

2016-07-09

Random thought, Culture of offense #1

Hi all,

The culture of offense has taken much of the world by storm in the last few years, yet most don't realize the spirit behind this movement is going to lead to something much greater on down the time line than merely 1 politician making personal attacks against another in a voting year.

On a small scale we have examples in the US of a teenager suspended from school because she said 'Bless you' to a class mate who had sneezed. At a school in California 5 students were sent home on May 5, the day Mexico celebrates Cinco de Mayo, for daring to wear T-shirts with the American flag on them.

On a national scale the culture of offense is very much like fascism. Fascism is the governmental system where people are not allowed to disagree with the government - the government takes offense at someone disagreeing with them. This includes examples of ISIS killing anyone who doesn't believe as they do, or Turkey prosecuting citizens who utter any opinion on social media construed as anti-government, or wide spread political correctness forced to the citizens as a matter of government policy. From 'bless you' to arrests for Facebook posts with a personal opinion expressed, these are elements of the culture of offense.

However, offense begins in the hearts of individuals before it becomes a force in society as a whole, and if it takes up residence in a person's heart, it forms its own little culture of offense which leads a person to live by their emotions rather than reason, logic, and morals, with the result of the cutting of relationships of those who don't meet their expectations.

How offense starts

Presumption is the act of putting your expectations on someone else, and then getting offended (hurt feelings) and they can even feel victimized when others don't meet those expectations.

The offended person can't measure the situation accurately

They are seeing the situation solely through the eyes of their expectations and how they feel about it, without taking anyone else's life into account. These people live by opinions formed by their emotions, rather than by opinions and emotions formed by God's Word.

Point #1 - They only see themselves and their situation (Narcissistic)

Their emotions are on the edge and they form opinions and make decisions on who to have in their life or who to exclude from their life strictly from their emotions. For example, maybe they have a friend of 20 years, but this friend makes them angry one day for something trivial - because they called their friend at an inconvenient time and the friend said so - and they got angry and decided to end the relationship. The culture of offense emotionally decides to throw away a 20 year investment in the friendship - completely illogical! Stinking thinking!

People who live like this start a downward spiral in their life.

Point #2 - They can't imagine what it is like to be the other person

Living in emotions and culture of offense means they also cannot understand another person's situation, and have lost sight of the fact their primary goal is to be mature in Christ. In the above example though friends for 20 years, the offended couldn't understand their friend's honesty at saying it was an inconvenient time to talk.

They take it as 'you don't want me', so their reaction is disproportionate to the event, and they throw the friendship away. They can't imagine anything in their friend's life larger than their need at that moment. Maybe the friend had a baby on the changing table with a poopy diaper, maybe they had visitors, maybe they were in a doctor's office - doesn't matter! They are offended because they are unable to understand their friend's situation at the moment they were in need, in emotional turmoil, so they were offended.

The truth is they love Jesus only to the point He doesn't ask them to make hard decisions which would lead to growth as a person and a disciple of Jesus. They aren't really disciples, just believers, for by definition a disciple is 'a learner'. They stopped learning, they've punched their ticket to heaven, now life is too difficult and they are too busy to be bothered with such things as growth in godly character. Such things as getting

their eyes off themselves, apologies, humbling oneself and admitting they over-reacted are just too hard on top of everything else. Too bad Jesus, I love you but life is hard and I want to wallow in my hurt.

They only see their need, their life, their crisis. They may offer a polite 'so what is going on with you?' but as soon as the person responds, they manage to shift the conversation back to themselves. Sympathy is the emotion felt when someone else is hurting, while empathy is the ability to experience the feelings of others.

A person easily offended can have sympathy for another, but they lack the ability to experience empathy, for that equates to humility, vulnerability, and feeling what others feel. Thus they pull back and shift attention back to themselves.

Point #3 - You can't talk a person out of offense

Offense is a choice of the emotions, often made as a knee-jerk reaction without any filter or check and balance for those emotions. The mature have learned how to balance emotions by causing them and their thoughts to be submitted to the cross.

Choosing not to be offended is Christ-like while choosing to take offense is a lower-self choice. You can't talk, negotiate, illustrate, or teach a person out of offense. They are hurt and they want to be - so once you point out the truth, once you apologize, once you try to get them to understand where you're coming from to no avail, you have to move on. Build a bridge to them to the extent they allow, but their sin and childishness can't hold you back from you doing what is right in Christ. You answer to Him, not them.

This is where feelings are worn on the sleeve so to speak, for all to see, measuring others by their expectations rather than by what is right and moral and just. People have a hard life and they are stressed, and they wear their tendency to be offended like a porcupine baring its quills at a confrontation. This is the area where people feel a need to always be right, to point out where others are wrong, and they live out of that 'home base' for their lives.

It is a horrible, miserable place from which to live, but these same people will say they love God - and that is true in their spirit man. But you can't talk them out of offense for they won't let God in their emotions and decision process. They never think "I have to do what Jesus says no matter how I feel" -

Thus internally they are in turmoil and hurting because they know they need to make things right with x person, but they would rather be distracted in their self-justification than humble themselves before the Lord and that person and do what is right. So they push things down inside them, and I've seen many, many cases where such sin leads to physical ailments - and they are quick to ask for healing - but it won't come because their physical ailment started in their offense.

I once had a woman approach the prayer line using a walker and showing me her stiff and bent fingers, asking for healing from arthritis. I was about to lay hands on her and the Lord spoke to me, 'Tell her to go and forgive her sister, and she will be healed.' 3 months later I was back in that church and she came walking up to me without any assistance, telling me she obeyed the Lord and went to her sister's house to make it right between them, and by the time she got home that night she was better, and when she woke up the next morning she was totally healed. Offense can do that and more to a person.

People in offense feign forgiveness, saying "I accept your apology" but then refuse to truly pick up the relationship where they left off, proving their words were hollow, for between 2 willing people, forgiveness results in restoration of the relationship. But you know they remain in offense because they would rather write off a relationship than do what is hard work for them of saying 'I'm sorry'.

Point #4 - Being offended doesn't matter to anyone but the person offended

No one cares that x brother or x sister or x church or x company offended and hurt them. Even if a friend did care, they would attempt to get them to deal with the hurt and make things right. Sometimes being offended really doesn't matter to anyone but the offended. They need to get over themselves and come to Jesus.

The lost art of conversation, that ability to exchange ideas even in a heated manner, yet not turn it into a personal attack, has been largely lost in world-wide culture because of offense. But I've run out of room for today and will pick it up there next week. Until then, blessings,

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2016-07-16

Random thought, Culture of offense #2

Hi all,

I was helping Chris get ready for the day after his morning bath, and he heard an airplane flying outside. Chris is our oldest son, age 36 at this writing, who had the umbilical cord around his neck when he was born and suffered a lack of oxygen, so mentally he is about 4 years old.

"Dad! An airplane!" he said, "You're right, I hear it too. I wonder where it's going?" I asked, and not giving him the time to answer I continued oblivious to the words on the tip of his tongue; "Maybe someone is flying home after visiting the lake this weekend. Maybe they're going to work, maybe seeing some friends. Or maybe even going on vacation far away. Where do you think they're going?" Clearly he had politely been waiting for me to finish, and replied, "They're going to an airport."

The lost art of conversation

His response certainly cut to the core truth - no matter why or where they were flying, it was to an airport. But I was so caught up in myself and all the possibilities I could imagine that I barely noticed that Chris was patiently waiting for me to finish talking. That is one element of the culture of offense, the lost art of conversation. We all dominate a conversation once in a while, but not as a habit.

Those in offense don't want to exchange ideas, for they are caught up in themselves. They want their voice and their voice alone to be heard. They want to use you, not learn from you. It may be to vent, to kill time, to have you confirm what they've already decided but use you to justify their decision while pretending they haven't yet decided. The reasons are numerous but it all adds up to they don't know how to exchange ideas nor do they want to.

A person in the culture of offense perceives someone voicing another opinion as a threat and therefore is met with a personal attack in an outburst of emotion.

This is part of the emotional instability that goes with being offended. A person's emotional stronghold of offense cannot be logically justified and they know it, but they are too fragile or hurting or stressed or have an agenda, to get their eyes off themselves and onto what is logical and right and what the Lord would have them do. They take it as rejection, having lost the ability to converse and exchange ideas without feeling threatened, maligned, or personally attacked, so they accuse and attack back, even when in truth, they aren't being attacked - they just perceive it that way. Yes, that is immaturity, and it is also offense.

When Paul was on Mars Hill in Athens, described in Acts 17, the people gathered were looking for an exchange of ideas and did so without making it personal. They knew how to attack an idea without attacking the person.

Nearly any professional can relate to this concept of exchanging ideas

Sometimes exchanges are in heated arguments, but are without attacking the other person personally. Lawyers, people in management, diplomats, teachers, (hopefully) spouses, and parents know what it is to converse back and forth in heated disagreements while still affirming and valuing and even loving the other person, which keeps them from making it personal.

(If there was any pre-marital class I would offer to the engaged it would be this - learn how to argue. Learn how to express ideas without making it a personal attack, bringing up the past, etc. Argue ideas, argue concepts, argue goals, but don't make it a personal attack.)

But many people, especially those who have either a weak spouse or no spouse, nor any close friends to speak into their lives, love God in their hearts but live in the small-self that defines itself against others, thus taking offense at anyone with whom they disagree or hurts their feelings. These people live out of 'self', and not out of Christ in them.

Rather than telling themselves or letting God tell them how they will feel and think, they let their emotions tell them how they will feel and think.

Wow, talk about living a life on earth in Christ yet bringing nothing to the eternal party but the burned up wood, hay, and stubble of their life. I would not want to be in their shoes on that day.

These same people often hold down jobs, and I'm sure when someone at work says or does something they don't agree with they don't walk off the job never to return - because they need the money. Yet these same Christians who know they will give account to their Creator, will live in anger and offense at another Christian, ending relationships though we'll all know each other in heaven forever - yet they have no fear of God, no desire to be Christ-like if being Christ-like challenges them to change how they feel or think.

Laziness?

Over the years I've noticed those who are easily offended are spiritually lazy and don't like to be moved off their spiritual butt. What I mean is this - imagine a lazy employee taking a long break, and he gets offended when the manager tells him to get to work. Rather than seeing his boss's command as 'You know, he is right, I've taken way too long of a break and I'm inconveniencing my co-workers', he instead says 'The boss doesn't like me.'

A person living in their smaller, emotional self views communication in any form first through the eyes of offense - they assume the person responding is angry, or perturbed, has an attitude or is annoyed - so they read into the conversation, email, phone call, or letter things which are not intended. This is normal for them, even though love says it believes the best and looks for the best. The man in obedience to Jesus adjusts his attitude and says 'He is right I've been on break too long and the boss wants what is best for me and the company and my co-workers.' That is love, the attitude the boss doesn't like him is the culture of offense.

In offense, rather than take responsibility for their own life and attitude, they are unable to see other workers inconvenienced by their long break. They are lazy, blind to their co-worker's needing them back on the job, more willing to let someone else do their work for them than taking responsibility for themselves.

Put that laziness on a spiritual level and it means someone is more willing to be offended than do what God asks. 'It is too hard Lord to apologize, so why don't you just take care of it and consider my slate cleaned up so I can move on.'

The world is set on edge, looking for things to be offended about. But we have not so learned Christ.

I've been asked many times how I keep my heart and motives right before the Lord

It is very simple: I don't form opinions in my mind and emotions about another person's actions. I judge the fruit of their lives as Jesus said to do, and don't judge their heart which is also what Jesus said. That way I only truly and honestly want the best for them and therefore have no hidden agenda in the relationship.

Paul put it in different words in Romans 14 among other places, saying essentially, 'What they do, they do unto the Lord, so that is their business not yours.' I may need to protect myself from actions I judge to be sinful or potentially dangerous to me or my family, but I don't judge their heart. Only God knows the heart. Human nature being what it is, means people judge themselves by their motives, but judge others by their expectations. And that leads them directly into being offended and hurt. If you do what you can to make peace and they refuse, their issue is with the Lord, not you. So let Him handle them.

I realized long ago I am already in eternity - we don't die and then enter into eternity, we are already in eternity. That means we're all going to get to know one another very well over the next 200, 500, and 5,000 years and beyond. So why not agree on what we can agree on right now, because 10,000 years from now will our differences in this life mean anything at all?

I remember the words of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, before he was burned at the stake for refusing to burn incense to the Emperor: "86 years I have served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my Lord and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked."

A good look at his perspective on eternity would do those who take offense so easily, Christian or not, some good I think. New random thought next week, until then, blessings,

John Fenn

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