

DEALING WITH OFFENSE
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In an increasingly self centered world, if we are alive, we will be offended. We may not be able to influence how others treat us, but we are not helpless to determine how we will respond. Anger has become the new drug of choice. We like the adrenaline rush it provides as we respond to rudeness, insult, and injury. **Colossians 3:8-10** instructs us to put things like anger and wrath off of ourselves and become a new man. We make the decision to stop hurting and move on; God's Spirit does not do it for us. We are responsible to remove negative emotions and actions from our lives. The fact we are mad or angry is no excuse for saying or doing whatever we feel, however we wish. When we learn God hates something, it is time stop doing that, especially what offends others, like violence in a marriage, or divorce.

When offense does come, what are we to do with that emotion? How do we respond to wounds? Accident prone people really are not trying to experience pain and no one who is sane really wishes to be hurt. We like to say, "No pain, no gain," in reference to hurt that usually accompanies healing. If we are smiling while speaking, odds are we are discussing someone else's pain. We personally avoid it as much as possible. We take pills for headache or pain at the slightest hint of discomfort, excusing them as "preventive measures." Enough medication can numb any discomfort. But the healing process requires nerves to receive pain signals. If they are severed and remain detached, healing never occurs. That process usually hurts on an ongoing basis till restoration is complete. Moreover, what is injured and grows back usually comes back stronger. Injured limbs and digits also have sensitivities the rest of the body lacks.

Our non-physical injuries, our offenses, can also yield positive results when properly treated. They can be a window of opportunity to more sensitivity and compassion than we had before. They can open doors and opportunities for ministry. Pain is not a sign we are damaged, but a sign of recovery. If it still hurts, healing is in process. Once complete, we can minister in ways never before possible. God doesn't offend us, but He can use injury to make us stronger and more sensitive, if we accept His healing. Treatment programs for alcohol or drug addiction are most effective when taught by recovering addicts who have fought that battle and conquered it. Those in the body who have been healed of hurts can effectively minister to the same needs later. That is why the body of Christ is comprised of so many with scars. When life gave them lemons, they made lemonade.

After ten years in a notoriously cruel Roman prison, Paul wrote his last will and testament to the church of Philippi. In **Philippians 4:4**, he responded to his ongoing hardship with joy. Until we learn what Paul knew, we can only rejoice when things are going well. **Acts 5:41**, the apostles exalted over being made to suffer shame for the sake of Jesus name. We can worship God or we can choose to worship our circumstances. History tells us they had to keep rotating guards to watch Paul because he kept converting the guards.

Paul knew about learning from the pain of the past. His biography included murdering those he would later serve with. Yet in **Philippians 3:13-14**, he said, "this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." We must leave yesterday behind us, for it is a lousy place to live. Did life and others wound us? Let God turn wounds into scars to show others who will receive the same wounds and will need a minister who truly understands. Incredibly powerful ministries result from giving lives and hurts to God.

We can get bitter or better. It is our choice. To feel again, we must experience and endure the pain. The answer to divorce is not to shut down our lives and never allow anyone to get close again. No healing is final till we can eventually take the risk of being hurt again. When someone disappoints us, we can withdraw and put up walls, but that just increases our loneliness. Since we will never live pain free, we must decide how to respond. Do we stay wounded and let infirmity define us? Do we self medicate with substance abuse until we are numb to life? Perhaps we will get even and compound the problem with guilt. Or we can allow God to heal us and open a window of ministry.

According to the Bible, if we have God within us, our lives should result in righteousness, peace, and joy. Too bad we sometimes choose instead to wear our wounds. It is so foolish, because when we come

into the presence of the Great Physician, it requires a deliberate choice to walk away with our wounds still unhealed. There is nothing that can block us from healing available to anyone who will take God up on His offer. Take the walls down. God will not embarrass or shame us for revealing to Him what He already knows. God said He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He is in the business of redeeming what life has hurt, broken, and discarded.

Choosing to change is not an easy solution. It is like chiseling away at a rock. I doubt the rough diamond enjoys chunks knocked off of it en route to becoming precious. One step further back in its past, that same diamond was nothing but decaying life that time and the pressures of existence slowly formed, first into coal, then into something more precious and useful. What life has done to us up till now does not matter so much as what we are going to do with life from this point forward. It just requires we decide to allow our Master to change us from a victim to a powerful survivor. We can pray, not for protection from Satan, but for guidance as to what part of Satan's territory God would like us to conquer today. Why not? Is God greater than he that is in the world or is He not?

When we let God be our God, in our lives and in our hurts, our offenses can be used to increase our worth.