

DEALING WITH OFFENSES

Today we are talking about something that happens to all of us – dealing with offenses. Maybe we have offended others, maybe others have offended us. This television show goes all over the world. It goes to about 170 countries. No matter where you live, how has your life been going lately? Do you have the peace of God in your life? Do you know what that peace feels like? Jesus said, “I came as the Prince of Peace but the world has problems. He said, “In this world, you will have tribulation, but cheer up for I have overcome the world.”

Do you know people who are so sensitive that when you are around them it is like walking on eggshells? Do you know what I am talking about? You think, “Oh don’t say that because they will get upset. Oops. There they go again.” You have to walk so carefully. One thing that breaks my heart is children who have parents that act like that. The children are scared because they never know if the parents are going to be mad or happy. It just makes life so hard to deal with.

What kind of person are you? Can you be easily offended, or do you know the secret of walking in love, full of God’s power? It is an amazing difference. You can change from being the kind of person you are right now to being a completely different person. Can that really happen? Can people really change? With the power of God in their life, they really can. I know they can because I am proof of it. One of my favorite things is for God to say to me, “Betty, you need to change here.” First of all I think, “Oh, I do? Okay. I don’t know if I can do that, Lord. You will have to help me.” Don’t you love His grace and His power in your life? It strengthens your weaknesses. One of the big weaknesses is are you easily offended?

(As you look at these pictures, you can see a lady offended, you can see a man offended, and just by their nonverbal looks you know exactly what is going on. You can tell they are upset, irritated, angry, and frustrated.)

What does the Bible say about people that are easily offended? Matthew 13:21 is about the seed being sown, and it says some people do not have deep roots. “Since they do not have deep roots, they do not last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems, or they are persecuted for believing God’s word.” That is one way that people offend you. When you try to tell some people what you think God is saying, they tell you, “I don’t believe that. Who do you think you are? Look at your life. How can you say that?” They offend you and hurt you.

In Luke 17:1, it says “Then He said to them, ‘It is impossible that no offenses should come.’” This means that offenses are going to come. You are human, you live in the world, and people are going to offend you. Sometimes people do it deliberately to hurt you. It goes on to say, “woe to *him* through whom they do come!” It even is talking about offending children. As parents and as adults, sometimes you take your anger out on your children. It is not right. They are not adults. Look how tiny they are. Deal with an adult, but do not deal with a child in a way that bruises or wounds them for life. Do not make the mistake of saying to children, “You are stupid. You will never do anything right. You will never amount to anything. No one likes you. You are weird looking.” Do not even do it in jesting. I heard about a lady who looked at a little child and said, “You have fat feet, fat, fat, fat feet.” The child does forget that. The little child said, “No, no I don’t.” That is an offense coming to someone and that is what I am talking about. It is going to happen to you. You cannot go through life living around people and think it is not going to happen.

How do they offend us? They reject us. Have you ever felt rejected? I certainly have. Not just for my Christian beliefs either, but for my personality. I have a real strong personality. I like to get things done, I like to move out. Sometimes people do not like that. I am not talking about where I am doing it in the wrong way. I am just talking about being me. I heard a saying once that said “Go where you are celebrated, not tolerated.” That made a big difference in my life. Sometimes people are offended, and they are offensive to you, because they do not like what you believe or what you think about things. They do not like your personality. Sometimes you are just misunderstood. You are saying one thing and they are hearing another thing. They say something back and you get offended. You might think, “They are turning against me. Why would they do that? I was just saying what I really believed.” Maybe they did not take it right and they said things back, and it hurt you.

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Did that happen to Jesus? Of course it did. Jesus' inner group did not stand with Him. His family did not stand with Him. His brothers that had grown up with Him said, "Are you going to Jerusalem and doing one of your miracles? Why don't you go down there and do some miracles?" He said, "I have to do it when God calls Me." Think about his very best friends, the ones that were the most intimate with him. Peter said, "Oh no, Jesus. I would die for you. I will be here forever." He said some other things to Jesus. But, Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan" because Satan was using Peter to get to Jesus. Think about some of the offenses that people have done to you. Look beyond them and think, "I believe that was the devil using them." Get mad at the devil, not at the people. The Bible says, "We do not war against flesh and blood. We war against principalities and powers and rulers of wickedness in high places." Learn to look beyond that.

A man named Bill Gothard said something that really helped me. He has a seminar that he has done for many years. At this seminar, he said "When someone offends you, it is for one of two reasons. It is either because God is trying to point out to you something you are doing wrong and you need to change, or God is trying to get your attention to pray for that person. By their being offensive to you, you notice them.

God is saying "You see that in them. Pray that out of their life," and you will do it. Some people are just mean. We can pray for them and pray for God to touch their lives, but in the meantime they are mean and offensive. They hurt us intentionally. It is their plan to hurt us. What do you do? Turn the other cheek, like Jesus said. You pray for them, bless them, and realize they have a long way to go. But, I am not going to be like that. In fact, you can pray, "Lord, do you see that? Help me, God. I do not ever want to be like that. Please help me not to be like that."

What about the people you and I offend? In Proverbs 18:19, it says "An offended friend is harder to win back than a fortified city. Arguments separate friends like a gate locked with bars." Have you ever been there? I have. It was my own fault, because of things I did. I did not think before I talked. I said what I wanted to say and I did not care what they thought because I was so put out with the situation. I said things and offended people and I had to go back. That is the other thing about walking with Jesus and walking with the Holy Spirit. He does not let you get away with stuff. The Holy Spirit convicts me, "Betty, you have to call them. You know you did that." When I first learned to do that, I did not want to do it. It is so hard to say I was wrong. It is hard for all of us to say we are wrong, but we all are. None of us are perfect. Why is it so hard to say, "I was wrong. I offended you and I am so sorry. Will you forgive me?"

Why don't we do it more? People may not do it to us, but we can do the right thing and ask for forgiveness. We are going to offend people.

How do you win back an offended friend? You do it by being honest. By just sitting down and saying, "Can I talk to you about something?" They might be so offended that they do not want to talk to you. You might have to say, "God, you are going to have to set it up because they are not going to talk to me."

Couples can do that in their marriage.

(Look at this picture on the screen. This couple is so offended with each other.) Does that happen in marriages? Of course it does. Why? It happens because you are two different personalities. You are attracted to each other because of the differences and you like it, and then you get offended by the differences.

How else do we offend people? By taking a stand and standing up for our beliefs, standing up for Jesus.

That happened to Jesus a lot. When He stood up for God, did people get angry? Yes, they did. They killed Him. How else do we offend others? By not taking the rough edges off of our personality traits. We all have good traits and bad traits. That is the most beautiful thing to me in the verse that says, "In your weakness I am made strong." People will let you know how you are offending them or where you have some places you need to change. You do not want to be one of those people that says, "It is just the way I am. You have to take me like I am." That is not walking with Jesus, because Jesus says, "I will take you like you are but I am not going to leave you here. I am going to ask you to change some things." Actually, it is a good way to be. You like how you have become, don't you?

How else do you offend people? Living with your relatives? You get them by blood and then you think, "I don't know if I even like you and now I have to be around you all of the time." God knows what He is doing when He puts you in a family. It is not an accident that you are in the family you are in. You may be thinking, "Now God, you really blew it this time. I don't know what you were thinking, but I don't belong here." But God says, "Yes, you do." Why would God do that? Why would He put you there? He does it because there are things you can learn there that you cannot learn anywhere else. He knows what he is doing. He picked the family you are in.

If you want to live peacefully with your family, what do you have to learn? You have to learn when to overlook something and when to call it up. It is not always easy to know which one and when to do it. I have certainly had to try to learn. I know I look like I am real bold and strong, but I have had a hard time

confronting people. I have had to learn how to do it. My pastor said he hated it so much he would run out of a building to keep from having to confront someone. He says now he loves it so much that he wants to do it as quickly as possible. That made such a big impact on me. I thought, "How could I get there? Lord, get me there." I will tell you that it has not been easy to get there, but I did and I am a lot better than I used to be. Am I the best I can be at it? No, I am not. But I am trying because true confrontation done the right way in love, speaking the truth in love, brings about great changes. It is amazing.

How else do we offend people? When we say something, and they say, "I don't believe that. I don't agree with that." Let's think about an example of offending people. Jesus had a huge group of disciples, more than just the 12 inner circle ones. He had about 72. One day they were saying, "Jesus you are so wonderful. Your words are so wonderful. You are from God and we love you. We love seeing these miracles and we love seeing these people get healed. It is so exciting and we love this excitement." Jesus said, "Great. If you won't eat my flesh and you won't drink my blood, you are not a part of me." It is said at that point many of them turned away from Him. Why? They did not take the time to say, "What did you mean by that?" They simply said, "I am out of here. This guy's a cult." Jesus went to his inner circle of the 12 disciples and said, "What about you? Are you going to go, too?" Peter said, "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of life and we have left everything to follow you."

Jesus had people that he offended over and over. Do not think just because you are full of Jesus that you are not going to offend people. You are. What do you do when you have offended someone? You name the baby. You do whatever you can to make it work, even if it takes a long time. You just hang in there praying until it happens. Sometimes the truth offends. Does it offend you? Can you offend people with the truth? Yes, you can. I know someone who says, "Well, it is the truth and they just need to handle it." I know someone else that says, "Well, she said it with a battleaxe not with a surgeon's knife." You have to learn how to give out truth. You cannot just say, "Well, it is truth. They need to get over it." You have to learn how to season your words. Think about it. Do you like meat and potatoes and vegetables that have been seasoned instead of a cold slab of meat? "It's meat, and you need meat. It doesn't matter if it needs to be cooked or not. Eat it and like it," versus seasoned meat that has been carefully prepared.

That is how your words need to be. You need to learn how to season them, how to have the right amount of salt, and the right amount of spices. You need to learn when to serve it and how to serve it. You have to learn how to deal with other people and not offend them even when you have hard things to say.

Can God use offenses in your life? Is there a purpose? Does He cause them? I do not think he causes them. A lot of people will say, "Well, that was the devil." Then the next thing you know, you might think, "That might have been God. I don't know." How does God use offenses in your life? One is to expose your heart and let you see what is really in your heart. At the time that people were praising Him the most, Jesus said "I know what is really in their heart." Have you ever wondered why God let Jesus be born in a manger where it was stinky and dirty? A pastor once said, "It was because he was born in your heart and it is stinky and dirty." God exposes your heart all through your Christian life, to cleanse you, to heal you, to restore you, to change you and grow you up. Sometimes it is to reveal needs in other people so you can pray for them.

Another reason God uses offenses in your life is because they have fire in them and they burn stuff off of you. Part of walking with God is the baptism of fire. I heard a lady say once, "Have you read that book 'Lessons from the Furnace'?" About that time, I thought, "I think I wrote it," because things were heated up and it was hard. Sometimes God definitely allows you to go through things out of His love and mercy to get stuff out of you that you are just not dealing with. You are not willing to deal with it. You are not willing to face it, you are not willing to go through the pain of change. You want to stay right where you are.

Everyone's baptism of fire is different. It comes at different points in your life. I want to give you some encouragement. Usually, after that, you will have the most wonderful, peaceful time with God. You will look back at the things that went out of your life and you say, "Lord, I don't think I could have gotten it out of me." Sometimes you have even tried really hard to get it out of you and just cannot seem to succeed.

God allows things to happen and you think, "I wouldn't wish it on a dog. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. I don't want to ever go through it again, but I am glad for what I became out of it. It was worth it."

You are going to be given the grace to handle people offending you. It is there if you will reach out and take it. It is available for you.

Another reason that God uses offenses is because it enables you to partake of the suffering of Jesus.

You might say, "Now wait a minute. I thought he did all of the suffering for us on the cross." Remember the verse about "If you are going to share in His glory, you have to share in His suffering." What is that all about? It is about identifying and working with people. All of your life, if you serve Jesus, you are going to be working with people, and people are just people. Life happens whether you want it to or not. If you want to know what Jesus is really like, and you want to really know Jesus, then you are going to go through some of the same things he did; like people mocking you and not understanding you. When that happens, open your eyes and say, "Oh Jesus. This is how you felt, isn't it? Now I know how you felt."

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There are some things you can go through that other people have never gone through and they do not know how Jesus felt, but you can say, "I do. I know what it feels like to have your whole family think you are just out there. I know what it is like to have your whole family not even want to be a part of what you are doing. I know what it is like to go through the things that Jesus went through." Jesus never took up an offense. Could he have? Of course, he could. He also never received an offense. That is where we need to get. We need to be so full of love that when the offense comes we do not receive it. However, when the same offense keeps coming up over and over and over, we need to wake up. God is trying to talk to you.

What are some examples of the ways people can be offended? It may be from someone educated to someone uneducated or bad grammar to good grammar. It may be from women preachers. Men have trouble with a woman preaching the word of God. I have to say, "I am sorry, but God has called me." One time I talked to a lady who is a mentor to me and helped me grow in the Lord. I said to her, "I don't know what to do. They don't want to call me a pastor, they don't want to call me a Reverend or minister. What do I do?" She said, "I don't care if they call you jam or jelly. It doesn't matter. All that matters is, did God call you and are you doing what God called you to do." Sometimes people get offended over racial issues or national or political issues. Sometimes people get offended through age issues. An example in the Bible is Timothy. He was a young man, and a little bit scared to be the pastor of the church in Ephesus. People were not really wanting to accept him because he was young and they thought he did not know anything. They were offended. Paul had to write to Timothy and say, "Timothy, don't forget what happened when they laid hands on you and they prophesied over you, and spiritual gifts began to happen in your life. Timothy, that was God's call on you. Do not allow their being offended with your age to stop you. Go on, Timothy."

An offense can be a stopping point. Is there anyone right now saying, "I got offended five years ago by someone in church, and I have never been back to church." That was a stopping point. You need to listen to this lesson again. I am telling you, offenses are going to come. Are you going to be a deep-rooted person that says, "The church is made up of people who are not as perfect as I think they should be, but I am going anyway." You are not perfect, so the church cannot be perfect. You are there and I am there. Be careful. I have seen so many people stop walking with God because of offenses. If you think about it, the devil probably used that to get you out of church. If you had stayed in church, you would be trained more and you would be more effective for God. Now he has you sitting on the sidelines saying this is enough, but it is not.

I have one question for you about being stopped by an offense. Did you keep growing as a Christian or did you stop? Did you keep serving God or did you stop? Do not give up.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. How does it help you to know that Jesus had reason to be offended?
2. What should you do if you've offended someone?
3. As believers in Jesus how are we called to deal with offenses?
4. How does Satan use offenses to stop you?
5. How does God use offenses to help us grow in Him?

To watch the video on DEALING WITH OFFENSES, Pillar Five, Relationship Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

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