

# Becoming a Peacemaker Series

## The Path of Peace in Giving Offense Conflict (1 Cor. 10:31-33)

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# The Path of Peace in Giving Offense Conflict

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Accidental Interruption

1. A group from our church was preparing to get on a plane for our trip to Israel. The group leader had purchased all the tickets for the group. When I walked into the Green Bay airport, I looked at my tickets for the first time. I noticed something unusual. We were supposed to be flying from Green Bay to Minneapolis, from Minneapolis to Paris, and from Paris to Tel Aviv. My ticket only went to Paris, as far as I could tell. Perhaps, I'd get another ticket later.
2. When I got to the agent at the desk at our initial check-in, I asked about the problem and said I was confused. The person told me everything was fine as they weighed and tagged my checked luggage. I asked another airline employee, who seemed to be the supervisor, the same question. I got the same response. With their assurance, I hoped everything would be okay, but I was still skeptical.
3. As we were waiting for everyone in our group to check in and be ready to go to our gate, I noticed another person from our group seemed to be having the same problem as I was. The agent was in the process of fixing the issue. When it was fixed, I immediately spoke up and said that I was having the same trouble with my ticket. I was getting nervous because we were supposed to be boarding our plane in a few minutes, and I still thought I had a problem with my ticket.
4. The agent said she knew what was wrong and would be able to help me as she reached out her hand for my passport and ticket. I gave my paperwork to her, and she started helping me. The family that was at the desk first moved to the other agent that had originally checked me in. Apparently, they weren't done checking in yet and I had unknowingly butted in as I followed the instructions of the agent. Once the problem with my ticket was fixed, I was the last person to leave the check-in station and the last one to get to the gate.
5. Thankfully, I am good friends with that family, so they weren't upset. However, after I realized what had happened, I thought to myself, I would be a little bothered if I was in their position and someone had done that to me. I didn't know if they thought I interrupted them on purpose. I apologized to them for unintentionally interrupting their check-in process. They said it wasn't a problem, and they knew me well enough to know I didn't do anything rude on purpose.

- B. While this potential offense was not very complex and was easily handled, that isn't usually the case. How do we work through conflict where an offense took place and both people involved have a difference of opinion? This is some of the complexity that comes up regarding the topic of what the Bible calls offenses. In situations like these, an important question must be answered. It is the same question Jacob asked his father-in-law Laban when he was falsely accused: What is my offense? (Gen. 31:36). When offenses arise, it is very important for conversations to happen about what is bothering the person who was upset, hurt, or is

experiencing negative feelings. People can get offended for good reasons, bad reasons, or no reason at all.

- C. Since there is a greater level of complexity in giving offense conflict than in sin conflict, there isn't a straightforward and easy step-by-step path toward peace. Instead, guiding principles that help move us toward reconciliation and a solution must be understood and applied. There are many variables and different situations in which offenses take place; therefore, a step-by-step reconciliation process is not possible. When it comes to offenses, there usually isn't Scripture that directly applies to the situations in question to provide guidance, as in the case with sin. Wisdom and discernment are needed to know how to best apply the principles being covered as we navigate the kaleidoscope of offenses we deal with in our everyday lives.

## II. Discern the Type of Offense

- A. Our path to peace for giving offense conflict begins by identifying the type of offense we are dealing with. This type of conflict is more complex than sin conflict because offenses come in all shapes and sizes, with a lot of grey area. Different people will view offenses differently, depending on their perspective, experiences, expectations, and desires. As difficult as it can be at times for two people to agree on what is right and wrong during sin conflict, identifying the right path forward is even more difficult when it comes to offenses. One person will be offended, while the next person will not. There frequently isn't an objective standard to assess and define what an offense is and how it should be handled.
- B. Broadly speaking, the Bible identifies two main types of offenses. The first one is discovered from the words of the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul:
  - <sup>32</sup> Why? Because *they did not pursue it by faith, but as though they could by works.* They stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup> just as it is written: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And the one who believes in Him will not be Put to shame." (Rm. 9:32-33)<sup>1</sup>
- C. Paul is explaining why Jews, who had the word of God, did not possess the righteousness desired by God, while the non-Jews (Gentiles) did, without having the word of God (Rm. 9:30-31). While we will explain more about Jesus being a source of offense in the upcoming message on dealing with taking offense conflict, here we will only note that Jesus Himself is identified as a source of offense ("They stumbled over the stumbling stone", v. 32 and "a rock of offense", v. 33). Jesus and His message cause offense for some people. Jesus, His message, and specific claims/teachings of Jesus are examples of the first type of offense identified in the Bible: a person being offended at truth and what is good. This type of offense is not justified, and the person doing the "offending" is not at fault. We will address how to respond to this type of conflict more thoroughly in the taking offense conflict message.
- D. Biblically speaking, offenses are the same as "stumbling blocks" (Mt. 5:29-30, 18:8-9). Before going further, we need to recall our definition of an offense. An offense is anything that hinders someone from doing what is right, causes one to sin, or causes someone to fall away from the

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:57-64, 1 Corinthians 1:23, Galatians 5:11, 1 Peter 2:8

faith.<sup>2</sup> When we are dealing with offenses, we need to remember and keep in mind that we are operating under the assumption that offenses are not immoral in themselves. To offend someone is not to sin against them or mistreat them. Offenses are morally neutral; they are not wrong in themselves, but they may be unwise and inconsiderate (in some cases). Offenses create harm and relational tension, even though offenses are not morally corrupted. Offenses occur when a person acts insensitively, obnoxiously, annoyingly, or inconsiderately toward others because of a lack of social and relational skill. Those who cause genuine offense do so because they are not paying attention to how their words and actions impact others.

- E. Offenses don't do anything immoral, but they often lack wisdom. Offenses can tempt another person to sin (Mt. 16:23), promote sin in another person's life (Mt. 18:7, 1 Cor. 8:13, 10:32), cause resentment or anger (Pr. 18:19), damage another person's commitment to Jesus (Rm. 14:13). Offenses can be a mistake that is held against a person (Neh. 9:17), or an action that leads to opposition (Gal. 5:11).<sup>3</sup>
- F. In this first type of offense, the problem is created not by the individual who is giving the offense (in this case Jesus), but in the person who is taking offense. The fault lies in how the person who is offended is responding to the truth and/or what is good, as well as the actions of the "offending" person. This type of offense will be further explained in how disciples should respond to the different types of offenses below in the situation with Jesus and the Pharisees from Matthew 15. Just because a person is offended does not mean the other person said or did something inconsiderately. Regardless, there is a perceived offense by the person who was offended.
- G. The second type of offense is very different than the first:
  - <sup>15</sup> For if because of food your brother *or sister* is hurt, you are no longer walking in accordance with love. Do not destroy with your *choice* of food that *person* for whom Christ died. (Rm. 14:15)
- H. Paul also identifies the second type of offense where the person giving the offense is responsible and at fault ("your brother or sister is hurt" and "you are no longer walking in accordance with love", v. 15). Some offenses are justified, as in the second type of offense: genuine harm is done to another person. The reason for this type of offense are the words or actions of another person ("the person who eats and causes offense" Rm. 14:20). The result of these types of offenses is harm, usually spiritual in nature, to another person. The spiritual damage done to a person's conscience or trust in Jesus leads to feelings of sorrow and unhappiness.<sup>4</sup> Real injury is done by these offenses, not merely violating a person's personal perspective, preferences, desires, or expectations. Harm is not the same as hurt feelings.
- I. In these offenses, the hurt feelings and relational damage done are the normal and expected result from the words and actions of another person—even more so for some individuals, given their past experiences. Being overly sensitive or insecure isn't the issue here; the behavior of

<sup>2</sup> Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, [\*Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 346.

<sup>3</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Bible Word Study Guide

<sup>4</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Romans 14:15 "hurt" and "destroy"

the offender is. These offenses must be dealt with, and the behavior of the offending person needs to be adjusted for peace to be possible. The person doing the action is causing a legitimate offense.

- J. Before we know how to respond to a person being offended, we first need to identify the source of the offense and what type of offense we are dealing with. The nature of the offense will determine how each offense is responded to. If we fail to correctly identify the type of offense we are confronted with, we may respond inappropriately to it.
- K. An issue that is becoming more common in the church today is misidentifying the type of offense we are confronted with. When disciples face the first type of offense but treat it as if it is the second type, some disciples end up compromising in a way they shouldn't. When those outside the church become offended at disciples agreeing with and promoting God's good moral standards or the truths of the Bible, we should not respond by thinking or acting like we have done something offensive. Faithfulness is never offensive in an irresponsible way. If we act as if truth, Jesus, or the moral standards of God are offensive, we will end up compromising in illegitimate ways. Disciples should never feel bad about standing with Jesus or agreeing with what God says is good, no matter how many people disagree with us. Great harm can be caused by misidentifying which type of offense we are dealing with.

### III. Two Different Responses

- A. Depending on the type of offense, our response will correspond to the type of offense. Jesus acted with a specific response when facing the second type of offense:
 

<sup>24</sup> Now when they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma *tax* came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma *tax*?" <sup>25</sup> He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" <sup>26</sup> When *Peter* said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are exempt. <sup>27</sup> However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater. Take that and give it to them for you and Me." (Mt. 17:24-27)
- B. Jesus intentionally thought about the other people He was interacting with and actively took steps to avoid offending them ("so that we do not offend them", v. 27). Before acting, Jesus helped Peter understand that He didn't need to pay the temple tax (also called the two-drachma tax, vv. 25-26). This tax was imposed on every Jewish man twenty years old and older to support the needs and work of the temple.<sup>5</sup> Jesus, as God's Son, didn't have to pay the temple tax; He was exempt ("Then the sons are exempt", v. 26). However, even though Jesus was free from the obligation of paying the tax, Jesus let go of His own personal rights and paid the tax anyway so that He wouldn't offend those collecting the tax. Jesus carefully maneuvered in this situation so that He would not unnecessarily cause a harmful offense on another person.

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<sup>5</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "[Tax, Taxation,](#)" in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2039, D. Downs, "[Economics,](#)" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 225.

Jesus was able to do this because He had a good understanding of the other people involved and how they would respond to His words and actions. Jesus sacrificed His own personal rights and freedoms for the benefit of others. Paul endorses this same type of response to unnecessary offenses that are hurting other people in Romans 14.

- C. On another occasion, in a different situation, Jesus responded very differently to the first type of offense:
  - <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” <sup>13</sup> But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. <sup>14</sup> Leave them alone; they are blind guides of blind people. And if a person who is blind guides *another* who is blind, both will fall into a pit.” (Mt. 15:12-14)
- D. Interestingly, the exact same term for “offense” is used in both passages. This time, Jesus doesn’t mind offending other people (“Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?”, v. 12). What statement caused the offense? Most likely it was Jesus’ accurate description of the spiritual practices of the Pharisees regarding the word of God (Mt. 15:1-9). They were offended that Jesus spoke the truth and called them out on their disobedient religious practices. Their human-made habits put them at odds with the word of God.
- E. Not only did Jesus offend the Pharisees, but He also didn’t bother trying to clear up the offense. Instead, Jesus completely ignored the offense, and the people who were offended (“Leave them alone; they are blind guides of blind people”, v. 14). Why did Jesus let people get offended without trying to clear it up? Because Jesus knew this was an offense of the first type and these people were spiritually dead—unresponsive to Him and the Father (“Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted”, v. 13). The Pharisees were offended at the truth statements Jesus made about them and the way they were pursuing God. The fault for this offense was on the Pharisees, not Jesus. This is why Jesus ignored them being offended.
- F. Our path of peace will be greatly influenced by the type of offense we are dealing with. In some cases, this may require a conversation with others in which we learn about how our words and actions have impacted them. It is critical for us to understand where the person is coming from, what caused the offense, and what impact the offense is having on them before we know how we should respond. When we are causing legitimate offenses through our unthoughtful words or actions, we should do as Jesus did and attempt to prevent all unnecessary offenses.
- G. On the other hand, if people are offended for an unjustified reason, we are free to ignore the other person and their offenses. However, if the offense affects another disciple, it would be wise to have a conversation with them and work toward reconciliation as much as possible. The problem and the solution for these offenses is the responsibility of the person who unjustly took offense. There is likely nothing the “offending” person can do to fix the situation since they are not the ones who are responsible for the offense. Ignoring the offense can be a wise course of action.

#### IV. Learn to Consider Others (Tit. 3:1-2)

- A. If we have given offense and the other person is justified in being offended, disciples will take the next step in the reconciliation process by focusing our attention on the other person and their needs:
  - <sup>1</sup> Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, <sup>2</sup> to slander no one, not to be contentious, *to be gentle*, showing every consideration for all people. (Tit. 3:1-2)
- B. Disciples are described as people who are considerate to everyone (“showing every consideration”, v. 2). To be considerate is to operate with a God-focused humility that treats others kindly, patiently, and without anger.<sup>6</sup> This gentleness is the result of being a child of God and having His character in us (Col. 3:12, Eph. 4:2).<sup>7</sup> As we seek peace amid offenses, we turn our attention toward the other person as we attempt to understand their spiritual journey and what their spiritual needs are. Thoughtfulness toward others comes in all forms, and every form should be given to every person we interact with throughout our lives.
- C. Consideration is a universal principle that is given to everyone we encounter (“for all people”, v. 2). This attitude and perspective is also applied to people outside the church who are self-centered, rebellious, angry, and hateful (Tit. 3:3). In short, there is no one who we will encounter as disciples who should not be treated considerately. Instead of only (or primarily) thinking about ourselves and our interests, we attempt to put ourselves in the other person’s situation and do what is best for them. Disciples don’t just consider themselves; they consider others as well. Thinking about how other people experience us is critical.
- D. We need to recognize the subjective nature of some offenses. If offenses tempt people or incite a person toward sin, different words or actions can offend one person but not another. We should be as sensitive to others as we can be, constantly growing in our understanding of those around us and how best to interact with them. We don’t always know what will put a stumbling block in another person’s path or what will do spiritual damage to another person. Familiarity and history can help us be more considerate with others.
- E. I’m sure Peter had no idea that a comment about not letting Jesus suffer would tempt Jesus (Mt. 16:21-23) in an area that He had to work through later in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39). Jesus admitted He had to work through this issue (Jn. 12:27). Satan apparently knew this was a temptation strategy that might work with Jesus, since Jesus wanted to avoid having to die an excruciating death on the cross (Mt 4:8-10). Satan offered the same outcome intended by the Father without the cost, pain, and suffering as a temptation offered to Jesus. Had Peter known this internal struggle of Jesus, he may have acted differently.

#### V. Limit Personal Freedom for the Benefit of Others (Rm. 14:13)

- A. Once we know what is best for the offended person and we understand how we’ve offended them, we should navigate our interactions with them in the future more carefully:

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Hauck and Seigfried Schulz, “[Πραῦς, Πραΐτης](#),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 650.

<sup>7</sup> This word is difficult to translate into English as there is no exact corresponding term, the focus of Paul is on the demonstration of gentleness toward others in relationship. John R. W. Stott, [Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 200.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore let's not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this: not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's *or sister's* way. (Rm. 14:13)

- B. Like Jesus with the temple tax collectors, we limit our personal freedom and rights for the benefit of others ("determine this: not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's or sister's way", v. 13). This principle of restricting self for the sake of others replaces our former tendencies to criticize and condemn those with whom we disagree. In the context Paul is talking about, there are two groups of people within the church. One group thinks disciples should not eat meat that has been used in idol sacrifices, while the other group thinks it is fine to eat that meat because you aren't participating in the religious ceremony. A parallel example from today's church might be drinking alcohol. Some disciples think it's okay, and others think it is wrong. These issues are not right or wrong in themselves; they are a matter of personal preference, wisdom, and thinking on topics where God hasn't given any specific commands. Even if an action isn't wrong, if there is a chance it will hurt or negatively impact others, we don't do it.
- C. Instead of forming critical opinions about people who have different convictions and lifestyles than us, disciples should make it their relational ambition to live in such a way that other disciples are not spiritually harmed by their choices and habits. Any action that might result in a person being tempted to sin, actually sinning, or prevented from performing a righteous action will be avoided.<sup>8</sup> Paul himself said that if eating this meat hurts another person, he will never eat meat again (1 Cor. 8:13). Paul refuses to do anything that he is aware of that will cause a fellow disciple to sin or be harmed in their relationship with Jesus. Paul knows Jesus died for each and every disciple.
- D. Some examples of this principle in action might be a person refusing to give information that was shared in confidence to a person who has a hard time with gossip. Another disciple may refuse to go to a movie with sensuous scenes with another disciple who struggles with lust. Perhaps a person who battles anger will be encouraged to avoid a situation that is known to be a trigger. Still another disciple who fights control with alcohol should not be invited to a party where it is readily available. Wives who neglect regular physical intimacy with their husbands put a stumbling block in his path. Husbands who ignore their wife's emotional support put temptation right at her door. Overly demanding and restrictive parents set their children up for anger and rebellion. The everyday examples of this principle are endless. The bottom line is that disciples help one another obey God, grow in being like Jesus, avoid temptation, and stay spiritually strong.

## VI. Serve Others in Love (Gal. 5:13-14)

- A. What would motivate a person to limit their own personal freedom? This is a counterintuitive way of life, given our current cultural sensibilities. Instead of putting ourselves ahead of others, we put others ahead of ourselves because we love them:

<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers *and sisters*; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. <sup>14</sup> For the whole

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<sup>8</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Romans 14:13 "obstacle" and "stumbling block"



Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal. 5:13-14)

- B. To serve others as we are motivated by love is a main component of a Christian lifestyle (“but serve one another through love”, v. 13). In fact, so important is this lifestyle habit that if we do it consistently, we will be doing everything God teaches and commands in His word (v. 14). Jesus made the same point Paul is making here (Mt. 22:39-40). Disciples act and work as a servant of those around them out of a strong positive emotion of regard and affection.<sup>9</sup> Our fondness and affection for one another is expressed in our actions. With the right heart and attitudes, disciples can eagerly and joyfully act sacrificially for the benefit of those around them on a regular basis.
- C. What Jesus and Paul are both advocating for here is directly contradictory to what we are encouraged to do by our culture. This life of service toward others philosophy is opposed to the life philosophy that says, “I’m going to do what makes me happy no matter what effect my pursuit of happiness has on others.” The modern expressive individualism philosophy of life is directly at odds with the values of Jesus and the Christian lifestyle. We put others ahead of ourselves, not the other way around. Those who take pride in “not caring what anybody else thinks” are operating out of sync with the heart of Jesus. On this issue, Jesus confronts our American culture.

## VII. Do not Give Unnecessary Offense (1 Cor. 10:31-33)

- A. The target disciples are aiming at in all these peacemaking principles is:
  - <sup>31</sup> Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God. <sup>32</sup> Do not offend Jews or Greeks, or the church of God; <sup>33</sup> just as I also please everyone in all things, not seeking my own benefit but the *benefit* of the many, so that they may be saved. (1 Cor. 10:31-33)
- B. Our hope and goal as disciples is to glorify God by doing good as we avoid all unnecessary offenses (“Do not offend Jews or Greeks, or the church of God”, v. 31). Negatively, we don’t upset or hurt others with our actions, but positively, we intend to make everyone pleased with our behavior and give them pleasure (“please everyone in all things”, v. 32).<sup>10</sup> In doing this, we fulfill our main purpose in life, which is to glorify God (“do all things for the glory of God”, v. 31). This controlling desire impacts every action we perform and every word we speak (“do all things”, v. 31). The only offense should be our message, not our actions in ministry (2 Cor. 6:2-3).
- C. Disciples positively interact with everyone around them by acting in ways that benefit others and lead them toward salvation (“not seeking my own benefit but the benefit of the many, so that they may be saved”, v. 33). Disciples live so others can get an advantage from them.<sup>11</sup> We act so others can receive good and be helped from us. Primarily, this refers to spiritual benefits and growth.

<sup>9</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Galatians 5:13 “serve” and “love”

<sup>10</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Corinthians 10:33 “please”

<sup>11</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Corinthians 10:33 “benefit”

- D. Disciples who share Jesus' values intend to not offend others with our words or actions. We constantly want those around us to benefit from us, our actions, and our presence, just the way people did with Jesus. Jesus had such a deep passion to obey and glorify God the Father that it influenced everything He did, which caused Him to always benefit those around Him rather than doing them harm. Jesus never produced one single unnecessary offense! While we probably won't ever reach that standard, it is still something worth striving for.

#### **VIII. Conclusion**

- A. Conflict happens when our actions have a negative impact on others, even when we don't do anything wrong. To avoid resentment, disciples must work through a range of topics that cause offense when there frequently is a difference of opinion on the issues being discussed. How do we work through this more complex version of conflict? By understanding and applying the principles above.
- B. Disciples attempt to avoid all unnecessary offenses by the way they think, talk, and act so they can create a greater degree of peace in their lives. By considering others, setting themselves aside, and serving those around them, disciples can avoid many offenses that can easily disrupt our lives and our relationship.