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ME, OFFENDED?

It is impossible that no offenses should come.

—LUKE 17:1

As I travel across the United States ministering, I have been able to observe one of the enemy's most deadly and deceptive traps. It imprisons countless Christians, severs relationships, and widens the existing breaches between us. It is the trap of offense.

Many are unable to function properly in their calling because of the wounds and hurts that offenses have caused in their lives. They are handicapped and hindered from fulfilling their full potential. Most often it is a fellow believer who has hurt them. This causes the offense to feel like a betrayal. In

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Psalm 55:12–14 David laments, “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng.”

They are those whom we sit with and sing alongside, or perhaps it is the one who is delivering the sermon. We spend holidays, attend social functions, and share offices with them. Or perhaps it is closer. We grow up with, confide in, and sleep next to them. The closer the relationship, the more severe the offense! You find the greatest hatred among people who were once close.

Attorneys will tell you the most vicious cases are in the divorce courts. The American media constantly report murders in homes by desperate family members. The home, meant to be a shelter of protection, provision, and growth where we learn to give and receive love, is often the very root of our pain. History shows that the bloodiest wars are civil—brother against brother, son against father, or father against son.

The possibilities for offense are as endless as the list of relationships, no matter how complex or simple. This truth remains: Only those you care about can hurt you. You expect more from them—after all, you’ve given more of yourself to them. The higher the expectations, the greater the fall.

Selfishness reigns in our society. Men and women today look out for themselves to the neglect and hurt of those around them. This should not surprise us. The Bible is very clear that in the last days men will be “lovers of themselves” (2 Tim. 3:2). We expect this in unbelievers, but Paul was not referring to those outside the church. He was talking about those within it. Many are wounded, hurt, and bitter. They are offended! But they do not realize that they have fallen into Satan’s trap.

Is it our fault? Jesus made it very clear that it is impossible to live in this world and not have the opportunity to become offended. Yet most believers are shocked, bewildered, and amazed when it happens. We believe we are the only ones who have been wronged. This response leaves us vulnerable to a root

of bitterness. Therefore we must be prepared and armed for offenses, because our response determines our future.

THE DECEPTIVE TRAP

The Greek word for “offend” in Luke 17:1 comes from the word *skandalon*. This word originally referred to the part of the trap to which the bait was attached. Hence the word signifies laying a trap in someone’s way.¹ In the New Testament it often describes an entrapment used by the enemy. Offense is a tool of the devil to bring people into captivity. Paul instructed young Timothy:

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those *who are in opposition*, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and *escape the snare [entrapment] of the devil*, having been *taken captive by him to do his will*.

—2 TIMOTHY 2:24–26, EMPHASIS ADDED

Those who are in quarrels or opposition fall into a trap and are held prisoner to do the devil’s will. Even more alarming, they are unaware of their captivity! Like the prodigal they must come to themselves by awaking to their true condition. They do not realize that they are spewing out bitter waters rather than pure. When a person is deceived, he believes he is right even though he is not.

No matter what the scenario is, we can divide all offended people into two major categories: (1) those who have been treated unjustly or (2) those who *believe* they have been treated unjustly. People in the second category believe with all their hearts that they have been wronged. Often their conclusions are drawn from inaccurate information. Or their information is accurate, but their conclusion is distorted. Either way, they hurt, and their understanding is darkened. They judge by assumption, appearance, and hearsay.

THE HEART’S TRUE CONDITION

One way the enemy keeps a person in an offended state is to keep the offense hidden, cloaked with pride. Pride will keep you from admitting your true condition.

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Once I was severely hurt by a couple of ministers. People would say, “I can’t believe they did this to you. Aren’t you hurt?”

I would quickly respond, “No, I am fine. I’m not hurt.” I knew it was wrong to be offended, so I denied and repressed it. I convinced myself I was not, but in reality I was. Pride masked the true condition of my heart.

Pride keeps you from dealing with truth. It distorts your vision. You never change when you think everything is fine. Pride hardens your heart and dims the eyes of your understanding. It keeps you from the change of heart—repentance—that will set you free. (See 2 Timothy 2:24–26.)

Pride causes you to view yourself as a victim. Your attitude becomes, “I was mistreated and misjudged; therefore, I am justified in my behavior.” Because you believe you are innocent and falsely accused, you hold back forgiveness. Though your true heart condition is hidden from you, it is *not* hidden from God. Just because you were mistreated, you do not have permission to hold on to an offense. Two wrongs do not make a right!

THE CURE

In the Book of Revelation Jesus addressed the church of Laodicea by first telling them how they saw themselves as rich, wealthy, and having need of nothing, then by exposing their true condition—“wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:14–20). They had mistaken their financial strength for spiritual strength. Pride hid their true condition.

Many are this way today. They do not see the true condition of their hearts just as I was unable to see the resentment I carried toward those ministers. I had convinced myself I was not hurt. Jesus told the Laodiceans how to get out of their deception: buy God’s gold and see their true condition.

Buy God’s gold.

Jesus’ first instruction for breaking free from deception was to “buy from Me gold refined in the fire” (Rev. 3:18).

Refined gold is soft and pliable, free from corrosion or other substances. It is when gold is mixed with other metals (copper, iron, nickel, and so on) that it becomes hard, less pliable, and

more corrosive. This mixture is called an alloy. The higher the percentage of foreign metals, the harder the gold becomes. Conversely, the lower the percentage of alloy, the softer and more flexible.

Immediately we see the parallel: A pure heart is like pure gold—soft, tender, and pliable. Hebrews 3:13 states that hearts are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin! If we do not deal with an offense, it will produce more fruit of sin, such as bitterness, anger, and resentment. This added substance hardens our hearts just as alloys harden gold. This reduces or removes tenderness, creating a loss of sensitivity. We are hindered in our ability to hear God's voice. Our accuracy to see is darkened. This is a perfect setting for deception.

The first step in refining gold is grinding it into a powder and mixing it with a substance called flux. Then the mixture is placed in a furnace and melted by intense heat. The alloys and impurities are drawn to the flux and rise to the surface. The gold (which is heavier) remains at the bottom. The impurities or *dross* (such as copper, iron, and zinc, combined with flux) is then removed, yielding a purer metal.

Now look at what God says:

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

—ISAIAH 48:10

And again:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by *various trials*, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though *it is tested by fire*, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

—1 PETER 1:6–7, EMPHASIS ADDED

God refines with afflictions, trials, and tribulations, the heat of which separates impurities such as unforgiveness, strife, bitterness, anger, envy, and so forth from the character of God in our lives.

Sin easily hides where there is no heat of trials and afflictions.

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In times of prosperity and success, even a wicked man will seem kind and generous. Under the heat of trials, however, the impurities surface.

There was a time in my life when I went through intense trials such as I had never faced before. I became rude and harsh with those closest to me. My family and friends began to avoid me.

I cried out to the Lord, “Where is all this anger coming from? It wasn’t here before!”

The Lord responded, “Son, it is when they liquefy gold in fire that the impurities show up.” He then asked a question that changed my life. “Can you see the impurities in gold before it is put in the fire?”

“No,” I answered.

“But that doesn’t mean they were not there,” He said. “When the fire of trials hit you, these impurities surfaced. Though hidden to you, they were always visible to Me. So now you have a choice that will determine your future. You can remain angry, blaming your wife, friends, pastor, and the people you work with, or you can see this dross of sin for what it is and repent, receive forgiveness, and I will take My ladle and remove these impurities from your life.”

See your true condition.

Jesus said our ability to see correctly is another key to being freed from deception. Often when we are offended we see ourselves as victims and blame those who have hurt us. We justify our bitterness, unforgiveness, anger, envy, and resentment as they surface. Sometimes we even resent those who *remind* us of others who have hurt us. For this reason Jesus counseled, “Anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” (Rev. 3:18). See what? Your true condition! That’s the only way we can “be zealous and repent” as Jesus commanded next. You will only repent when you stop blaming other people.

When we blame others and defend our own position, we are blind. We struggle to remove the speck out of our brother’s eye while there is a log in ours. It is the revelation of truth that brings freedom to us. When the Spirit of God shows us our sin,

He always does it in such a way that it seems separate from us. This brings conviction, not condemnation.

It is my prayer that as you read this book, God's Word will enlighten the eyes of your understanding that you will see your true condition and become free from any offense you are harboring. Don't let pride keep you from seeing and repenting.

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