

Did we get everyone's toes?

It really is amazing how many opportunities there are in a day of our lives to be offended. Offended by news or neighbors, by traffic or saving turtles, by politics or policies, self-checkouts or solicitation...

And one of the worst offenses that there is out there is to know that you are not as offended about what I am offended about! For the next several weeks, we will be taking a journey on Sunday mornings, but hopefully, throughout the week, we will discover how one small change can make all of life better.

We will discover the real physiological and psychological effects of living taking offense. There is a book we are encouraging everyone to read, but what Mark and I will try and do it cover this idea outside of how Brant has covered it in the book... and then Brant will be here to talk more about this during the final week of the series.

I've got to admit that before I picked up this book and started to dive into scripture on this, I thought I was doing pretty well. I don't get offended very easily, it takes a lot to really offend me... this would be a good book for all of those Christians who are constantly offended by everything, and boy, was I wrong!

I have realized that I have been so conditioned to become offended and how very quickly those offenses can begin to stack up in a day... For the sake of the series and to make sure we are all headed in the same direction, I figured it might be helpful to define the word offense -

Offense: annoyance or resentment brought about by a perceived insult to or disregard for oneself or one's standards or principles.

I do want to make a clear caveat that there are things that move beyond offenses, to abuse. There are those who are or have been victims of abuse in this room and listening online, and I am not at all suggesting it is safe to stay in that place... Mark is going to address more fully Anger and forgiveness in the coming weeks.

But today we will discover that Experiencing unconditional love leads to living an unoffendable life. And yet the inverse is true as well... Lacking in love leads to living an often offended life

I have had the joy of attending and officiating many weddings, and on Scripture that nearly everyone wants to read comes from 1 Corinthians 13 - so it will be a familiar text for most of us. Some people may have parts of it hanging somewhere in your living room, But the more I read it, the more I am convinced it is some of the most difficult passages in Scripture.

We bring a lot of baggage and misunderstanding to it... we remove it from its context... and it sounds like this light, happy, simple, straightforward passage about love. But today, I hope we discover more of it's beauty and how absolutely counter-cultural it is.

Paul is writing this letter to the Corinthians church, and he has a few things he wants to address. The Corinthians are using their gifts for display rather than service; instead of using them to bless, they were using them to brag. They thought their spiritual superiority and ability to stand out from others were a result of their gifts.

In chapter 12, he reminds them of the beauty of these gifts that God had graciously given them, how they have been called and equipped as the church to be the HOPE OF THE WORLD!

So after he lists all these gifts and encourages them to use them, he closes his thought with 1 Corinthians 12:30b - And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

So today we are going to see a more excellent way!

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 - 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.

Paul is trying to help us understand that if we have all of the gifts in the world and all of the right tools, but they are not fueled by LOVE, then they are no good.

And this shouldn't come as a surprise for the Corinthians or for us... on a couple of occasions, people asked Jesus, what are the most important commandments to follow? And Jesus said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself.*" - Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31

So, just like Jesus... Paul doesn't want this to feel ambiguous... He makes it clear that Love is the pinnacle of the Christian life. The answer to the Tina Turner question that took the world by storm in 1984... The answer is Everything Tina... Love has Got everything to do with it...

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.

Then, Paul describes what love is and the actions that LOVE DOES and LOVE DOES NOT do...

Love Does:

Patience
Kindness
Rejoicing in Truth
Protect
Trust
Hope
Preserve

Love Does not:

Envy
Boast & Act Proudful
Dishonor People
Act Selfish
Act Angry
Keep records of wrongs
Delight in Evil

Imagine learning to love like this and taking offense at the same time... it seems impossible. The reality is that you will not produce enough warm fuzzies in a lifetime to get this done. Let's not sugarcoat it... We live in a real world with real problems... there are genuine offenses taking place. Things that go far beyond paper straws and self-checkouts.

We live in a culture that is not trending toward truth. In fact, there are many people and corporations that are actively opposing truth... And it is so tempting to fight fire with fire. To get it a yelling match! To call it like you see it! To take a stand and let everybody on your social media feed know about it. But if it is not clothed in these things, then it is just a bunch of noise that people are tuning out.

So, my hope is to take a look at this list of the characteristics of LOVE and ask three questions to serve as a bit of a litmus test to see if we trend toward offering LOVE or living in offense... So, we will use three questions for this self-analysis

Am I walking in humility? - *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. - That is the core of this verse!*

- PATIENCE - Offended people are impatient. One of the biggest places the Holy Spirit has been convicting with me lately is how little patience I have for other people's dysfunction and how much patience I demand from God and others for mine.
- Do I judge others by their actions and myself by my intentions?
- KIND - Offended people lack kindness. In an interesting couple decade-long study of marriages, *the* Gottman Institute research says the difference between what they call MASTER marriages and DISASTER marriages comes down to two things... kindness & generosity
 - "Marriage Masters are scanning the social environment for things they can appreciate and say thank you for. Marriage Disasters are scanning the social environment for partners' mistakes." - Dr. John Gottman
 - I think marriage is just one of the easiest things to consistently measure and get good data on, but this applies to Unoffendable and offendable people...(REPLACE WORDS) - "Unoffendable people are scanning the social environment for things they can appreciate and say thank you for. Offendable people are scanning the social environment for people's mistakes." - Dr. John Gottman
 - Paul says in Romans it's the rich kindness and patience of God that leads to repentance
- ENVY - Offended People embrace envy. What happens if someone else gets that thing you have always wanted? The raise? The recognition? The spouse, perhaps? The baby? When their company or investments expand while yours does not?
- BOAST/PROUD -Offended people boast the most ... what happens when you get those things? Are you flexing it... disguising your boasting or pride at #BLESSED

Am I making this about me? - *Love does not dishonor others, love is not self-seeking, love is not easily angered, love keeps no record of wrongs.*

- DISHONOR - Offended people love to consume media that convinces you that you can love your neighbor (because of how they vote, act, live or believe differently than you), And friends, anything that seeks to convince you that you can love someone who was created in the image of God less it is nothing short of Godless. - (I am just going to repeat that one... and let it sit) - they are not an idiot... they are BELOVED...
- SELF-SEEKING - Offendable people commodify people ... When a server, or style doesn't meet our preferences or desires, we pick it apart and find every

reason for offense. We make worship services about how satisfied we were vs. how glorified God was.

- NOT EASILY ANGERED - Offended people are Anger Addicts - Like if there is not something to be always angry at, then they don't know how to function. (*Chapter 14 - Brant talks about the book "Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers" and dives deeper into the real psychological and physiological effects of anger and living on the edge.*) - more on that next week
- NO RECORDS OF WRONGS - Offended People love to keep score! Inherently as humans, we are scorekeepers. But most of us are terrible at it. We always think we have way more than we actually do & that others have way less.

Am I trusting that God is in control? Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

- NOT DELIGHT IN EVIL/REJOICE IN TRUTH - Offended people are afraid of confronting evil personally. Like one on one in the lives of people. They prefer megaphones instead of headphones since they would rather shout.... command than listen and understand.... when I have a deep enough relationship to confront sin in someone else's life, they have an intimate enough relationship to confront sin or evil in my life... and also will rejoice in and stoke the truth... when I am believing lies or following evil, it's because I need to be reminded of truth! They will replace the lies with the truth.
 - Offended People hate the sin and love the sinner... in everyone else's life. We have sort of co-opted this phrase in Christian circles - but my question is always - how is that going in your life? Are you obsessed with and as passionate about defeating the sin in your own life as you are about the sin in the lives of others? Defending your sin instead of defeating it.
- ALWAYS PROTECTS/TRUSTS/HOPES/PERSERVERES - Offended people always search for cracks. They have a hard time protecting, trusting, or hoping. And this can become more difficult the more intimate you become with someone or something. They prefer tearing down over building up
- Offended people would rather FIGHT WITH people than FIGHT FOR people.

I want to be clear that I am not an expert in being unoffendable at this point in my life, and those people who interact with me the most are internally saying "AMEN". I grew up in the church as one of those Christians who could find offense in anything and everything, Chief of the Morality Police

I went to Bible college excited to get more ammunition to help defend my position on everything. Within my first couple of semesters, there were three moments I will never forget that rocked me deeply.

The first was sitting across from a sibling, hearing the words “Alex, I am gay.” I remember thinking... how is this going to work? I have all of this love for Scripture and doctrine... and yet all of this love for this person, and had sleepless nights wondering if they could be compatible...

The next memory was hearing the words “Guilty of murder” said about my childhood best friend in a downtown courtroom... I remember walking out of there with rain pouring on my head, tears pouring from my face.... so many questions and very few answers...

And it would be a couple of weeks later, I would show up in the hospital getting to meet my nephew for the first time... overwhelmed by the joy of his life, but also knowing my little sister was now a teenage mom...

These are the BIG OFFENSES... the ones labeled SIN in all caps... the ones I had been writing theological position papers about... issues I had grown up judging and looking down on, yet they were people I loved deeply...

I remember moments of wrestling with my faith like never before... wrestling with my positions on theological issues and Scripture like never before... and I remember sensing God say, *“Alex, I am not interested in changing your positions about issues; I am interested in changing your posture toward people”*

At that time this studying the book of 1 Corinthians, this LOVE CHAPTER became deeply convicting for me at that moment... as I was in school, training to do ministry, feeling called, gifted, and equipped... yet I had no ability to LOVE... at least not those who lived and thought differently than me...

These were the “types of people” I tried to stay away from... the ones I was most disgusted and offended by... and now here they were all in proximity to me.

And I realized in those moments that the more I live in proximity with those who are different from me and the more unoffendable I become... and there is freedom in that... freedom in not having to play the role of judge and jury and trusting that a sovereign God will.

If I ever hope to live a UNOFFENDABLE life and with the freedom it offers, I have got to LOVE!

That is why this is the greatest commandment: to love God and love people... but there is a paradox that presents itself in the great commandment... we cannot just white knuckle, grit our teeth, and obey ourselves into loving others. This kind of love must be received before it is ever shown.

The love described in 1 Corinthians 13 isn't just a nice list, this love was made alive in the person of Jesus. It is a love for you to experience...

1 John 4:19 reminds us... "We love because He first loves us."

It is through the Gospel that we can recognize that we are more flawed, offensive, and selfish than we ever dared believe, yet at the same time, we can be more loved and accepted than we ever dared to hope.

Nothing a person has ever done to you. Is crazy as what God has done for you.

Only through experiencing unconditional love will I be able to live an unoffendable life
Experiencing unconditional love leads to living an unoffendable life

You and I have offended a holy God. A God who is clear and unchanging in his position, yet decided to get in proximity to the people who offended him. Showing a posture of LOVE toward the most offensive of people.

And let me be clear... this call to LOVE is anything but a calling to be a pacifist and not care about justice or morality, it's a calling to be radical. To see the weight of injustice in immorality. To recognize offense, and yet meet it with radical love.

Living in a constant state of offense is not radical... it's easy... and at the end of the day, it hurts us way more than those who are offending us!

But living an a UNOFFENDABLE life by Loving people is RADICAL AND RISKY... because you cannot control the RESULTS... There will be no guarantees how the person will respond... True love cannot demand or control the outcome.

There are times I have seen God a redemptive story written, and times I have been rejected... But by His Grace, God has allowed me to be in proximity to so many people and families with similar stories and point people to the truth, hope, and LOVE that is only found in the Gospel... in a way that I would have never imagined.

Some of us are so easily offended because we have not received love in a while... I can usually tell that I am OFTEN OFFENDED, when I am LOW ON LOVE... I cannot give what I haven't received... so I have to be reminded of God's great love for me. Love cannot pour out of what it has not poured into.

If that is you. I want you to know that there is a God who is crazy about you. He loves you deeply... not because of anything you have done or have not done, but because he adores you. He made you. HE WANTS YOU TO EXPERIENCE HIS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FOR YOU!

So here is the challenge for this week.. Get in proximity to someone who you find offensive, and ask that God would work on changing your posture toward them. For some of us, it won't be difficult to get in proximity with someone who offends you... you already work somewhere or go to a school, or a gym, or a coffee shop... dare I say some of you even live with someone who is offensive.. And maybe even actively aggressive about your beliefs... I want to invite you to lean in this week... lean into prayer... lean into love... ask God to reveal his love for them.

Church we are God's "Plan A" for bringing hope to the world... at the end of the day our hope is not to be a church known for good music, or programs or preaching... BUT BY OUR LOVE!

Let me close with these words from Jesus in John 13:34-35 as a benediction.
"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." - John 13:34-35