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*“For Better or Worse - Biblical Principles for Resisting the Spirit of Offense”*

PROVERBS 19:11

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## AT A GLANCE

Do you ever get offended? Does your spouse ever get on your last nerve? If so, check out this sermon, “For Better or Worse - Biblical Principles for Resisting the Spirit of Offense.” I’ll provide three questions that if you’ll ask yourself sincerely the next time you feel yourself getting angry or hurt could revolutionize your relationships!

## PRETTY GOOD AT HOLDING A GRUDGE

In the hit comedic television series, *The Office*, one of the main characters, Angela, shared how she and her sister, formerly her best friend, got into an argument over something petty. With a smug grin on her face, she boasted that she hasn’t spoken to her sister in sixteen years. She couldn’t even remember what caused the original argument. She quipped, “So yeah, I’m pretty good.” Good at getting offended and holding a grudge, that is.

Sadly, many of us have gotten “pretty good” at allowing a little offense to go a long way. Whether it’s in the context of being slighted by the wait-staff at a restaurant that results in a 1-star review with blistering comment, or a misunderstanding that has you doubting your nuptial vows, the fact is we tend to give the spirit of offense too much ground and it can have disastrous effect in our lives. With the new year upon us, I invite you to consider how resisting the spirit of offense might make 2024 a more pleasant, kind, and forgiving year and how that might enhance every relationship in your life.

I would like to draw attention to one relationship that I believe deserves special attention, though. It’s your marriage. If you’re not yet married, read and heed and you’ll thank me later. If you’re not planning to be married, or to be married again, I think you’ll still find this article helpful in every other relationship.

As I reflect on the marital woes I’ve had the opportunity to shepherd our people through, I see spouses getting so easily offended and holding on to that offense, allowing it to drive a wedge between them. I hear their stories, I watch them in real-time, and frankly, I experience this myself. It is just so stinkin’ easy to get offended! Amiright?!

As a disclaimer before I begin, I am not suggesting there are no real problems that need to be addressed. I’m not suggesting the answer to all marital woes is to sweep it under the rug. There are certainly some things that must be confessed, confronted, and corrected. But may I humbly posit that in most marriages, these represent a small fraction of what gets our feathers ruffled?

As I was preparing my sermon, I opened my notebook and began to scratch down a few thoughts about marital issues I’ve observed. After a few minutes of reflecting and writing, I looked over at the other side of the binder. Days earlier I stuck a post-it note there with **Proverbs 19:11** written on it. It says, **“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”**

When I saw the verse there, it occurred to me that if people would take this to heart and make a habit of simply overlooking minor offenses, marriages would be much healthier. Before we begin to look at what I'm calling the spirit offense and the biblical principles for resisting it, let's pray. **PRAY**

### WHAT IS THE SPIRIT OF OFFENSE?

What is the spirit of offense? The spirit of offense is not some mystical force. We don't need to exercise our house and cast it out. I don't think the enemy even needs to dispatch one of his evil minions for the spirit of offense to have its effect in our lives. James tells us we fight and quarrel and do all kinds of wicked things because of passions at war within us. We get offended because we want to be offended. If we didn't, we wouldn't; at least generally speaking.

No, the spirit of offense is not some external evil force. It's much more sinister. It's an internal bitterness birthed out of the selfish sin nature within us. It's the sin of irritability. It's the refusal to exercise radical forgiveness in obedience to Jesus. Remember that 70x7 command of His? It's having a hair-trigger. Proverbs 19:11 begins with **Good sense makes one slow to anger**. Elsewhere we're commanded to be. Having a spirit of offense is living contrary to scripture by being *quick* to anger rather than **slow to anger**. It's what causes people to have to walk on eggshells around you. The spirit of offense makes you easy to offend and hard to please.

That's a hard pill to swallow, but it's the truth and we need to come face to face with the truth. So many of our woes originate not from without, but from within. The solution, then, is not deliverance, but repentance.

### THE SPIRIT OF OFFENSE GOES BEYOND BEING OFFENDED

There's a difference between being offended and having a spirit of offense. We all have plenty of opportunities to offend and be offended. We all have our own preferences. Sometimes those rub against the preferences of others and vice versa. We cross the line into a spirit of offense, though, when rather than dealing with those offenses, we begin to nurse them. Rather than processing the hard feelings in a healthy way, we allow them to turn into what the bible calls a root of bitterness, which not only hurts us, but causes hurt in others as well.

*"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled..." Hebrews 12:15* If you think you can harbor bitterness in your heart without it impacting every other relationship in your life, especially your marriage, think again.

Whether the offense comes from real or perceived slights, the feeling is real. The sadness, the anger, the hurt are all real responses to something that has offended you. While you may not have the choice to feel the way you do, you do have the choice about what you do with those feelings.

There are times when the only healthy solution is to address the offense with your spouse and possibly to enlist the help of other mutually trusted people. I'm thankful for the wonderful Biblical Counseling team here at Wildwood! But dare I say most of our offenses come from our own sin nature and simply need to be overlooked, even repented of? Bearing in mind the exceptions that must be dealt with by talking it out, what do we do with the average, everyday, you-irritate-me-with-your-mouth-breathing offenses? How do we resist the spirit of offense?

### HOW DO WE RESIST THE SPIRIT OF OFFENSE?

**Proverbs 19:11** continues, saying it is our **glory to overlook an offense**. But how do we know what to gloriously overlook and what to confront in the manner of *Matthew 18:15*? There Jesus says, *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault."* I see two ways to err here, both can bring harm to relationships. The first is to passive-aggressively ignore offenses while holding it against your spouse.

You're not telling him or her what's bothering you; you're just punishing them for it. The second is to nit-pick everything that irritates you. You're not overlooking any offense but are instead super-critical.

In Matthew 18 Jesus was giving us a method to deal with legitimate sin that should not be ignored. Let me insert here that abuse should not be ignored. Physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual abuse does not fit the category of offenses to overlook. I'm not talking about that.

But we need to also keep in mind that not every offense against us needs to be addressed, as *1 Peter 4:8* says, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." Clearly not every misdeed deserves equal treatment. There are some things that because you have declared that you're going to love this person for better or for worse, you simply need to get over. Or to put it in biblical terms, let your love cover and overlook. As Kellye put it, "Sometimes we just have bad days."

I counsel people that anything they cannot genuinely forgive and move on from ought to be confronted and dealt with according to Matthew 18. But so little of what offends us rises to that level. Your husband leaving the toilet seat up causing you to fall in probably doesn't rise to the level of needing Matthew 18 discipline. That feels more in line with "love covers" even as you nurse your bruised...we'll go with *pride*. You might need to deal with it if leaving the toilet seat up is part of a pattern of disregard for you, but don't let these sort of one-off irritations put a chip on your shoulder. Instead, as you navigate the various opportunities to be offended by your spouse, I invite you to ask yourself three questions, which come from three biblical principles.

### THREE QUESTIONS THE NEXT TIME YOU FEEL THE SPIRIT OF OFFENSE

#### 1. Is this a case of mismanaged expectations?

I use the term mismanaged expectations rather than unspoken expectations because the key to a peaceful marriage, and really any peaceful relationship, is not simply vocalizing your expectations. A marriage is a partnership; there's give and take. Expectations ought to be negotiated and kept in check. The bible tells husbands, "*live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel,*" *1 Peter 3:7* It also tells wives to submit to their husbands and "...let the wife see that she respects her husband." *Ephesians 5:33*

This mutual care, love, and respect is necessary to manage expectations appropriately. Have you and your spouse had a discussion about your expectations? Not an argument, but a discussion? Have you agreed on them? Are they fair for both of you? Ask yourself if this offense is a case of your spouse deliberately denying you or is it that you have an expectation you shouldn't have?

Mismanaged expectations will always cause one or more of the following emotions:

Sadness – What you feel when you believe your expectations are not regarded.

Anger – What sadness turns into when you feel your expectations repeatedly go unmet.

Anxiety – What others feel who are desperately trying to live up to your expectations.

Shame – What they feel when they recognize they have failed to do so.

In every relationship, there is mutual responsibility to agree on expectations. When those expectations are not managed well, you can count on one or more of those emotions.

#### 2. Is there a log in my own eye?

People often quote Jesus in *Matthew 7:1*, "*Judge not, lest you be judged.*" They typically do this to justify their own sin. In context, though, Jesus was warning people not to judge others by a standard they are not willing to be judged by. Hypocrisy is expecting of others what you do not expect of yourself.

Jesus' guidance was that you first take the log out of your own eye and then remove the speck from your brother's.

Of course, Jesus was speaking in hyperbole, but there seems to be a principle here that when you begin to notice something small in someone else, when you get offended by their foibles, it may very well be that you've got something big going on in your own life. I've come to recognize that when I'm getting critical of another person, it's because there's a sin problem the Lord wants to deal with in me. In the best of those situations, I've been able to step back and say, "Ok, Lord, I see this thing that irritates me in that person...what are you showing me about myself?" In most cases, the issue resolved when I dealt with the log in my own eye.

### 3. What am clinging to?

Paul tells us in *Philippians 2:5-6* to "*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped...*" In other words, Jesus did not cling to what was rightfully His. Instead, for you He let that go. He gave up His rights. He denied Himself, emptying Himself and taking the form of a servant. When you find yourself offended, irritated, perturbed, angry, whatever the case may be, ask yourself, "what am I really clinging to?" Then ask yourself how you can cling to Christ instead.

The sin nature in us is much worse than we really think is and the Lord uses relationships in our lives to make us more like Christ. "*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*" *2 Corinthians 3:18*

The more you resist this, the more painful the process will be. Seek the Lord and ask Him to reveal to you the heart issues that are causing this spirit of offense. This is what you're clinging to. Perhaps it's pride. Bruised egos cause us great discomfort. When we believe we've been disrespected, disregarded, or disgraced, we're tempted to lash out in an attempt to vindicate ourselves and nurse our pride.

For some people the root issue is ease or comfort. Any disturbance to their ease or comfort is met with offense. Any inconvenience or request outside the normal bounds of the relationship is cause for offense.

Perhaps you crave attention, and you seek fulfillment through other people. You're trying to have this need met and when it goes unmet, you'll respond like a kindergartner. After all, negative attention is still *attention*.

For some the underlying issue is a need to feel appreciated. They believe that what they do for others ought to be more appreciated. They rarely consider what others do for them, but they definitely keep track of what they've done for others. When they receive less appreciation than they believe they deserve, the result is offense.

Maybe the thing you cling to is yourself. You're selfish. You want what you want the way you want it. You have a hard time recognizing that the other person in your relationship is exactly that, a person...another self who also has desires and hopes and goals. You are one self on a planet currently inhabited by over 6 billion other selves. Yet for some reason, you're convinced that of all the selves on the planet, your self is the most important. That you matter...*most*.

You know, maybe the issue that has you constantly offended is a wound. Perhaps your mom or dad didn't show you the kind of love they should have. Maybe someone took advantage of you and traumatized you. And these wounds keep you from trusting, submitting, loving, or respecting your

spouse and others. They have you constantly on guard, treating every misdeed as if it were intentional, just like the person who hurt you.

Whatever the case may be, you will be better off for identifying and submitting it to Christ. The next time you feel yourself getting offended at your spouse, or your friend, or your pastor, or your boss, or whoever, take a minute to ask yourself these three questions. And better yet, ask the Holy Spirit to answer them for you. Then deal with the answer in a biblical way. If the problem is really you and not the other person, repent.

If it's them, and you can sincerely say you've searched your heart with these questions, tell them what they've done in a spirit of gentleness, seeking reconciliation rather than revenge.

At the end of the day every Christian relationship, whether it's marriage or family or church friends or is made up of two sinful people who are each being sanctified slowly. The Lord is using the one to work the sanctification process in the other. We should not be surprised that marriage is filled with offenses, which is why we need to learn to deal with offenses biblically. In most cases the solution is simple: overlook it. The bible says it is your glory to do so.