

Overcoming Offense

Ready:

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NIV)

Set

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells us that without love nothing we are and possess nothing. This is a fundamental truth of Christianity. It's so simple and yet so complex. We can say we believe it but our relationships with others will reveal whether or not we really do.

As athletes and coaches, we never show up to the game expecting our opponents to hand us the victory. We know there is going to be a battle. We expect it and plan for it. As Christians we must remember that we have a spiritual opponent who is going to use every opportunity to come against us. John 10:10 says that our enemy comes only to steal, kill and destroy. And one of the ways he tries to damage our relationships with God and others is by luring us into unforgiveness. It's a powerful way that he can bring us down by causing stress, hindering fulfilling relationships and hurting our witness for Christ.

Being offended and causing offense is going to happen. Staying offended and being an offensive person, however, is a choice. The psychology is out there that forgiveness is part of a healthy lifestyle. As Christians, we must remember that forgiveness does more than just help us in the natural; it also serves as a powerful spiritual weapon. First Corinthians 13:5 tells us that love is not easily angered nor does it keep record of wrong. The chapter makes it clear that without love nothing else we do, say or possess matters. Therefore, when we stay in offense, we are not operating in love and become ineffective. What athlete or coach wants to be ineffective? The answer is obvious but we somehow still refuse to forgive.

One of the biggest obstacles we face when trying to forgive is our emotions. God created us to feel, and we all react to situations differently. Emotions are not the problems in and of themselves, but rather the emotional decisions we make as a result of how we feel. In Ephesians 4:26, Paul said, "In your anger do not sin." He didn't say not to be angry; he said to not sin. We can feel the emotions, but we should not make decisions until we have cooled down and prayed for God to guide us in our response.

Another obstacle to forgiving is our pride. When I get offended I ask God, "Is there any truth in what they are saying?" Asking this question neutralizes the emotion and moves my focus from how I am feeling to how the situation can help me become more Christ-like. After all, I may

find myself getting offended even when the person has a valid point. Proverbs 13:10 reminds us that pride and arrogance lead to strife but that wisdom is gained by those who take advice. When we look at the offending comment through the eyes of God and ask for His wisdom, we may find the path to forgiveness is much shorter.

Another obstacle may be concern that the offender will continue in their ways if we quickly forgive them. When I encounter repeat offenders who apologize I respond, "I don't want your apology. I want the behavior to stop." It's truthful and honest, and it helps me to offer forgiveness while addressing the issue. It also leaves us with a reminder that when we cause offense we can follow up our apology with what we can and will do differently in the future.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus says, "So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." The passage doesn't get into who is right and wrong; it is about reconciliation. Since God has forgiven all of our offenses, surely we can forgive those who have offended us.

Forgiveness is not about what people deserve but about extending mercy and grace. Remember how many times God has forgiven your offenses and realize that unforgiveness affects our relationships with God and others and damages our witness for Him. Today, whether you are offended on the field or off, diffuse the enemy's power by taking the matter to God and asking for His wisdom and chosen response. Follow Him and trust Him to take care of the results.

Go

1. Do you believe that God cares about your daily interactions with others?
2. Who do you need to forgive?
3. From whom do you need to ask forgiveness?

Workout

- Proverbs 15:1
- Romans 12:21
- 1 Peter 4:8

Bible Reference:

1 Peter 4



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