

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE ROCK OF OFFENCE

Jesus was the cause of much offence! Both Peter and Paul quote the Old testament in calling Him ‘a rock of offence’..<sup>1</sup>

The Pharisees were offended by Him; demons were offended by Him; even His family were offended by Him!

Some He deliberately avoided offending, such as the despised tax gatherers doing their unpleasant work. He told Peter to go to the sea where he would find the required tax in the mouth of a fish, “*so that we do not give them any offence.*”(Matthew 17: 24)

Some He seems to deliberately offend!

#### ***Cousin John***

John the Baptist was second cousin to Jesus and had been born just a few months before Him. He was full of the Holy Spirit even while in his mother’s womb and was the first to show any response to the promised Messiah. He had leapt in Elizabeth’s womb when Mary, the mother of Jesus, had first come to tell the remarkable story of her baby’s conception.

I’m sure the two boys must have spent many hours together during childhood. They had played and worked together, run and fought together, talked and argued together. They may have even talked

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:8

together about the burden that was growing in each of their hearts. Finally, John leaves home to answer a strange compulsion. Possibly Jesus was the only one who understood when John announced that he must *'prepare the way of the Lord'* , and then he left for the desert. There John began to preach to all who would listen to him. "The Messiah is coming soon" he would proclaim, "and we are not ready! Repent and be baptised. Return to your God!" The people responded, seeking to be reconciled to Jehovah and indicating their new resolve by being baptised in the local stream, the River Jordan. There was a baptism of repentance and a return to orthodoxy.

One day Jesus came to the Jordan and John cried out to the people, "*Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World!*" (John 1: 29). John gave witness that he saw a dove descending upon Jesus and remaining upon him. The Holy Spirit had already told John that this would be the sign of the coming Messiah. "*I have seen and bear witness, that this is the Son of God.*" (John 1: 34).

John was not a popular preacher who 'tickled men's ears'. Most of those who came to hear and see him were looking for a curiosity, hoping that they would be there to hear his condemnation of the self-righteous leaders of the synagogue. He had some choice things to say to such leaders and the people loved it! However, one man who did not like what John had to say was Herod the Roman puppet ruler. He was a wicked man who was having an affair with his sister in law, an affair that John openly condemned. To silence his voice Herod had John committed to prison.

I can imagine the thoughts of John while in those dungeons. "Herod, you old fool! You think you are in control and that putting me in prison will silence my voice. But, my cousin is the Messiah and He has come to overthrow your little empire and to establish His own kingdom! He'll get me out of this prison soon, and you will be the one locked away! He has declared that He has come to set the captive free. I can hardly wait to see your face when He does it!" John sits back in his cell and waits ...and waits ...and waits.

Meanwhile, Jesus continues with His ministry in the nearby villages, not even finding the time to visit John in prison! Surely He would at least come to visit him! He does not come - and John is *offended!* He subsequently lost his head over the matter! John's disciples are sent to Jesus to ask a pointed question. "Are you truly the Messiah or should we wait for another?" (Matthew 11:3). "You do not meet our criteria!" "You are not doing what we expected You to do!"

Jesus replies, "*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them, and blessed is he who is not offended in Me.*"

### ***Dear friend Mary***

Jesus had some very special friends who lived in the small town of Bethany. He was just a few miles away when He received news that His friend Lazarus was dying and that the sisters Mary and Martha were grieving for him. "*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. When He heard therefore, that he was sick, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was!*" (John 11: 5,6).

We do not read of any miracles, any teaching, anything He did during those two days! And Lazarus died! When Jesus finally came to Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days and his sisters were in deep sorrow. It is Martha who comes out to greet Him. That is noteworthy, for she was the one we often think of as 'the drudge', the one who was kitchen-bound, while her sister Mary would leave everything to sit at Jesus' feet, washing them with precious perfume and wiping them with her hair while absorbing everything He said. Today, Mary would be prominent in Christian activity, President of the local women's Adoration Group while her sister would be in the background making coffee and serving cookies.

Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” Jesus assures her that her brother will live again for He is the resurrection and the life. I do not hear any condemnation in the comment of Martha, just a sadness. She then goes to Mary, to ask her to come to Jesus. Why isn’t Mary already there? Surely she knows that He is coming? Everyone would be aware of that, but *Mary sat still in the house*. Why? May I suggest that she was pouting! She was ***offended!*** When she comes to Jesus, she falls before Him weeping and says the same words as Martha had. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Note that Jesus does not say the same comforting words to Mary that He expressed to her sister. Could this have been because of the tone of her voice? Accusing? Judgemental?

Instead, ***Jesus wept.***<sup>2</sup> Not because Lazarus was dead. He had known that for some time and also that, in a short while, all would be rejoicing at his resurrection. He did not weep because Mary, Martha and their friends were in sorrow. He had known that they would be for that was natural at the death of a loved one. He wept because ***Mary was offended.***

Jesus would die for our “offences” but He still grieves when we take offence.

On the journey to Bethany, Jesus had told His disciples that people are often offended when they cannot understand. They are walking in the dark.<sup>3</sup> Had He known how Mary would react?

### ***Why offences come***

Why does the Lord allow offences to come? Could it be that His purpose is to reveal to us something about ourselves? Did John have to realise that, though he had declared that *He must increase and I must*

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<sup>2</sup> John 11:35

<sup>3</sup> John 11:10

*decrease*,<sup>4</sup> the agenda, the timetable, has to be the Lord's not John's. How easy it is for us to try to manipulate Him into doing things our way. How easy it is to cross the line between His will and our plans. We must not get offended when He doesn't do things 'our way'. He does know what is best for us, even when we cannot see the reasons for the valleys we experience.

Did Mary need to learn that obedience and trust is far better than prominence and popularity, even in the Lord's 'service'. Greatness in the Kingdom comes to those who would be least, even as servants.<sup>5</sup>

### ***What to do with offences***

1. ***Own it!***                    The offence is yours. Another has not sinned against you. You 'took the monkey' on your own shoulders, so throw it off - or carry it!

2. ***Examine it!***                The Lord allowed it to come to                teach you something about yourself.

I have had to learn some hard things this way! I have given you some of the reasons for offences, in the previous chapter. Study your *personality types* and learn to major on your strengths - e.g: Most pastors tend to be melancholics. One gift of the melancholic is the ability to see problems long before others do. This can cause them to be critical of others, offended by their inability to see 'the obvious' and to do something about it. Thank God you are not all like me!

Our *giftings* are different. For many years I was offended by other's failure to recognise my teaching 'gift'. Everyone thinks he can teach! I have learned not to be so easily offended when people ignore my gifting and calling as a pastor.

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<sup>4</sup> John 3:30

<sup>5</sup> Luke 9:48

3. ***Discard it!*** By choice, pray about it and bury it! Bless those who have offended you. Seek the empowering of the Holy Spirit if the offence seems too heavy. He has promised to be sufficient for all your trials.

*“Pursue peace with all men ..... See to it that you do not come short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble and by it many are defiled.” (Hebrews 12: 14,15).*

4. ***Forget it!***

Finally, DO NOT BE THE ONE WHO CAUSES OFFENCE!

***“Woe to him through whom they come!” (Luke 17: 1).***