

Taking on offences



One of the significant challenges we face in ministry is taking on 'offences'. It's such a problem that John Bevere has written a whole book on this subject called 'The Bait of Satan'. He states, '*....most people who are ensnared by the bait of Satan don't even realise it* (Italics mine). So, don't be fooled! You *will* encounter offense, and it's up to you how you're going to let it affect your relationship with God. Your response will determine your future.' Jesus undoubtedly included the importance of not taking on offences when He said, "in the world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). It's normal life.

I notice there are three areas where people succumb to this temptation.

1. People are offended by God and His ways.
2. People are offended when hurt by others.
3. Out of compassion for others, people take on other people's offences.

In succumbing to these temptations, people are prone to express anger, develop attitudes of unforgiveness, be judgmental, act controlling and finally have an ineffective ministry. Is that you? I hope not. A friend of mine died recently, with what appeared to have an unforgiving spirit from the unfortunate way he was treated in his theological training days, decades ago. Sad. If you have a similar problem with carrying offences, you must find release. Once free, you will flourish! Ask God to give you discernment.

Praise God, there is an answer.

Bible perspective

When Jesus visited His hometown, people turned on Him by saying, "*Where then did this man get all these things (e.g. wisdom and power)?*" And they took offence at him. Matt 13:56,57

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this (His teaching), Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?" John 6:61

And forgive your people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offences they have committed against you, and cause their captors to show them mercy; 1 Kings 8:50

Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs. Prov 10:12

Observations

1. People are offended by God.
 - a. For years I struggled with the passage in 1 Chronicles 13:9,10 when the oxen stumbled in pulling the ark of God on a cart, and Uzzah reached out to save it from falling. Immediately, God struck him dead! My problem was, why would God do such a thing when Uzzah's intention was only

honourable? When I read 1 Chron 15:1,2, where God makes it clear that only the priests were to move the ark and saw that Uzzah ignored God's direction, I understood.

- b. Too many people are offended by God when things go wrong or when prayers are not answered. However, even when we don't always understand, we need to hold to the conviction that God is truly good, loving, kind and just. (I believe this, as I write unexpectedly from hospital where Doctors seek to discern what is causing half my body to go numb progressively! Later they discovered I was having a stroke).

2. People are offended when hurt by others.

When this happens, it is wrong and self-defeating to respond with anger and/or attitudes of unforgiveness. Learn to recognise that God is at work in a more significant way of wanting to refine us further into the image of Christ. Don't resent that. It's a time to die to self. It's not easy, but it has rich results! Psalm 66:10-12 is a favourite passage of mine to describe this process from God's perspective.

*For you, God, tested us;
you refined us like silver.
You brought us into prison
and laid burdens on our backs.
You let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and water,
but you brought us to a place of abundance.*

3. Out of compassion for others, people take on another's offences.

The Sandfords coined the term 'empathetic defilement', which aptly describes what happens when we carry other people's hurts. Usually, we only hear one side of a story which touches our emotions. It seems plausible, but it is not always the whole truth. When we take that bait, we add to destructive gossip and negative feelings. On the other hand, people in top leadership positions hear a wide range of confidential information and are sometimes unable to share what they know..

Extending complete forgiveness to those who treat us and others poorly, sets us free from taking on offences. Then we resist Satan's bait and become wholesome messengers of goodwill.

Resources

The Bait of Satan, by John Bevere

The Screwtape Letters, by C. S. Lewis

Honourably Wounded, by Marjory F Foyle