

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### UNNEEDED BAGGAGE

*“Let us lay aside every weight which so easily hinders us.” (Hebrews 12: 1).*

Many are hindered in the battle, not because they have been ‘wounded’ by others but because they have taken upon themselves, a burden that they should not be carrying. They have been offended by someone and have ‘taken umbrage’.

We must realise that offence and sin are very different. Though the former may be a ‘fruit’ of the sinful life, it is not a deliberate sinful act of the one who offends. Indeed, we are told that Jesus was an ‘offence’ to the religious leaders of His time, and He was without sin. It is my belief that He deliberately caused offence on more than one occasion, as I shall shortly present to you.

There may be many causes for offence, but the following are the most common.

**Personality clashes:** How often we hear that phrase as an ‘excuse’ for not getting along with one another!

**False expectations:** Probably, the number one reason pastors and churches separate. We are not very good at making our expectations known before offence occurs.

**Misunderstandings:** Failure to communicate clearly with one another.

**“Giftings” / talents:** Envy at another’s prominence, instead of feeling secure in our own ministry or ‘calling’.

**Pride:** An affront to one’s ‘ego’. (e.g: the father who is angered (offended) by his son’s average grades in school, believing it reflects badly on himself).

**Rebellion:** The “old man” refuses to die!

The new church sanctuary was almost complete. It had been two long years of hard work for the congregation who were building this church, but God had proven Himself to be faithful. Many were the stories of ‘miracles’ of provision from *Jehovah Jireh (our provider)*. It was now time to decide the colour scheme for the interior of the sanctuary, so a small committee was formed of members of the church and John, art master at the local school, was asked to lead the group. At their first meeting, John arrived with a portfolio outlining his suggestions (some say ‘decisions’) for the colour scheme. It was not long before others present expressed their disagreement with his proposals, having some opinions of their own. Finally, a vote was taken and a consensus decision made - that did not reflect the art teacher’s views. John was offended and the reverberations of his offence were felt in that church for some time afterwards. Indeed, some even said that that was when the ‘miracles’ ceased.

John is no different to all of us! It is so easy to be offended without realising the terrible negative impact this can have on ourselves and on the work of Christ. It is a major weapon used by Satan in defeating us in the battle. Be assured of this - *Offences will come!*<sup>1</sup> Jesus told us of their certainty, and warned us how we can be kept from stumbling at the offence, by responding to His requirements for discipleship, made in the Upper room.

*i.e: “Serve one another; love one another; be obedient to My Word.”*

We are going to look at some Biblical examples of people who were offended. We shall seek the cause and note the results of their offence. Hopefully, we shall also discern the Lord’s purposes in allowing the offences to come. He has promised to deliver us from the ‘evil one’ but has not promised to deliver us from offences! He would, however, teach us to recognise the offence and to receive of His grace in such times of testing.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:1

The various translations of the New Testament can confuse us on this topic, so let us understand that the Greek *skandalon* is variously translated as ‘a stumbling block’, ‘an offence’, ‘a falling away’.

### ***The sower & the seed (Matt 13:18-21)***

Jesus taught the people this well-known parable. In the verses above, He interprets the parable for them, likening the four types of soil to four types of hearers of the sown Word.

The ‘stony places’ describes the man or woman who “heareth the Word, and receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in him, so only lasts a while; for when problems arise because of the Word, **he is offended.**” (v21).

This is a believer who doesn’t like what the Bible teaches him. He had anticipated that being a Christian would be easy! He wanted the joy and the peace but was not prepared to *take up his cross*, to pay the price of servanthood. By and by, he is *offended* and falls away, the result being *no fruit!*

### ***A prophet without honour (Matt 13:54-57)***

Jesus came to His own town of Nazareth where He taught in the synagogue. His neighbours were astonished at His teaching, questioning where He received such wisdom. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?” they said. “We’ve known him since childhood! Who does he think he is?” ‘Familiarity often breeds contempt’ and they were *offended in Him* (v57).

How many young men and women, responding to God’s call on their lives, have tried to answer that call, but have been hindered by the greater ‘wisdom’ of their neighbours - family, friends and church leaders! I am reminded of the old prophet in 1 Kings 13 who was offended because God was using another young man to proclaim His word. Because of his offence, the old prophet deceived the young man, the result being the silencing of his witness, through death!

As a result of their offence in Nazareth, “*He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*”

A sure way to stop the Lord moving in miraculous ways in your life, is to take offence. The result of their being offended was *no miracles!*

### ***The betrayer (Matt 26:6-14)***

Jesus was at the home of Simon, a leper, when a woman came in with an expensive box of perfumed ointment. She broke it over the Lord’s feet and began to wipe them with her hair, so that the fragrance filled the house. Matthew tells us that the disciples *were offended* when they saw this ‘waste’,(v8) declaring that the perfume could have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor. Just after this, Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests in order to betray his master. (v14). In John’s account of this event, we are told it was Judas himself, who made the complaint, being offended, “*not because he was concerned about the poor but because he was a thief!*” (John 12: 6)

I remember when a well-known International charity spent over US\$1 million to make a documentary film about their work. Many of their supporters expressed indignation at such ‘waste’, and withheld their monthly contributions. They felt themselves to be justly indignant. However, within one year, the proceeds from the showing of that film, exceeded five times the cost of making it! I believe we should rather err on the cautious side when we come to spend the Lord’s money, but taking offence could be a greater source of embarrassment!

Judas was offended so he goes out to betray his master. The potential for betrayal was already there but the offence stirred that potential into action. The result of his offence was that he no longer trusted the Lord to do what He said He would. Judas would goad Him into action. If He were the promised Messiah who would establish His kingdom in place of the Roman empire, now was the time to prove it! Only one thing was proved! That he, Judas, was a poor politician and an even poorer friend!

Judas had lost confidence in the Lord! Where is your confidence placed? In what do you place your trust, your hope? Christian 'hope' is an eager expectation in that what He has promised, He will complete! The hymnist declares "*My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness!*"

The writer to the Hebrews encourages us "not to throw away your confidence which brings great reward." (Hebrews 10: 35).

When we are offended, the result will be a lack of hope - *no confidence!*

### ***Peter's denial (Matt 26:31-35; 69-75)***

Jesus had just come to the Mount of Olives, having instituted the communion covenant with His disciples. He now teaches them that He is about to be taken away from them. "*You shall all be offended because of Me this night.*" Peter, - brave and foolish Peter, - says "*I will never be offended in You, even if everyone else is!*" How he must have regretted those words just a few hours later! I feel for Peter because he is so much like me! How wonderful a Saviour we have who, feeling his pain, would appear first to Peter after His resurrection, and before the others saw Him.<sup>2</sup> I can only imagine that scene as the two of them were reconciled through the Saviour's love.

John and Peter entered the house of the High Priest, where Jesus was being tried. As Peter passes through the doorway, a slave girl said to him, "Aren't you one of His disciples?" He said, "I am not!" Two more times he denies his Lord, adding some choice oaths before the cock crew. I like to imagine that young slave girl and her question. Isn't it possible that she was attracted to the Lord and wanted to know more about Him? If Peter had acknowledged his discipleship, would she have asked him to tell her

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 24: 34

about his friend as she wanted to love Him also? However, Peter was **offended** and the result of his offence was **no testimony!**

### ***Many turn away (John 6: 53-61)***

Jesus is speaking some hard things to His followers. He is calling them to “*eat of My flesh and drink of My blood.*” Today, in retrospect, we understand this in terms of the communion cup and the *new covenant* He has called us into, but, to them it was *a hard saying, difficult to understand.*

### **Jesus said, “Are you offended?”**

Are you offended by His call to the discipleship demanded in the communion covenant, that discipleship which is the core challenge of this book? The result of their offence was that *many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him (v66).* The result of their offence was **no community.**

So we have five Biblical examples of those who were offended, with the result that *they lost their fruit, their confidence, their testimony. God did no miracles among them and there was no unity! ..... and Satan gloated!*