

Call to Obedience #215
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Offenses will come by divinity clashing with carnality,
but let us not create any offenses of our own.

On Being Offended

By Reimar Schultze

“And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another”
(Ma. 24:10).

In this eschatological passage where Jesus shares extensively about the marks of the end times, he said that “then shall many be offended” (in modern English: “many shall leave the church because of hurt feelings”).

What Does It Mean To Be Offended?

First of all, let us look at the dictionary definition from the American College Dictionary: to offend means to irritate in mind or feelings or to cause resentful displeasure in a person.

It seems that this is a good, common description of what happens to people when they are offended: they become irritated, resentful, and they are greatly displeased.

But a theological definition of an offense goes deeper than that because irritation, resentment, and displeasure experienced by the person offended is only a description of the effects of an offense and not that of the cause.

Christian theology tells us, first of all, that behind every offensive response is a sinful disposition of life. Sin in the hearts of people produces a resentful, irritated, upset response whenever they hear what they don't want to hear. So, in actuality, an offense, most of the time, is the fault of the hearer and not of the speaker. For one person will hear a certain truth, and he will rejoice. Another one will hear the same truth, and he will be resentful and outraged.

Wherever Jesus went, he offended people, or people were offended because of him. It is possible that Jesus offended more people than any man who ever lived on the face of the earth. Look at these following passages:

“And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour save in his own country, and in his own house” (Ma. 13:57).

“Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” (15:12).

“Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad” (26:31).

Yes, Jesus offended the people, or should we say that people were offended with him, but he was never offended himself, and he never apologized to those he had offended, or who were offended because of his words or his actions.

Now you understand that the fault of an offense is rarely with the offender but almost always with the offended; hence, rarely is an apology called for--or wise.

Consider the prophesy from Isaiah 8:14,15 concerning Jesus: “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.”

Do you get the picture? When truth is spoken by Christ, or through Christ dwelling in you, many will be offended. In fact, it is possible that more people will be offended with God working through you today than were ever offended through Jesus when He was on earth. This is because we live in the last days where offenses or hurts are at a peak. Yes, in the last days “shall many be offended” (Ma. 24:10).

When Simeon blessed the Christ child at the temple, he prophesied, “...Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Lu. 2:34,35).

It is the nature of carnality to be offended by divinity. Jesus’ words of truth would pierce hearts, and those who were obstinate and rebellious would have their nature revealed. That was always an ugly picture, and it continues to be so. Few things are as ugly as an offended person who, on top of his misery, then starts to accuse someone else for his or her hurt feelings. It cannot get much more pitiful than that.

Paul picked up the gospel teachings on offenses in Romans 9:33: “As it is written, Behold I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” Indeed, many church people want to bury the “rock of offence” and “after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Ti. 4:3). Peter also quotes this passage: “To you then who believe (who adhere to, trust in, and rely on Him) is the preciousness; but for those who disbelieve [it is true], The [very] Stone which the builders rejected has become the main Cornerstone... A Stone that will cause stumbling and a Rock that will give [men] offense; they stumble because they disobey and disbelieve [God’s] Word, as those [who reject Him] were destined (appointed) to do” (1 Pe. 2:7,8 Amplified).

Notice here that Peter relates being offended with being disobedient and unbelieving. This, then, leads us into the parable of the sower.

People Are Offended Because They Are: Disobedient, Unbelieving, and Have No Root in Themselves.

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Ma. 13:20,21). Stony hearts, hard hearts, unrepentant hearts, hearts with rebellion, and backslidden hearts are offended.

The people Jesus describes here in the parable of the sower are those who once received the word with joy, but have not endured, who have not persevered in self-denial, obedience, and faith. Hence, they have no root within themselves. They are weather-vane Christians, forever more influenced by momentary impressions than by a deep relationship with Jesus Christ. They are offended and hurt by almost anything that comes against their carnal and destitute state of soul.

No wonder Jesus said in Matthew 11:6, “And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” The one who is not offended is the one who follows Jesus in self-denial, faith, and obedience as David also said, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (Ps. 119:165).

‘Hurt Feelings’ Is a Modern Expression of Being Offended

The expression, ‘hurt feelings’ is not a biblical term, but it is what people experience when they are offended. Normally, they look for the blame of their hurt feelings outside themselves while it is really in their own hearts.

Many a person has said, "I've been hurt by my minister (or by my church) over and over again; I'll never go back to the house of God." The problem here is that the persons, when they were hurt, should have come to Christ asking forgiveness from Him for their hardness of heart. Then, they should have pressed on to sanctification where no hearts are ever offended. But, instead recognizing their hurt feelings as a need for sanctification, they used them as tracks to a bitter, resentful, and critical lifestyle, trying to make others feel guilty for their own sin. Don't let anyone put their guilt upon you.

Carnality will always be offended at divinity, and carnality will retaliate when it is offended. Retaliation could either be administered through the 'silent treatment', through withdrawing support, or through spreading evil reports or slander about a servant of God. Sometimes, retaliation can actually lead to verbal attacks on a servant of Jesus. All of this is what the Pharisees did when they were offended by Jesus.

Oh, what all people have missed, what healings for their bodies, what salvations for their loved ones and others, and what blessings by having been offended and drawn back from the work of God. God cannot and will not work through any heart that is offended because such a heart has not forsaken all to follow Jesus. It is only as we forsake all, as we come to the death of Self, that our root system will begin to go down into the soil of humility, that our spiritual branches will spring upward. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). When that occurs, we are beyond being offended.

Yes, indeed, the fruits of a heart with hurt feelings are terrible and grievous to the Holy Spirit. If, after we are born again, we do not die out to Self, spiritual growth will not begin, and we will be offended at many things.

Do not harbor your hurt feelings, neither nourish the hurt feelings of others. Don't empathize or sympathize with people's hurt feelings, for to do so is to give support to their sin. Hurt feelings are sin and should not be nourished, but they should be confessed or starved to death so that new life can come forth.

Although Carnality Will Be Offended at Divinity, Saints Will Be Careful not to Offend Anyone

Why create more trouble than there already is by virtue of the divine meeting the carnal? Yes, "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Ro. 8:7). Paul also says, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (14:21). Jesus made this statement: "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea..." (Ma. 17:27). Yes, Jesus offended many, sometimes all. Yet, he never offended anyone deliberately, for "love...thinketh no evil" (1 Co. 13:5). Jesus avoided offenses whenever possible. You must know there are avoidable and unavoidable offenses.

Jesus also cautions us not to offend those whose root-systems are as yet weak and young, or those who are under great pressure and heavy weights but, yet, believe in Jesus. This comes to us from Matthew 18:6:

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Finally, Jesus strongly stresses that we must remove the source of offense by saying, "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Ma. 5:29).

Whatever is the source of offense, whether it is a hand or an eye, a wicked heart, or a conceited or carnal heart, get rid of it. Because, if we keep nursing offenses, our future, as Jesus said here, could be nothing short of hell. We cannot afford being offended any longer. Let us put our roots down, fall in love with Jesus, and go on to sanctification.