today I'm going to show you how to let go of offenses.

But first what is an offense? The dictionary defines it as something that causes displeasure, humiliation, anger, resentment, or hurt.

The Greek word in the Bible is skandalon which means a trap or a snare. *Vines Expository Dictionary* tells us that the skandalon is actually the part of a trap to which the bait is attached. Satan sets a trap so we'll stumble and the bait He uses is offenses.

Paul used the term in Romans 14:13 when he wrote-

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

The word here for obstacle is skandalon - which means offense. So, if we take the bait of offense we are trapped and we will stumble and fall...Offenses are messy stuff...and they are a mess NOT worth making.

So then why is it so easy to get offended? Let's look at some reasons people get offended:

1. Past hurts that are not healed

When we filter everything through past hurts we will be easily offended. Unresolved past hurts can also cause us to be stuck in unforgiveness, judgmentalism, in-security, self-pity, anger, fear, and on and on. This will keep us immature - spiritual infants, wearing spiritual diapers and making spiritual messes. It makes me so sad when I see people 30, 40 50 years plus acting like babies over being offended.

2. Having a victim mentality

I can really relate to this one. Because of being sexually abused as a child I grew up with trust issues. So I constantly thought others were out to get me. I saw myself as a helpless victim who was the target of the negative or unjust actions of others... so pretty much everything offended me. I couldn't let go an offense because I believed I was a helpless victim.

If Joe gave me constructive criticism I felt like he was picking on me. I would take it personally. I would think things like "Why me?" or "He lets everyone else do this or that, but not me." My feelings would get hurt and I would feel attacked. So I would hold on to an offense.

3. Unrealistic, unexpressed or unmet expectations

We think that our spouse or friends should anticipate and fulfill our every need... and when they don't we are offended.

For many years I struggled with this in my marriage. If you look up high maintenance in the dictionary you'll see my picture. I wanted Joe to anticipate my needs and meet them without be told. I wanted him to be a mind reader.

So you see when you have all these issues in your life it's pretty much impossible to let go of an offense. So what do we do?

Jesus makes that clear in Matthew 18:9 which says:

And if your eye offends you, pluck it out, and cast it from you: it is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. Jesus said if you have an offense - cut it out.

Don't nurture it and rehearse it over and over in your mind. Don't hold on to it. Cut it out in Jesus' name.

As pastors we deal with people being offended a lot. I just want to say to them "Cut it out" ... "Stop it". That's different than what Jesus is saying here, but I still want to say it. So before we can let go of an offense, we have to be healed of these issues that cause us to hold on to the offense.

So - How do we let go of an offense?

1. Let go of past hurts

This is easier said than done but if you're holding on to past hurts you will be easily offended. The only way to heal that is through forgiveness. If you don't forgive you will be constantly offended. You must release your offender from whatever you are holding against them. Working through offenses is hard but necessary work.

2. Let go of your victim mentality

You will never be free from offenses until you take personal responsibility for your part of the reconciliation process. You are not a victim!

Matthew 7:3-5 says:

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Isn't this the truth? We say things like:

"If it weren't for my spouse we would have a happy marriage"

"If it weren't for my parents I wouldn't be so angry."

"If it weren't for my boss I would be more successful."

This just keeps you stuck.

Quit being a victim and take control of your life.

Quit looking at the speck in someone else's eye and get the log out of your eye.

3. Let go of unrealistic, unexpressed or unmet expectations

It's easy to get offended when we put unrealistic expectations on people – expectations that can really only be fulfilled by God.

Some of our expectations will be met directly by God and some He will meet through other people. Either way – our expectation must be in Him.
Psalm 62:5-6 says:

My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved.

This verse says our expectations should come from God and be in God.
I'm not saying we never should expect anything from anyone.
But God is our source.

So, letting go of offenses is hard work. I really recommend getting a counselor if you feel stuck or if you're offended all the time.

But I want to close with this. Philippians 1:9-10 says:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.

We must abound in love in order to be free of offense!
We must love God and love people.
And we must refuse to allow offense to take root in our lives!

Whenever an offense has occurred there is pain. For us to get free of offenses, we must express genuine concern for the other people involved.

I've seen the greatest offenses healed in an instant when someone showed caring and compassion for the other person's feelings. This involves looking beyond a person's behavior to the pain that is causing the behavior.

So, love is the key!
The less we love, the more we are offended.
The more we love, the less we are offended.

The less we love, the more we hold on to offenses.
The more we love, the more we let go and forgive.

The less we love, the more unrealistic expectations we have.
The more we love, the more our expectations come from God.

Offences are a mess NOT worth making.

Will you let go of your offenses and choose love?