

Dealing With Offences

It is inevitable when people get together that someone will get hurt feelings and become offended.

Most times this is the result of misunderstanding a message or misinterpreting a situation, or what someone else does or says.

Sad to say, such offences can destroy loving relationships and create long-lasting enmity and hard feelings.

Even seemingly insignificant misunderstandings can, unless handled properly, fester into deep wounds that permanently divide people.

Offences that go unresolved between two Christians can adversely affect the spiritual development of both.

Matthew 5:23-24 [New King James] *“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

Notice how important this reconciliation with your brother is to your relationship with your Creator God.

You can actually cut yourself off from your Creator God because of your failure to show love for another person in the way God wants you to.

1 John 4:20-21 [New King James] *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”*

When you are offended or are causing offence to someone else you are not showing a loving relationship.

How do you handle such a problem?

Do you confront it or avoid it?

If you deal with the situation, how do you do so?

Do you really know how to handle offences?

What to do when offended –

A major key to handling problems between people is found in God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

Matthew 18:15 [Phillips Translation] *“If your brother wrongs you, go and have it out with him at once, just between the two of you. If he will listen to you, you have won him back as a brother.”*

While this command applies specifically to Christians, the principle is clear, the Creator God wants all people to do something about offences, not to ignore them. He does not want real or imagined barriers between people.

How then do you go to your brother? –

Make sure your attitude is right before you go, draw close to God in prayer about the situation.

Evaluate the situation, the hurt you feel. Has the person really wronged you or are you over-reacting?

Is your pride getting in the way?

When you approach the person, show respect for the hurt they may feel.

Be careful about accusing them of being too sensitive, to you it may seem they are making an issue out of nothing, but what may be relatively unimportant to one person may be a major consideration to another.

You must understand that admitting error will probably be difficult for the other person. Is that not true for you?

The other person may offer many justifications for their actions, but give them a chance to tell their side of the situation.

Proverbs 18:13 [New King James] *“He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.”*

You might discover that you have been wrong in being offended.

Proverbs 25:11-12 [New King James] *“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.”*

Be sure to choose your words carefully, do not let the hurt you have suffered ruin your communication. Restrain your emotions, consider the other person’s point of view and objectively present the problem.

Remember it is always hard for the mind to stop justifying itself and acknowledge wrongdoing.

Approaching another person with a proud, demanding and harsh attitude can keep them from seeing themselves in a clear light. They will become defensive and start accusing you rather than examining themselves.

Proverbs 15:1-2 [New King James] *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.”*

It is critical that the situation is handled with tact, sincerity and concern for the other person.

Another important point is to remember to keep the dispute between the two of you at this stage, it is easy to discuss the real or imagined fault with others.

Such an action will *do no good at all.*

It may ruin the other person’s reputation and will not make you look so good either.

Not only will you still have the problem with the other person, but you will have infected others with your negative feelings and information.

If the other person involved finds out that you have discussed the problem with others, they may become even more bitter towards you.

Proverbs 25:9 [New King James] *“Debate your case with your neighbour, and do not disclose the secret to another;”*

The Creator God wants you to keep the problem between the two of you in the hope that it will be resolved without adversely affecting others.

So restrain yourself from telling others.

Be willing to apologise –

Do not desire revenge or blow out of proportion your role as a wounded party.

Be willing to admit your own faults.

Proverbs 16:18 [New King James] *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”*

Our humility is tested when we need to admit that we are wrong, but admitting our own error is a major part of solving interpersonal problems.

Proverbs 18:19 [New King James] *“A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.”*

Healing a relationship that has been ruptured by offence is **not** easy.

Colossians 3:12-13 [New King James] *“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”*

We have to reflect the very mind of Jesus Christ when we go to another person who has given us offence.

These attitudes of mind will enable us to do a much more effective job of restoring relationships after an offence.

If you are wrong, these qualities will help you to apologise, which is essential to restoring a relationship.

When the problem has been resolved, completely forgive and forget it, do not harbour resentment about it or bring it up later.

Hebrews 12:15 [New King James] *“looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;”*

Bitterness over any situation can be deadly for our relationship with our Creator God.

Matthew 6:12 [New King James] *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”*

God forgives us according to how we forgive others.

What if the first meeting does not work –

What should we do if all our efforts fail after “going to your brother” as the Creator God has commanded we should?

Should we quit trying to resolve the problem?

Matthew 18:16 [Phillips Translation] *“If he will not listen to you, take one or two others with you so that everything that is said may have the support of two or three witnesses.”*

Only now is the time to include others. Choose these individuals very carefully, for they need to have the same attitude of mind that you have.

All of you need to pray together about the situation to receive God’s guidance.

Go to the person with the same humility, love and truthfulness, try to reason with them about the problem.

Matthew 18:17 [Phillips Translation] *“And if he still will not pay attention, tell the matter to the church ...”*

If your efforts fail, then, in the case of two Christians, the ministry will need to be involved.

The ministry will work with the offending person in the hopes of correcting their fault. However, if the “fruit” of repentance is not borne, stronger action must be taken.

Matthew 18:17 [Phillips Translation] *“... and if he will not even listen to the church then he must be to you just like a pagan ...”*

Try not to offend –

1 Corinthians 10:32-33 [New King James] *“Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”*

As Christians we should at all costs avoid being offensive to any people in or out of the Church.

Matthew 15:12 [New King James] *“Then His disciples came and said to Him, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?’”*

In some instances, offending people in our process of obeying our Creator God is unavoidable.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 [King James] *“Abstain from all appearance of evil.”*

Try to avoid giving anyone the impression that you are sinning.

All of us have God-given emotions, but not all of us control them in the same way, so offence may occur at times.

Going to your brother in any situation that may have caused offence is a God-ordained requirement to ensure that right character and relationships will be built.

If we practice this principle, we will enjoy much more peace, unity and harmony in all our relationships.