

THE DANGER OF HARBOURING AN OFFENCE



Matthew 24:10 - And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

Luke 7:23 - And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.

Have you noticed how easily people are offended? When words or actions cause someone to feel upset or offended, modern-day laws in many countries allow them to accuse and legally sue their offenders, even when something was just said in the course of conversation! As such cases are heard and judgment is given in favour of the offended one – people become more adamant to sue anyone who offends them. Regardless of the fact that there are sometimes grounds for a matter to be taken to court, Scripture encourages Believers to live differently.

A root of unforgiveness

Offences taken and kept will eventually lead to unforgiveness. Jesus Himself taught us the importance to forgive others in the 'Our Father prayer' in Matthew 6:12 – *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*. In verses 14 and 15 he also condemned it and warned us against it – *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* This is very serious and presses upon us the importance of dealing with any kind of offence!

Dr Francis Frangipane said: *When we allow an offence to remain in our hearts, it causes serious spiritual consequences. In the above verse, Jesus named three things that are the results of taking offence: **betrayal, hatred, and cold love**. In general, 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.*

Not one person can escape the reality of offence in everyday life. Offence usually does not come because of big things, but because of small things. Sometimes someone's personality or way of doing things may differ from ours, and we feel offended by it. When we allow these little offences to linger, they can quickly grow into a monster! The effects are felt in the soul in the form of coldness, disconnectedness, irritation, and a growing attitude of fault-finding and criticism. Plainly put: harbouring unforgiveness.

The occasions for taking offence are practically endless. Indeed, we are daily given the choice 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, gentle heart that can be filled with His Spirit and abound with His love.

Cultivating an unoffendable heart

Let us become aware of the condition of our hearts and purposefully develop spiritual disciplines that can help us cultivate an unoffendable heart. Here are seven spiritual disciplines which you can start to follow today!

1. Spend time in prayer and Scripture.

When you feel offended, your mind runs wild! Quickly you find yourself 'speaking' to the person who offended you in your mind. Or 'defending' yourself before others. The mind needs to be tamed and one sure way to do it is to pray God's Word.

Take verses about forgiveness and love and ponder them over. As you think over these Scriptures you take thoughts captive into obedience to Christ. Also, your character is formed to align with God's way of thinking and doing.

2. Overreaction worsens it.

Often one's first reaction when feeling offended is to respond – this can be verbally or inwardly. You can explode in anger or shock towards another, or you can play out what happened in your mind over and over again, imagining how you should have responded, spoke etc. This overreaction worsens the situation! The golden key here, before allowing your mind to run wild, is to pause and ask the Holy Spirit to show you what just happened from His perspective. It sounds far-fetched, but it is actually very possible that an offence can be stopped in its tracks if we can muster the courage to do this. Remember, you are not without sin, so drop the stone with which you want to condemn the other person (John 8:7).

3. Do not expose people before others.

When we have been wronged and become offended, it is part of our natural sinful nature to 'share our dilemma' with others. These days people take to social media rather than addressing a conflict with someone in person. Especially if you really feel wronged! Scripture however is clear – with such behaviour the world will certainly NOT KNOW that you are His disciple!

Ask the Lord to show you the person's actions from His perspective and why they spark such emotions in your own heart. Put yourself in their shoes – how would you respond to yourself if you were them? Is there perhaps something YOU did that sparked their actions or words? Allow Jesus to act as your Chief High Priest. Let Him be your defender. Allow Him to objectively point out where you could have done things differently, then acknowledge your pain.

4. Distance to pray.

In the case where an offence is constantly caused by someone near you – family or workplace – it is wise to keep a safe distance from them, especially emotionally. You do not need to view yourself as a victim of someone's verbal attacks.

In and through Christ, it is absolutely possible to be shielded emotionally from someone's continuous offending or violent behaviour towards you. However, it does not mean that you should separate yourself from them spiritually. The responsibility to pray for someone remains a God-given command. Pray for them to experience the Father's love for them. Pray this from the bottom of your heart – once a heart encounters the love of God, it crumbles and comes into its right place before God and people.

5. Ask for God's love to give you a heart of flesh towards such a person.

How would you feel if the Lord Jesus turns His face away from you in response to all you do to offend Him through your character and attitude? It would be absolutely devastating! Ask the Holy Spirit to help you quickly forgive anyone who has offended you. An offence harboured will turn into bitterness and eventually leave you with a cold despondent heart of stone. Philippians 2:13 tells us that *"it is God who works in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure"*.

Jesus knows it is challenging to love people, especially in the face of pain, but He has given us His Holy Spirit for this exact reason. Jesus as our High Priest is acquainted with our suffering and hardships (Hebrews 4:15). Judas, one of His close disciples, betrayed Him! Still, Jesus washed all the disciples' feet. Ask the Holy Spirit to work in you a tender heart, filled with humility. True biblical love is not easily offended (1 Corinthians 13:5) and *"love covers over a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8).

6. Check your heart for feelings of guilt and sin.

Titus 1:15 tells us, *"To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted."* Offence in Scripture is often connected with guilt and sin. It says that offence also comes from jealousy, thinking more of ourselves than we should (James 3:16) At first this is hard to see because you experience yourself as the 'victim'.

Ask the Holy Spirit to remove all blindfolds and blind spots within your heart, so you can discern right and wrong, true and false, pure and impure.

7. Beware of what stops advancement of the Kingdom.

Offences taken, kept and defended have the power to stop what God wants to do through the lives of others to advance the gospel. Offences have caused the closure of churches, church-attendance and ministry work. They bruise hearts and hinder God's love from flowing through us. Proverbs 19:11 tells us, *"Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense."*

Ask the Lord to show you where you may have taken offence by something that happened in Church. Do not allow such offences to cause you to leave the church without reaching out to the leadership and discussing it with them. Consider the damage and harm offence can bring to the

Kingdom work of God in your current situation. Ask for His grace to be able to pray: "Lord forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

What to do now

Will you not prayerfully consider the points mentioned in this article in your devotional times with God. Ask Him to show you any offence in your heart that may have grown into unforgiveness and bitterness. Try to write down any incidents where something happened that hurt your heart or emotions. After bringing it to the Lord in prayer and asking for His forgiveness, also pray for His healing of your heart and emotions. Wait silently in His presence until His peace floods your heart and you feel free from the pain, hurt and memory of any such offences.