

No Offense #4

This is the fourth 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.

Sometimes, change or a challenge to the status quo can offend people and taking offense can be a defense mechanism to resist change.

And often it isn't just our enemies, 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 something.

They are owed 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,

(instead of dealing with it in the healthy ways we've been talking about in this series),

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.
But even if we give into this temptation
by we can release it by doing what the Lord told us to do

Repent and believe in the Gospel.

Mark 1.15

The basic message of Christianity,
the basic message of this season of Lent is that we can
turn away from offense and turn back toward the truth
that is God in our lives.

Two weeks ago, we talked about
the importance of having a proper perspective
when it comes to an offense. When we are offended
we are tempted to make the hurt
the only thing we see, but if we pull back
and look at the larger picture,
we know that God makes all things work together
for our good. God can bring good out of any offense.

Last week, we looked at times when we are offended *by the truth*.

To be successful in life, we must learn to receive the truth without being offended by it.

If we do not receive honest feedback from others, we greatly limit our personal potential for development and growth.

It is a whole different deal when we actually have a right to feel offended because someone has wronged us.

How can we just let that go?

And so we hold onto the offense because we don't feel like we have any choice. If I let it go, then somehow I am justifying the offensive behavior and denying my own feelings.

Today I am going to remind you that you *do have a choice* in how you react to real offenses.

I am going to share with you the key to the way forward.

If you don't learn to take this path, then offenses will always be a problem for you.

And the action we are talking about is something that is core to Christianity.

Every week in the Creed, we profess to believe in it

but is so much easier to *say it* than to actually *do it*.

To help us out, we're going to look briefly at St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire and a center of commerce located in what is now Turkey.

Paul spent three years living in Ephesus, developing leaders and setting a firm foundation for the Church there. Subsequently he wrote to them underscoring basic principles of the Gospel. I encourage you to pick it up and read the whole letter this week, it will take you about ½ an hour. Paul writes:

You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you use to live when you followed the ways of the world.

Ephesians 2:1-2

It turns out
sin doesn't just hurt you. It can kill you.
Sin is an experience of death.
It kills the spirit and life of the soul.
Sin kills relationships with others.
Sin kills our relationship with God.

God's laws cannot be broken.
When we transgress God's laws,
we don't break his laws,
we break ourselves.

Paul continues to describe our situation:

*All of us lived gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature
and following its desires and thoughts*

Ephesians 2:3

In other words, in doing whatever we want to do,
we've also lived unmindful of God and his word.

This is our reality before God.

We have offended God.

And God would be perfectly justified in responding
to that offense with anger and wrath.

In fact, he has often been portrayed in just that way.

But that is not what the Bible says.

Paul tells us exactly what God does with offense

*But God who is rich in mercy,
because of the great love he had for us,
even when we were dead in our transgressions,
brought us to life with Christ,*

Ephesians 2:4-5

From anybody else, we would expect a pay back;
it is different with God.

When we offended,
God doesn't *pay us back*, he *brings us back*.
He brings us back to life.

Look at this, Paul writes

*For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and this is not from you; it is the gift of God.
It is not from works so no one may boast.*

Ephesians 2:8-9

Sin brings a kind of death.
Grace brings life.
Sin is our choice: grace is God's gift.

Knowing this, it makes sense that Paul says "it's not from works so no one may boast"

because everything is a grace from God, everything that we have as a human being is a gift from God, even our relationship with Him.

It's on us to say "yes" to the relationship. God provides the path of the relationship. We had nothing to do with the path, but we have to choose to walk the path. How

do works fit in? When we say “yes” to God, we are on the hook for showing the world our “yes” through our works.

So, in light of how God treats us, when we want pay back for offenses, it is foolish and futile

There might be some immediate gratification in it for us, but long term, it hurts our hearts.

The key to overcoming offense is to emulate God’s own pattern in dealing with us.

Let me say that again... The key to overcoming offense is to emulate God’s own pattern in dealing with us.

God doesn’t pay us back; he brings us back. We read from the Gospel of John today one of the best-known verses in Scripture so iconic because it sort of sums things up:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

John 3:16

If we are to ever get over offenses,

there's really only one way to do it:
we need to forgive others as God has forgiven us.

Now the push back to offense is that if you forgive someone, you're saying what they did *didn't matter*.
Of course, it mattered.

In the same way your offense matters
and so God had to do something about it.

Some people say
I can't *forgive them* because I can't *trust them*.
They're two different things.
Forgiveness has nothing to do with trust.
You can forgive someone and still not trust them.

Maybe you push back and say if I forgive
then they're going to get away with it.
But is holding onto the offense,
really keeping them accountable?
You're the one still carrying the burden of the offense.
It's bothering you more than them, so who are you hurting?

Forgiveness is not saying it didn't matter,
it isn't about trust
or necessarily about rebuilding a relationship.

It's not about holding someone accountable.
Forgiveness is simply canceling a debt. That's all it is.

At some point businesses have to write off money they're never going to get and let it go.
They decide that a customer that owes them money is never going to pay, and that it isn't worth the energy and resources to keep chasing after it.

That's forgiveness.
We cancel debts because that is the way God chose to deal with us.

So how do you forgive someone a debt?

First, name the debt.

What did they take from you or what do they owe you?

- a happier childhood
- a better marriage
- respect

Name whatever it is they took from you.

Second, you cancel the debt.

And the *deeper* the offense the more *concrete* you need to make this. You talk to an empty chair.

You write a letter. You make up an invoice which you burn or rip up. This makes it real to you.

Third, forget the debt.

When you hold onto an offense
it takes up space in your heart.

When you evict offense, invite the Lord
into that place of your heart instead,
to heal your heart, to bring you back
to where you were before the offense.

You have every right in the world to be offended.
Don't be.