

No Offense #3: Offended by the truth

This is the third week of our Lenten series called *No Offense*. As a foundation for our discussion, we've laid out three facts about offense.

First fact: *Offenses are inevitable*.

Life affords us opportunities to be offended in every way every day.

People will say all kinds of things that are thoughtless and careless and can offend us.

Oftentimes, what offends touches on our insecurities. When we're insecure and lack confidence, we are far more likely to register offense.

And often it isn't just our enemies who offend us, friends and family members can disappoint us in this way too.

We cannot get by in life without experiencing offense nor can we get by without offending others.

Offenses are inevitable.

Second Fact: *Offenses are a trap.*

It is a trap that will handicap us and keep us from living up to our potential.

Offended people can often

become self-absorbed and self-centered.

They make everything that happens all about them.

Everyone owes him or her an apology

or some other kind of compensation,

and they seem to be waiting around for it

and so they get stuck.

When we take offense and hold it in our hearts, we're nourishing hurt, anger, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, and hatred in our hearts.

We're hurting our hearts.

We're fashioning for ourselves a heavy heart.

We get stuck because offenses are a trap.

Third fact: *We have a choice about how we handle offenses.*

When tempted to harbor offenses,
we can say no to the temptation
and not allow offense to dwell in our hearts.
And, if we allow an offense into our heart,
we can always get rid of it
by doing what Jesus said,

Repent and believe in the Gospel.

Mark 1.15

We can turn away from the offense and turn back toward
believing the good news of God's love.

Today we want to take a look at being offended
by something that we would never want to admit
we would ever be offended by.

But, it's something we are offended by *all the time*.

We're going to look at being offended by *the truth*,
especially as it comes to us in the form of *feedback*.

Nearly everybody would contend that
they're open to honest feedback, but when they say
honest feedback read *glowing praise*.

And yet, to be successful in life we need to learn
to receive the truth without being offended by it.

If we can't receive honest feedback, we greatly limit our personal development and growth.

We all know people that we have to walk on eggshells around because if you tell them the truth, they'll react poorly to it.

From the outside, we can see so clearly the dysfunction of their behavior. But, we dare not share it because we know, they'll be offended by our observation.

You know people who love their kids but are doing some things as a parent you would really like to challenge them on.
But you wouldn't touch the topic with a ten foot pole.

You know people who are smart people but are doing some stupid things with their finances.
But you would never say a single word about it.

You know people who are killing their careers or driving good people away from their organization because they overreact or micro-manage.
But you've learned to look the other way.

And you know what?
This is so simple to see in others,
and so much harder to see in the mirror.
And the longer we ignore it for ourselves,
the more difficult it becomes to see.

We need honest feedback to grow
because we all have blind spots.
You don't know what it is like
to be on the other side of you.
You don't know how your actions or responses
are coming across to others.

You may have the best of intentions,
but the impact of your actions or reactions
might have the opposite effect.

And if you can't or won't receive honest feedback,
you'll never be able to adjust
those actions and reactions to match your intentions.

If we never listen to the people around us,
eventually we'll be surrounded by people
who have nothing to say.
They'll learn to keep their comments to themselves and
we might drift further and further

from who we think we are and who we want to be.

We will be ignorant of truths
that would help us to grow and be more successful.

And there is a cruel irony to this.
The very things you love and care most about
are the areas you're sometimes least likely
to seek or accept feedback.

If you want to be a great mom,
then there is a greater chance that you'll be offended by
any weaknesses or gaps in your parenting
or any concerns that might arise about your child.

If you take great pride in your work,
you might easily bristle at any comments
that don't correspond to your own assessment.

If you want so badly to get married
maybe you're completely closed
to any comments or legitimate concerns
regarding your Prince Charming.
It is ironic that we're *most* easily offended
by feedback we need *most*
on what we value most.

We see this perfectly played out in the Gospel of John. John writes:

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the area those who sold oxen, sheep, doves, as well as the moneychangers seated there.

John 2:13-14

Pious and practicing Jewish people of that time would go to Jerusalem during Passover to celebrate the feast. The population in Jerusalem would swell in numbers as people from all over the surrounding area would come to the Temple to worship God and offer sacrifices.

The temple market was, in large measure, dishonest, as people were forced to fulfill religious obligations at the hands of shameless profiteers which is what these temple merchants and moneychangers were.

The part of the temple where they operated was called the Porch of Solomon.

It was the only place the Gentiles or non-Jewish people were allowed to worship. But they *couldn't* because of all the buying and selling.

This part of the temple should have served as a symbol to all the nations of the world that they were welcome in God's house, but these crooked traders had turned it into a circus.

So Jesus gives them some feedback:

He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area with the sheep and the oxen and spilled the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables and to those who sold doves, he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

John 2:15-16

Worse than the shady merchants themselves were the religious leaders who were behind the whole scheme, yielding huge profits making them very wealthy men; their wealth came at the hands of ordinary people of mostly modest means.

Throughout the story of the gospel, nothing angered Jesus more than the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, who, in turn, are extremely offended by his anger. So they said to him,

What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do this? John 2:18

Another translation reads:

Who the hell do you think you are?

John 2.18

Which is sometimes our favorite form of feedback.

This is in an interesting response because the Old Testament prophets had already predicted that the Messiah would one day come into the Temple and cleanse it of the very corruption that they were responsible for. So they knew, what they were doing was not right and would one day come to an end. And still they push back. Jesus answered and said to them,

Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it.

John 2:19

They had no idea what he was talking about, thinking that he's making the absurd claim that in just 3 days he could rebuild the temple which had taken 46 years to construct.

He was, in fact, referring to the Resurrection: In a sense saying,

I have authority to do what I am doing because I am the Son of God.

John tells us about this event that took place early in Jesus' ministry.

The other gospels relate his return visit, just before his death, to cleanse the temple for a second time.

The Jewish leaders never change.

Interestingly, it was their job to spot the Messiah but they were so offended by Jesus, they crucified him instead.

They missed what God was doing among them. They missed the very presence of God himself, because they were so offended by the truth.

It turns out, when we're offended by the truth, there is a lot we can miss out on.

So here are a few action steps to take.

Step One:

Think of feedback as a *present* and not as a *punishment*.
Honest feedback is a gift that helps you to grow.
It is your number one tool
for personal and professional growth.

Feedback is the breakfast of champions
for successful people. Over time, if you can learn
to listen to honest and helpful feedback,
you'll actually find yourself craving it.

To do it, separate the feedback from your identity.
No new insight or fact from another person
can change our identity in Christ. That is *who we are*.
When we see feedback as a comment
on *who we are* instead of *what we do*,
we're not looking at it the right way.

Another way to see feedback as a present
is to simply recognize that you are a work in progress.
You know you are not done. You know you can still
improve and grow and feedback is just giving you

the information you need to do so.

Also, when you are feeling *most offended*, when you're *most sensitive* to feedback, that's exactly when you probably *need it the most*. It could be your greatest opportunity to grow.

Step Two:

To lean into honest feedback, ask clarifying questions. Ask for more context.

The reason feedback doesn't always seem helpful is because its not always well presented.

People will bring thoughts that are unformed or not well communicated.

We have no control over how information is brought to us, but we can manage that information by asking questions, and encouraging the other person to make their comments more helpful.

Step Three:

Give permission to someone or a few someone's to give you honest feedback in a *consistent way*.

When feedback comes from people we know and trust, it is easier not to be offended by it.

The best way for you to receive honest feedback is by your personal invitation. And arrange with them to provide the feedback at a time and in a setting that is helpful.

There is power to inviting and receiving honest feedback. If we humble ourselves when it comes our way, we can identify the ways we need to grow. And more than that, there's a spiritual power to it.

That is what this message is all about.

Humility is an open door to the grace God will give us to confront those unpleasant truths about ourselves.

Only by being open to the truth, even if it is offensive at first, can we become the people God intends us