

## No Offense Week 2

This is the second week of our Lenten series all about offense and offensive behavior. As we kick off this series, I want to underscore *three key facts* about offense that form the foundation of this series.

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. Now, there are two kinds of offenses: *perceived and real.* There are some offenses that we experience that offend us based on our sensibilities, our past, or our opinions about the world and about ourselves. Offense *is taken* but no offense *was intended.* And, frankly, no real harm or injury has been done. Our pride may be wounded. our self-image may be challenged, a nerve may have been hit, but there's no permanent damage sustained. When we're secure and confident, we are far less likely to register offense; oftentimes, what offends touches on our insecurities. However, 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. Did you ever notice that 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. They spend so much time playing the victim and waiting for others to fix the offense, that they miss out on living their lives. When we take offense and hold it in our hearts, instead of dealing with it in the healthy ways (something that we'll be talking about in this series), we're nourishing hurt, anger, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, and hatred and in our heart. We're hurting our heart. We're weighing it down. 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 in last week's gospel, *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.

It's always amazing to me how often when we do a series, whatever the topic, it gets played out in my life: we do a series on money and the church gets hit with some major unbudgeted expense we do a series on emotional health and suddenly there's some disruption or drama in my family. We kick off a series called "No Offense"

and no kidding...the week started, and I was offended. Incredibly offended. And I chose to remain offended the rest of the day. I won't get into the details. I don't want to put you all through it, but I cherished that offense. I nourished and nurtured that offense; I wouldn't let it go.... *Basically, the exact opposite of what I'm telling you to do.* I'm just saying, it's weird how our series topics get played out in my life... *That's why we're never doing a series on death.*

So, today we want to look at a truth to hold onto when we are tempted to hold onto offense instead. The reason offenses can grab hold of our hearts is because they can become all encompassing. When you *are* hurt or *feel* hurt by an offense, you can come to see a whole relationship through the lens of the offense. You can come to view the whole person through the lens of the offense. You can come to view the whole world through the lens of that offense. Pain grabs our attention and focuses it. This can be good because pain tells us something is wrong, and that we need to address it. But it also brings a danger if we focus only on the pain for too long or handle it an unhealthy way.

This one truth we are looking at today, can give you a more proper perspective on offenses so that you see them in the right context. This truth could change your life. It is one we see presented over and over again in Scripture in various ways. Perhaps most clearly explained in Paul's letter to the Romans.

Paul's letter to the Romans is sometimes called "The Gospel According to Paul." It is usually regarded as one of the most important of Paul's letters. Romans gives us Paul's systematic theology or most detailed explanation and logical argument for the Christian faith and following Christ. Paul was a well-educated man of great depth and intellect, so at times the letter can be a bit dense. On the other hand, it also contains some of the most beautiful and encouraging verses of Scripture, several of which we're going to look at today taken from Romans 8, where Paul writes this:

*We know in everything, God works for good with those who love him, who are called to his purpose.* Romans 8:28

Paul says that in everything that happens to us, God works for good for those who love him. Do you know what *everything* means in the original Greek? It means *everything*. In everything that happens to us, God is working for good. *Imagine how life would be experienced if we really believe that.* Notice what it does *not* say. It does not say that everything that happens in life is good.

Clearly, there is evil in this world. There are bad things that happen to all of us that are not a part of God's plan. Because there is a difference between *God's perfect will* and *God's permissive will*. In God's perfect will there is no evil or sin. But God has shaped us with free will and once God gives free will, people can choose evil over good, again and again... and they do, so much so, that we find ourselves in a sin-stained world where bad things happen to good people.

So, Paul *isn't* saying that everything that happens is good. But he *is saying*, that in every situation, good and bad, God is working on our behalf to bring about *something* good. Anyone can bring good out of good. God brings good out of evil. God is always working for good for those who love him. Notice, however, *We know in everything, God works for good with those who love him, who are called to his purpose.* Romans 8:28 We have to work *with* him. We have to be on the lookout for how, when, where, to work with God so that he can bring good out of the offenses we suffer.

Paul continues:

*For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* Romans 8:29

Sometimes we don't get what we want, our plans don't work out; it's confusing, it's disappointing; however, in *every* situation, God is working to bring about goodness and growth in our character to help us *to be conformed to the image of his Son.* Romans 8.29 even if it doesn't make sense in the moment. That's what Paul is talking about here. When it comes to an offense, take it as an opportunity to grow to be more like his Son.

*Someone has gossiped about you.* Take it as an opportunity to be more like his Son who was called names and remained undisturbed *and God wants you to be like that.* *Someone says something very unflattering.* Take it as an opportunity to be more like his Son who was accused of some very unflattering things and yet still loved his enemies *and God wants you to be like that.*

*Someone disagreed with you.* Take it as an opportunity to be more like his Son who took time to understand others rather than insisting on being understood *and God wants you to be like that.*

In all situations, God is working for our good. He is working for our good to make us more like his Son even in our suffering if we allow Him.

*And so, Paul concludes with a couple of rhetorical questions:*

*What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31*

If God is for us, then people standing against us, or even working against us are ultimately of no consequence.

Think about it:

*He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for all, Now will he not give us everything else along with him? Romans 8:32*

God held nothing back when he sent his Son so we can trust that God will use everything in our life for His good. We're invited to accept that truth. And when we do, we can rest secure in it. We can live confidently in it too.

On the Second Sunday of Lent, we always hear the story of the Transfiguration. Jesus' dazzling transformation before his friends his divinity shining through his humanity. This revelation is meant to strengthen their faith in anticipation of the scandal of the cross. To their wonderment, the apostles are suddenly exposed to a higher reality, a more complete reality. At last, they see things as they really are. When we're offended, however much we've been offended, we're not seeing things as they really are.

So, my invitation to you is to memorize Romans 8:31 but make it a little more personal. Memorize: *If God is for me, who can be against me?* The next time you are offended by someone else and are tempted to take the offense into your heart or realize that you have harbored an offense, repeat that verse. *If God is for me, who can be against me?* When you say this, let go of offenses and trust that God is working for good in your life. Offenses never have to have the last word.