

## Giving Offense or Taking Offense

Matthew 18:1-11

July 19, 2020

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How easily people are offended by the truth. Jesus said that the world hates the light of truth, but loves the darkness of sin and error. The light of God's truth reveals their sins and errors and they seek to destroy the light. The world is not offended by the grossest of sin and error, but they hate Jesus and those promoting "the truth", not your truth or mine (e.g. God's commands as summarized in the Ten Commandments are His universal moral law; all people have broken them and are sinners condemned by God under His perfect justice; there is only one way to heaven and that is through Jesus Christ and yet there are many ways to hell; God not only loves what is righteous, but hates what is wicked etc.).

The biblical injunction is to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and yet not to take offense when you are corrected (Proverbs 15:12,32), but to be easily entreated (James 3:17). If people are offended by us as Christians, let it be the truth of Jesus Christ that offends and not our foolish pride, anger, or foul speech. As Christians, we need to have a very thick skin when it comes to not taking offense from others, but a very tender heart in not giving offense to others by our sinful words/actions.

Jesus teaches us from our text that we are not to give offense to one another. Others may take offense at what is faithful and true, but let us not give offense by our own sin or error. The main points are: (1) Be Not Stumbling Blocks to Christ's Little Ones (Matthew 18:1-7); (2) Be Not Stumbling Blocks to Yourself (Matthew 18:8-11).

### I. Be Not Stumbling Blocks to Christ's Little Ones (Matthew 18:1-7).

A. In Matthew 18:1-7, the Lord had rebuked the disciples for their proud and foolish debate among themselves as to who should be the greatest in the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:46). Rather than hiding in shame they expose their pride to Jesus when Jesus asks them what they were arguing about as they walked on the road (Mark 9:33). There are three questions from these verses that that I would ask in seeking to understand what the Lord here teaches.

1. What does it mean to "offend" in Matthew 18:6?

a. Does it simply mean to say or to do something that someone else does not like or appreciate? No, this is not the biblical meaning of offend; otherwise we would never be able to speak the truth or live a holy life before others. For many people neither like nor appreciate words of truth (even when spoken in love and humility). To offend (according to the Bible) means to throw some sin or error in one's path so that it hinders that person from coming to Christ or growing in Christ. It is to throw a stumbling block in the path of others over which they trip and fall, thus impeding their coming to Christ or growing in Christ. That is an offense. To speak the truth in love is not an offense.

b. The word "offend" comes from the Greek word (*scandalizo*), which means to stumble or to fall. If you become angry and defensive over some sin that is brought to your attention in love by your husband or wife, you have not been biblically offended. You may have taken offense unnecessarily, but no offense was given to you. In such a case, it is not the giver but rather the receiver that has sinned (Matthew 15:12). It is your own pride that has offended you and will not be corrected and keeps you from coming to Christ or growing in Him. However, if the truth is not given in love, but in pride or anger, then by your attitude and behavior you give offense to another (Galatians 6:1).

2. The second question to be answered in this passage is: Who are the "little ones" to whom Christ refers in Matthew 18:6?

a. These are those who are represented by the child Christ set before them (Matthew 18:2-5). The child represents a believer who recognizes his own helplessness (like a child), and looks in faith to the Lord to rescue him Mark 9:42 (even the weakest of believers). Though using a child here as an object lesson, Jesus is saying that a characteristic of all Christians is to be like a child who depends upon his parents.

b. Thus, the disciples were being warned not to offend one another in casting a stumbling block before them for that would be hindering their growth in Christ by means of their foolish pride and jealousy in wanting to be the greatest among the disciples.

3. The third question to be asked from these verses is this: Is this truly a serious matter to the Lord?

a. If there is any doubt as to how serious Jesus takes this sin of giving offense, consider that the Lord declares that it would be better for one who will not repent of this sin to be drowned in the sea with a millstone hung around his neck (which was a form of punishment practiced by various nations at that time). We might take our offenses against one another (especially in the home) as being insignificant, but Jesus takes them very seriously. This is a very sober warning.

b. Does this mean that one who is justified by faith alone can fall under the condemning wrath of God in hell? Absolutely not! We all are guilty of having caused offense to fellow believers by way of our own sins. But the true Christian removes offenses, whereas the hypocrite does not seek to remove the offense but rather keeps that stumbling block of sin or error in the path of others.

## II. Be Not Stumbling Blocks to Your Own Self (Matthew 18:8-11).

A. You are not only not to place stumbling blocks before others, you are not even to place stumbling blocks to sin before yourself. For you will not care about offending and hindering the growth of others if you have no concern about offending and hindering your own growth in Christ. However, if you are careful not to throw up temptations to sin that would hinder your own growth in Christ, you will more likely be careful in avoiding the same sin with others.

B. In Matthew 18:8-9, the Lord uses three members of your body that may offend you and cause you to stumble: the hand and foot (verse 8), and the eye (verse 9).

1. The Lord is not literally commanding you to amputate your hand or foot, or to gouge out your eye that leads you to sin. A hand, a foot, and an eye are figures of speech which represent those things which are very dear and highly valuable to you in this life. Thus, the Lord says even if that which is dear and most precious in this life should continually lead you into sin, it is better to be without it in this life and to enjoy the glories of heaven, than to be with it in this life and to endure the eternal torment of hell.

2. The Lord is calling you to see that there is nothing in this life that ought to be as dear and precious to you as the Lord Jesus; for Jesus is your life, your righteousness, your salvation, your hope, your peace, your strength, and your contentment. Even if it should seem that you must give up everything in this life in order to follow Christ (even your own life), the Lord says it is a sacrifice worth making.

3. Jesus is not necessarily calling you to forsake your job if you have made an idol of it, or to leave your family if you have loved it more than you have loved Christ, or to give up all of your possessions if you have placed your confidence in them rather than in Christ. However, what this text does plainly command you to do is to cut off **all idolatrous love** for the people and the things of this life which offend you in leading you away from Christ and hindering your growth in Christ. Thus, the love of the things of this world (worldliness) which lead you to compromise what is faithful and true and which rob Jesus of that place of "first love" in your life, ought to be cut off, for they are an offense and stumbling block to you.

4. When your love for peace and the applause of others would tempt you to join with

family in the celebration of Christmas, or would lead you to break the Sabbath, or to attend the services of ministers who teach unsound doctrine, Jesus says cut off that immoderate love for peace and that excessive love for the applause of others—it is hindering your growth in Jesus Christ.

5. When what you look at in magazines, television, or the internet tempts you to lust, you must cut off that lust by denying yourself access to that which is immoral, for it is leading you away from the Lord Jesus Christ and His commandments rather than to Him.

6. The Lord uses very graphic terms here to describe the pain that will be involved as you separate yourselves from that which offends you and leads you away from Christ. It's like an amputation of the hand or foot, or like the gouging out of the eye. Remember that when this was spoken, anesthesia and surgical methods were quite crude in comparison to what we now have. Thus, even as this figure of speech is painful, how much more painful it will be to cut off addictions to certain sins—those cherished secret sins that no one else know about. It will be like a knife cutting through flesh and bone. For old sinful habits will not die easily. You will struggle. You will fall, but you will get up again and again by God's grace. You will seek Christ and repent. He will forgive. His grace will prove more than sufficient. His mercy will never end. Because He has conquered all His and your enemies in His death and resurrection, you will overcome and will not lose hope by His grace (that is itself a victory—namely, that you continue to fight the good fight of faith).

7. What besetting sins must you mortify by the grace of God? Pride, self-centeredness, rivalry, trusting in yourself, contention, sinful anger, loving the applause of men, lust, unbelief, fear, discontentment, a love for family, friends, money, job, house and pleasures of this life that is greater than your love for Jesus Christ? How do you know whether you love these earthly things more than Jesus? How do you follow when there is a conflict between Jesus and family, between Christ's commandments and your pleasures? When Jesus and His truth takes second place to anyone or anything else, that is a love that is greater than your love for Jesus and Jesus says it must be cut off by confession, repentance, trusting in Jesus to be both Savior and Lord. There is abundant grace to the believer in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is not possible in our own mere strength, but it is not only possible but a certainty to all who are in Christ—not without struggle (as Paul says in Romans 7), but nevertheless, a struggle that Jesus will give you the grace to overcome when you take these matters seriously.

C. The Lord draws a contrast here between the reward of eternal life for the believer who evidences faith in Jesus by taking up his/her cross, denying himself/herself, and following Christ, and between the reward of eternal hell for the unbeliever who evidences his/her unbelief by choosing the loves and pleasures in this life over Christ. It is the hope of heaven that sweetens the crosses on earth. We must reflect often upon what is at stake: heaven or hell—perfect joy or eternal torment. The true believer is one who looks to the reward of heaven and by faith in Christ and love for Him cuts off those offenses. The believer cares about such offenses and takes them seriously. The unbeliever doesn't care about such offenses and is cast into hell. Which are you? Do you care about these offenses? If so, what are you doing about them to remove them? Flee to Jesus, dear ones. His resurrection power is yours who trust in Him.

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