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Why Christians offended easily? #1

2012-03-24, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

Why do Christians get offended easier than any other group of people?

To get to the answer we have to get into the Word, and then state what people actually do rather than obey the Word, and then we can get down to the core reason Christians are so easily offended and are so willing to cast off relationships in Christ in offense. I think you'll be surprised at the answer.

We've all seen it or been the victim, or maybe even the perpetrator - a Christian known in person, print, TV or cd, believes something or says something that offends a person, and suddenly they are tossed aside with a curled lip like they sniffed a carton of milk that was two weeks past its due date.

Why are Christians so quick to cut people out of their lives? Why do pastors say 'If you leave our church you (take your choice)...have a demon, open yourself to demons because you have no covering, aren't in the will of God, some disaster will befall you' - and therefore people are forbidden to talk to or socialize with them, or even acknowledge them in public?

Why is it alot of non-Christians act more Christian than Christians? I've often been amazed how people in their work relationships continue to work around difficult people, putting up with all sorts of jerks for money's sake day after day. Yet let a brother or sister believe differently than they; an instant severing of any ties!

How much higher in priority and importance are relationships in Christ - based on the blood of Jesus. Yet how lowly we value them....do we have that luxury? The days ahead will reveal the relationships we have in Christ will be the most important things we possess.

Let's start at the beginning

Let's go back in time to the first century, where we left off last week: A time where some Christians insisted they eat only veggies, some said it is OK to drink wine while others said no, some said Saturday is the day to worship while others said Sunday, some said they should honor the Jewish festivals while others had no interest, and still others ate meat that had been sacrificed to idols, while others wouldn't think of doing such a thing!

Let's take Mr. Average Christian of the day and make him of 'weaker faith', to quote Paul; How would he react to the meat eater, wine drinker, idol meat eater, and not a Jewish Sabbath or festival observer?

If he lived in our day, he'd feel righteous indignation against his brethren who don't see God through the same colored glasses as he, and feel right before God in cutting all ties with that person because there is plenty of teaching on the web of others who believe like him. He'd walk away smug in his mind that he had deeper revelation, was more mature, and justified in feeling that person sorely disappointed them. In short, he would cut them off with good reason. Would the Lord agree though?

Conditions for cutting ties with other Christians

"I urge you brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way, that are contrary to the sound teaching you have learned, who serve their own appetites and not the Lord. Keep away from them." Romans 16:17

"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and dishonest, or idolaters. You would have to leave this world to do that. I'm writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is in fact sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or dishonest." I Cor 5: 9-11

Elsewhere Paul speaks of those who draw people away after themselves and the need to confront them thus protecting the flock, gossipers and deceivers who go from house to house (church and house) spreading rumors and division and sowing strife, who need to be confronted and stopped (Acts 20:29, I Timothy 4:7, Titus 1:10-11)

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus, and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and word studies that results in envy, strife, malicious talk, suspicions, and constant friction between people whose minds have been corrupted, and some even robbed of the truth to the point they think that godliness is a means to financial wealth. From such withdraw yourself." I Timothy 6:3-5

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Can you see a pattern?

There is no place in the Word that says to break off relationships with people because they eat meat and you don't, or they drink wine and you don't, or they worship on Sunday and you on Saturday, or you observe the Jewish festivals and you don't. In those cases, as covered last week, Paul said make allowances and walk in love with each other.

In our day Paul might include there is no reason to break off relationships with others because they go to 'that church' or they....hurt me, wounded my pride, didn't let me talk, I wasn't appointed committee head, were on the side that voted the new sanctuary carpet would be blue instead of green, doesn't accept Bishop _____, doesn't believe mass prayer in a stadium is going to change the nation, etc.

The next layer down

The next layer down, the layer just atop the core reason - is idolatry. You read correctly. Those who get offended so easily and are quick to separate themselves from others because they get offended, are idolaters. An idol is anything worshipped or held in higher esteem than God. Another way to think of it is something held dear that is placed between you and God.

Think of the Pharisees in Jesus' time - They esteemed their law and what they thought God wanted more than the actual written Word. They were idolaters. They pulled scriptures out of context, built a series of conclusions based on that incorrect understanding, and valued that higher in their minds than what the OT actually said. They were angry at Jesus for placing the scriptures in original context and intent - fighting to justify their beliefs.

That placing of their pride and their pet doctrines above the balance of the whole Word, was idolatry. It came between them and God. They got to the point they could not function in a group of people who were outside their pet doctrines, thus became islands while surrounded by people - they had no idea how to function in a group setting and in the larger culture around them; separated from society and potential friends.

And now we get to the real core: Their faith was not in God, but in their carefully constructed pet doctrines and ideas of who God was and what they thought He wanted. Anything outside that offended them.

There are Christians who know the Lord, barely, but they've never gone beyond getting saved, choosing rather to build a framework of beliefs of who God is and what He wants, thinking knowledge equals maturity (wrong), so amass knowledge in areas of specialty in order to protect themselves from getting hurt by the changes they know God would require for them to be Christ-like.

Their construct of God is safe, familiar, comfortable, and they will rail against anyone who attempts to challenge their carefully built walls of what they believe. Thinking themselves mature, they are actually what Paul said in I Corinthians 3:3 of those who took offense because someone liked Paul's teaching and others liked Apollos better, and each group was offended at the other - he said they were infants in Christ as they were acting like mere (non-born again) humans as they were in strife.

So...this lays a ground work why Christians use petty, no-real-reason reasons to separate from fellowship. For some, it is easier to be an idolater and not truly know and grow in Christ, than it is to lay aside the baby stage of hiding behind knowledge and truly mature both as people and as people in Christ and a larger community of like-minded believers.

And that's where we pick it up next week - and how to change a lifestyle of offense to maturity.

Blessings,
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Why Christians offended easily? # 2

2012-03-31, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

Idolatry?

Last week I said that Christians who got offended by other Christians were idolaters. Now to explain.

"Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the Word of the Lord..." I Samuel 15:23

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"Stubbornness is as idolatry." Basically, if I am holding onto something like offense, and not dealing with it scripturally (being stubborn), I have placed that offense between me and Jesus - it has become an idol - something I protect, give allegiance and attention to, and refuse to get rid of though I know the Word says I should. That's why the Word calls stubbornness idolatry.

When Barb and I were dating during our high school years, we went to a Saturday night prayer meeting that started at 7pm/19:00 held in a farm house out in the country, about a 25 minute drive from Barb's house. Our routine was that I'd drive to her house by 6:15, we'd leave within 10 minutes, and arrive at the prayer meeting at 10 or 5 minutes to 7. I said routine - but it never seemed to go according to my schedule :)

She would be late which upset me, or I'd be angry at something else but was still stirred up by the time I got to her house. Or maybe she and her mom had argued and I got the brunt of that frustration. Either way, we would be angry with each other as we drove to the meeting.

He loved his Camaro

We also went to another meeting on Sunday nights. That meeting rotated between homes and consisted of teenagers from various school districts, usually led by everyone's mutual friend, Dave. An experience Dave shared one Sunday night resonated with me.

Dave owned a Chevy Camaro, which was a very nice car for a teenage boy to own in 1975. In our day, not every teen had his own car, so if you had one you were a star attraction. Dave really, really, liked his car. Think Danny Zuko in Grease. Think Richie and Potsie and Ralph Malph from TV's Happy Days.

He was sitting at a stop light one day and the Lord spoke to him: "You are committing idolatry." Without thinking he replied; "I am not Lord! I don't have any idols, I don't have any shrines in my house like the Catholics!" The Lord said: "You've put this car between Me and you, therefore you are committing idolatry. It is an idol to you. You love it more than you love Me."

Dave's lesson that night was from the scripture I shared in the opening - that stubbornness is idolatry. He was stubborn about his love for the car. God could deal with him in any area and immediately he would change the priorities of heart to adjust to what the Lord wanted - except for that car. He was resisting the Lord's efforts to keep that car in perspective. He had to do some 'heart surgery' that day and remove the car from the pedestal that was blocking his view of the Lord.

I'm right; No, I'm right

So Barb and I were sitting out in the barn lot before one of the Saturday night prayer meetings, arguing as each of us tried to prove our point, trying to get the other to back down, apologize, or agree. Suddenly Dave's experience came welling up inside me: "You (two) are committing idolatry by your stubbornness. It doesn't matter who is right or wrong, all that matters is that there is peace between you." (By you sticking to your position you are placing it higher than My efforts to get you to forgive and move on, therefore you love being right more than you love doing right.)

Back to King Saul

You might ask, 'Why does that passage say 'rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft (and stubbornness is as idolatry).'? How is rebellion as witchcraft and why are they related?

Witchcraft is (stubborn) manipulation. Lucifer stubbornly twisted truth and manipulated the other angels. So when a person stands their ground demanding they be judged right in a matter, they are stubbornly manipulating the situation to their own motives rather than simply forgiving and moving on. That's why Paul asked: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" (3:1)

The Galatians were being manipulated by believers who said they had to obey the laws and festivals of Israel, when the Word doesn't say that.

Learn this: People in idolatry and witchcraft (manipulation) always complicate whatever matter is before them. God's way is very simple - drop the offense, forgive and move on. But people in witchcraft and rebellion must complicate and muddy the issue in order to prove themselves right in their eyes as the offended party needing an apology.

God's Word says...

So now let us go back to Mr. Average Christian. He has been offended by something. That's on one side of a paper, a left hand column. On the other side of the paper, a right hand column, is what God says:



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'As you stand praying, forgive...live a life worthy of the call you've received, be humble and patient, bearing one another in love...make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace...you were taught to put off your old self...and put on your new self, which is created in the image of God in true righteousness and holiness...be kind and compassionate to one another even as Christ forgave your sins...follow God's example and walk in the way of love...' (Mk 11:25, parts of Ephesians 4 & 5)

So on one hand you have God saying grow up, forgive and move on, take the high ground, lay down your offense and hurt and sense of injustice and become Christ-like by forgiving.

On the other column Mr. Average Christian wants to stay in offense. He is an idolater. He is as one doing witchcraft by manipulating himself and others in his justification. The revealed Word is clear, yet he digs in his heels in his offense.

So why do Christians get offended?

It is because they would rather be offended than grow up in Christ. We have the idea that 'laying down your life for another' as Christ laid down His life for us means being inconvenienced by a friend asking us to drive 10 minutes out of our way to pick them up for church. Or maybe volunteering for a church program though it is hard work.

The truth is that laying down our lives for others mean taking the high ground when you could lash out, choosing NOT to be offended, when offended or hurt, covering that offense in love and letting it fall off you like water off a duck's back. THAT is laying down your life for another.

Growing in Christ comes through doing what Jesus said to do when all your emotions, all your pride, all your sense of right and wrong cry out to be heard, cry out to be justified in the eyes of man. Growing in Christ happens by making difficult but right decisions in times when it would be so easy to retreat into hurt and rejection, so mad at the world you want to kick anyone that gets in your way. You lay down your life for the higher purpose of making peace, and move on.

Growing in Christ doesn't happen by hearing the Word, but by doing the Word. All resistance to doing what you know God says is stubborn idolatry and manipulation and witchcraft.

Growing in Christ means learning how to make a hurt, an offense, an injustice, a lie against you, a mere moment in time instead of a lifetime.

Next week - how do you do that?

Blessings

John Fenn

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Why Christians offended? #3

2012-04-07, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

How to keep from being offended, and overcome offense (UK spells it offence)

"He that loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him take offense." (1 John 2:10)

The fast and easy answer to getting out of offense or preventing yourself from being offended, is to love the one who presents you the opportunity to be offended. How do you do that? That's the subject today.

#1 - Take one emotional step backwards

In Matthew 19: 16-30, Jesus was approached by a man known through the ages as 'the rich young ruler'. The end of that conversation was an invitation for the man to become a disciple, if he would sell all.

As you know, the man "went away sorrowful for he had great possessions." This was THE perfect opportunity for Jesus to be offended. Offense is described as anything that arouses prejudice or becomes a hindrance. Can you imagine! The Lord Himself invites the man to follow Him, but he walks away because he loved his wealth more than he loved God.

Was Jesus angry? Didn't the young man know who was inviting him? Didn't he know what eternal glory awaited? Yet Jesus did not exhibit any anger, nor frustration, nor appear the slightest bit peeved when the man walked away. He didn't go after him either.

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And that's a key point. Jesus realized it was that man's decision, it was his story. Jesus didn't agree with his decision, but that was his decision. Jesus did not let the emotions of what was right and wrong cloud His love. **He expressed His love for the man by extending an invitation to do right.**

Where we get into trouble is when we try to inject what we think is right, or what we think a person should do, or how they hurt our feelings or are doing things wrong - into their lives whether they want our opinion, advice, plan, or not. Then we get hurt when they make us mad. And we are angry because they won't do what we think is right for them to do.

Jesus wanted the man to follow Him, but He did not force upon him anything more than an invitation. Love extends an invitation to do right, but doesn't take offense when the invitation is refused.

#2 - Be reflective

"Then said Jesus to His disciples: "Truly I tell you, it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven."

If Jesus had taken offense the passage could read: "I tell you, I am really hurt by him walking away. He would have been perfect. Does he know how hard I'm working to make a place for him? Doesn't he know what I've gone through? Doesn't he know what he owes me? I am the Lord!"

But instead, Jesus didn't cross that emotional line...He kept His opinion to Himself. He turned reflective about the man's decision by looking at the big picture.

Start at the biggest perspective possible - you don't want them to go to hell. That will get you praying for them. Then make that circle a bit smaller - you don't want them to lose their (family, job, health, sanity, etc). Then make it still smaller and closer to home, to the event before you, all the while not getting emotionally involved by keeping focused on their eternal walk, not on you and your feelings.

If you start bringing yourself and your feelings into your prayer for them, back up to the last place you were when you could honestly pray for them with a pure heart, even if you have to start with 'I don't want them to go to hell.' Now I realize that with some people, even THAT may be a struggle to work through :) but you can do it!

#3 - Have no opinion other than chapter and verse

Don't get involved in their emotional baggage. We are to judge fruit, not hearts. Fruit is the visible result of a tree that was pollinated. A peach or acorn or orange begins as a pollen fertilizing a flower - the visible and mature fruit comes weeks or months after that pollination occurred.

You weren't there when their 'fruit' that made them lash out at you, or do what they did, or say what they said, was formed in their heart. All you know is you had rotten fruit thrown at you - fruit that started forming long ago in unknown circumstances. Just judge the fruit, don't form an opinion about what caused that bad apple.

That's how you love them - you stop your emotions at the fruit without ever going to the how and why, for that is God's domain, to judge hearts. Keep your prayer based on the Word they must do (or bring yourself around to what you must do in the Word) - you just love them because you know that rotten fruit is not the real them, just the result of bad seed somewhere in their past. And since you don't want them to go to hell, you just leave it a blank slate in your mind about why they did what they did, and just pray for them and find ways to do good to and for them.

Remember this: Once you have done what you can to make peace and then they refuse, their problem is no longer with you, it is with Jesus. For they have become as covered last week, an idolater, setting up their offense between themselves and the Lord, refusing to obey the Word of the Lord.

If you are the one offended, your issue is with Jesus, not them. It just takes a moment to make the heart right.

Rotten apples

For instance, if someone is offended at you - angry let's say - immediately you go to scripture to see how to pray for them, like 'As you stand praying, forgive people who trespass against you' and 'be angry but don't sin, don't let the sun set with you still angry'. You pray they would do the Word, for their issue is with the Living Word. (Mk 11:25-26; Eph 4:26)

Confine your opinion to chapter and verse - know what they need to do based on scripture, not what you think they need to do to make it right in your eyes - love them by praying they will do the Word so they may be right before the Father and Lord.



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Go back and retrace these steps - Back away emotionally from the issue. If they are offended at you, it is their issue. If you are the offended one, grow up, it isn't about you, it's about becoming more Christ-like in all things, not who is right and wrong, not proving your point. All you can do is try to make peace, but once you extend peace, it is up to them to receive it. If they choose not to, your hands are clean.

This step back allows you to be reflective - you may be able to see where they will be a year from now if they don't deal with whatever offense, real or imagined, they accuse you of. You can see wisdom and the big picture if you turn reflective in the Lord, asking for wisdom in love for them that you might pray for them effectively as Jesus instructed.

When you do that, you will be able to NOT form a personal opinion, but rather the Father and Lord's opinion. You will know there are larger issues at work in their heart God is dealing with them about, that are none of your business - so don't form an opinion other than what chapter and verse show they need to do. Do right, for truth requires responsibility and that's why everyone runs from it. Don't run. Admit any wrong doing on your part, but then forgive and move on.

He that loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to cause him to take offense.

If you live long enough you realize you'd do alot of things differently if you knew then what you know now. But in the long run none of that matters, only learning lessons and keeping our hearts in love.

Next week: Where do you draw the line?

Blessings,
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Why Christians offended? #4

2012-04-14, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

Where do you draw the line?

How can Christians disagree, work through conflict, and maybe even go their separate ways without being offended at each other? How do you identify that line between disagreement and offense?

In Acts 1:8 Jesus told the disciples they would be witnesses of Him in a series of ever increasing circles, and we'll use that example to help define the lines between disagreement and offense.

"...and you will be witnesses of me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."

For our use, the inner most circle, Jerusalem, is you, (spouse), and young children at home. The next circle outward is Judea. Jerusalem was surrounded by Judea and this represents your extended family outside the family home. If you have no immediate family Judea represents your closest friends and confidants, maybe even a close co-worker or friend from school.

Outward from Judea is Samaria. In Jesus' time the Samaritans were not Jews, so for us this represents unsaved contacts we interact with in life - family, co-workers, neighbors, friends. The uttermost parts of the earth in Jesus' day meant the vast world beyond Samaria, and for us it represents strangers we interact with in public, in work, in life as we go about our business.

People in each of these circles outside 'Jerusalem' might have an opinion about you, your behavior, decisions, or even how you are raising your children - in short, they may have an opportunity to become offended at you, and you at them. Knowing where the lines are determines how you and they may interact.

Defining the lines

Offense happens when someone thinks what they think should be what the other person thinks, but they don't.

Years ago we knew a mother who was still breast feeding her 5 year old son. The boy had quick hands. Several people (myself included) had observed the boy walking up to mom and unbuttoning her top before she could excuse herself to prepare for nursing him. Every other person in church thought God's signal to wean a child was when they grew a full set of teeth - but not her.

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'Jerusalem' - This mom's 'Jerusalem' was herself and her care for her son. Everyone else in church was Judea. Several women strongly disagreed with the woman, and a couple of them were offended - they were angry, embarrassed, disgusted, and refused to go to any church function where she would be, due to a possibility of witnessing a 5 year old undressing mom to have a milk and cookie break!

Here is the line - The age of weaning her son was her business because it fell in the domain of her 'Jerusalem'. Outside of that innermost circle people could shake their head in disgust, talk behind her back - whatever - but they were wrong before God by their offense though from a weaning standpoint, they were right. Rather than take offense they should have prayed for this mom who struggled with letting her first born 'grow up'. Different isn't necessarily wrong, it's just different.

Worship leaders - A husband wife were part of a worship team, and while they weren't the most gifted musicians or voices, they were faithful and sensitive to the Holy Spirit. But two women who were best friends, who had superior voices, asked me to remove the couple and put them on the worship team in their place. The ladies were offended at this couple and struggled during worship when they were on the platform.

Here is the line - This couple was not in their Jerusalem; they were in their Judea. In fact, the church was part of my Judea as I was the pastor. And this couple's involvement in the worship team was part of their Judea as well. But I had authority over the worship team, so what these ladies asked was rude and out of line. The ladies needed to retreat to protect their Jerusalem - their own heart and business - and not insert themselves into that situation.

None of your business Peter

In John 21: 20-22 Jesus had just told Peter when he was old he would die by crucifixion, and Peter saw John following them as they walked and talked, so he asked the Lord, "What about him?"

Jesus had been talking to Peter about his 'Jerusalem' - his faith and destiny. Peter then asks about John's 'Jerusalem' - which is none of his business. Jesus deflects the question asking, "(Even if) I want him to remain alive until I return, **what is that to you?**"

That is a good Bible lesson boys and girls: **What is that to you?** LOL When it deals with someone's Jerusalem, we have no right to be offended - we can disagree, see things differently, and do things another way, but there is no basis for breaking off fellowship in offense.

Fortunately it doesn't appear Peter got offended - but in our day the situation could be applied to promotions at work, one selected over another for assignment, an application to volunteer at church rejected - any number of situations might have someone asking about someone else's Jerusalem in offense: But what about them? What about ME? Don't they care how I feel? (no) Don't they care what I think? (no)

That's bold!

In Matthew 16:23, just after Jesus had told the disciples He would be killed and then raised from the dead the 3rd day, Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him: "Never Lord! It won't happen to you!"

We know that going to the cross was part of Jesus' 'Jerusalem'. It was the reason He came into the world. So when Peter pushed the idea of NOT going to the cross, Jesus responded: "Get behind me Satan; you are an **offense** to me for **you are not setting your mind on God's interests**, but on man's." Jesus had to protect His 'Jerusalem' from any thought or plan that was contrary to the Father's plan.

Jesus continued by saying: "If anyone wants to follow me he must deny himself and take up his cross." What are you denying yourself? You are denying yourself thinking about a plan for someone else's life other than God's plan for them, and you are denying thoughts you have toward them of changing their plan, and you are denying the temptation to push what you think they should do on them.

'Taking up the cross', a device of torture, is not a reference to any general hardship - Jesus said it was specifically about first thinking then pushing what you think God's plan is on another person, when in fact you are wrong and misguided in what you think. Keeping your mouth shut and thoughts captive to obedience in Christ is the act of 'taking up your cross'. That's torture for many, isn't it?

Think of your life and other's lives in terms of those every increasing circles. Keep relationships within those God-defined borders and be confident in how God is leading you, offer suggestions - but don't get offended at how someone else handles what happens within their border either. These are deep principles I've shared, and I don't have the space or time to write in detail - but know the ways of God and let the Holy Spirit how to apply these things to your life.



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That brings us back to the start - 'He who loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him that would cause him to be offended'. Walk in love, you won't be offended, you will however be a prayer warrior.

New subject next week, blessings,
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