

Travel Guide: Offense  
Bethany Assembly of God  
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**Central Proposition: You can get over offense.**

**Introduction**

For the next stop on our Summer Journey, I want to help you learn how to get over offense. I'm going to use a fence to help us think about how to get over offense. I realize that this might not be the best suggestion for travel. If you're on vacation and you decide to climb a fence that is there for your protection, you may find yourself falling to the bottom of a deep canyon or into the bear enclosure if you're at the zoo. I'm not recommending you actually climb fences, but we do all need to understand how to get over offenses.

Offense can come in a couple of different forms. Some offense is real sin against us, whether intentional or unintentional. Other offense is annoyance, an irritant, or something that rubs us the wrong way or makes us feel disrespected. It offends our pride. Either way, we're going to have to learn to get over it.

We need to get over offense because it causes division in the body of Christ. When there is offense, it's like a fence. It cuts us off from one another and, when we are not united and cooperating, the church will not have all the gifts it needs at its disposal and we won't be as effective demonstrating the love of God to the world as we should be because offense between believers does not communicate the reconciling love of God.

Offense is also painful and harmful to our emotional and spiritual state. It can be like a pebble in your shoe that constantly causes irritation. Resentment and unforgiveness can grow and, when there is unforgiveness, it hampers our relationship with the Lord, who is willing to forgive us, but requires that we forgive one another as well.

Offense has two sides. There's the offender, the person who built the fence, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and there is the offended, the person standing on the other side of the fence. The need to get over offense applies to both. We shouldn't be building offense, but we also need to learn to climb over offense. The truths from the Gospel that we will apply to offense this morning should enable us to get over offense.

And we all need to know this because we are bound to be offended and to be offensive. Nobody wants this in church. In fact, we all come to church thinking that it's the one place where we won't be offended. Of course, that's a silly proposition to start with. The Gospel itself is offensive to our culture and the sin nature, the flesh, so I hope that the preaching offends you in the spiritual sense of spurring you to repentance and growth. But let's put that definition of offense aside for a moment, and we are still left with the expectation that when we come to church, we won't be offended by other people. We expect it to be the one place where we will come and be warmly greeted, accepted, included, and feel welcome. There's just one problem with that: we're all here. We show up with all our baggage and our faults and we expect others to overlook, forgive, and we're so busy being concerned with how they treated us or didn't treat us

that we forget that they have their own baggage, faults, and limitations. And so, people avoid one another because there is offense. People leave the church because of what someone said to them or didn't do for them. Ministry is hindered because we're preoccupied with our offense.

So, if you're going to participate in the body of Christ and be effective in serving others and accomplishing the ministry God gives you, you're going to need to learn that **you can get over offense**. To do that, it helps to have a ladder, so I brought one. Let me describe to you the rungs of this ladder so that you can get over offense.

### **1. You should be humble.**

Maybe the most important rung of this offense-scaling ladder is humility. Remember, we're not just looking for tips and tricks on this journey; we want to know what the Gospel says to these matters. See Philippians 2:1-11.

- Paul was concerned that the believers should be united in love and in purpose. How do we accomplish that? Humility. Sometimes offense is real sin, and we'll address that in a moment, but often, offense is just wounded pride. When this happens, we have to respond with humility, real, hard, humility. Paul defined that humility as counting others more significant than yourself.
- And humility isn't just a rung for helping us get over offense, it's also a rung in the ladder that helps us not to offend. I'm not talking about the offense of the Gospel. The Gospel is offensive, but our attitudes toward one another shouldn't be. When we start assuming things like this is my area, my ministry, my church and think that's an excuse to treat people harshly or with rudeness, when we act as if we're too important or busy to be bothered, we reveal that we haven't yet learned to identify with Christ in His humility. He emptied himself.
- The only way to have real humility is through Christ. We'll never have this level of humility if we don't follow His example by dying to ourselves daily. If we are in Christ and walking with Him, we will walk in humility. And we all need to do it, because none of us will do it perfectly all the time. But if we are all walking in humility, then even when one of us fails, others will be there with grace, not assuming the worst, but valuing one another as best.

### **2. You have to forgive.**

The next rung on the ladder to get over offense is that you have to forgive. This is related to humility, however, humility teaches us that not everything that offends us means someone has sinned against us.

- Sometimes we get offended because of our own sin, especially our own pride. But other times, people will actually sin against us and that sin will cause offense. But even though people, even people in the church, will do things that are actually sinful to us, we can get over that offense with forgiveness.
- Before it's a feeling in your heart, forgiveness is an act of your will. You won't always feel like forgiving. Often, you'll feel like getting even. And you will attempt to justify

your unforgiveness. We want to walk in love by the power of the Holy Spirit, but we fall short. It seems that many people come to church “just as they are,” but seem to forget that other people have come as they are as well. And when we get a bunch of people together who have come as they are and we are all still learning to be like Jesus, we end up sinning against one another and offending each other.

- You can't be part of a church and expect others to forgive your imperfections and at the same time be unwilling to forgive theirs. See Colossians 3:12-13.
- When we're feeling defensive, it's easy to forget that we need forgiveness. Defensiveness makes us feel that our anger is justified. It flattens complicated situations into, “I'm right and you're wrong.” When we're on the receiving end of offense, often, our instinct is to double the size of the fence.
- Sometimes, the offense will be a straightforward sin: someone acted against you and they shouldn't have. Even then, you have to forgive. Forgiveness is love covering sin. Forgiveness is entrusting justice to God. For the Christian, forgiveness is faith that the death of Christ not only covers what I've done to others, but what they do to me. So, failure to forgive shows distrust in the Gospel.
- Reconciliation requires more than forgiveness, it requires repentance. For your part, you must at least hold out the offer of forgiveness. But forgiveness must also be received. So, if you're the one who has offended someone else, you have to crucify your pride and ask for forgiveness or receive the forgiveness being offered. When that happens, real reconciliation is possible and offense is overcome.

### **3. You need to confront it.**

Sometimes, forgiveness is difficult because the offended person is willing, but the offender isn't receiving it. Maybe that person doesn't even realize how he sinned against you. Jesus described a situation like this in Matthew 18:15-17.

- You may need to confront sin. If they “sin” against you, not violate a preference, but do something the Bible describes as sin. When offense rises to the level of sin and the sinner doesn't recognize the offense, you should go to them personally. See Proverbs 17:9.

### **4. You have to be gentle.**

You can get over offense. The first rung on that ladder is humility. The second rung is forgiveness. The third rung is biblical confrontation. The final rung we'll cover this morning is gentleness. You have to be gentle.

- Gentleness in the Bible doesn't mean weakness, or being indirect or avoiding conflict. Gentleness is rather an application of love. It's doing things in a way that tries to avoid unnecessarily hurting and offending people. See 1 Corinthians 13:5.
- The love of God leads us to diffuse offensive situations when possible. See Proverbs 15:1, James 1:19-20, and Proverbs 19:11.
- Gentleness and humility will enable us to overlook petty things for the sake of unity.
- Sometimes, we'll even have to overlook what we hear people are saying about us.

Remember Ecclesiastes 7:21-22. When we're walking in love and gentleness, we won't have to chase down everything that is said about us. We'll learn to overlook much offense because we recognize we need others to overlook our offense.

- Gentleness in the manner we respond to and relate to each other is necessary, not just to protect the weak feelings of someone else, but because we are imitating our Heavenly Father. If He wasn't gentle with us, if He was as direct as He could be, we wouldn't be able to stand it. So, gentleness doesn't make us soft; it makes us like our Father.

### **Conclusion**

If you've not yet realized it, the ladder that is built to get over offense is nothing other than the cross. We are not called upon to exercise any old humility, but the kind of humility Jesus displayed when He emptied himself of the privileges of heaven to die for sin. We are not asked to exercise ordinary, human forgiveness just for the sake of preserving peace, but the kind of forgiveness Jesus exercised when He went to the cross and said, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." Jesus' demand is not that we exercise the love of this world, which is self-seeking and self-gratifying, but the kind of love He first described and then lived, see John 15:13.

And the unity we ought to have with one another, unity that sometimes requires loving confrontation so there can be reconciliation, is none other than the unity Jesus has with the Father, see John 17:20-21. That unity with one another and with God the Father only comes because of the reconciliation gained through the cross of Jesus. Jesus is the ladder. Faith in His life, death, and resurrection, faith that includes following Him, is the ladder.

Not everyone who claims the title "Christian" has climbed that ladder. "Christian" means that you follow Christ, and since Christ laid down His life, so must you.

It's remarkable that people are so easily offended, but many of those same people do not believe that God should be offended by them. They believe they have every right to be angry with how they have been treated, and, if given the opportunity, they would certainly get even. At the same time, they somehow manage to believe that God should not be offended with them though they ignore Him, violate His moral law, reject His design in creation, and scorn His offers of love. In other words, they sin against Him and offend Him in the strongest sense. Their offense is no petty irritant, but a denial of who He is.

Then, they want to slap a title and some religious jargon on their lives and say, "I'm a Christian." God will not accept that. Your offense against Him cannot be gotten over so easily. He sent His Son to demonstrate His love for you when He died on the cross. And that cross is the only way that you can be right with God. And the cross is not just something you believe, it is a place where you follow Jesus to die. You die to your sin and yourself by faith in Christ and when you do, you discover that, not only have you died with Christ, but you have been raised with Him, no

longer to live a life in which you expect God not to be offended by your sin but in which you are genuinely pleasing to God because you are following Jesus.

Are there offenses in your life right now that need to be addressed by dying? The cross is a humbling, humiliating place. Maybe you need to humble yourself. The cross is a place of forgiveness. Who do you need to forgive? The cross is where sin is confronted. Who are you talking about rather than talking to? The cross is a place of love. To whom do you need to express the gentleness of love?