

I'm Sorry if This Article Offends You. Please Forgive Me.

When I went to journalism school, they told me I needed to develop thick skin. People don't always like what you write, even when it's 100 percent accurate.

When I went into ministry, they told me I needed to develop a big heart to go along with that thick skin. People don't always like what you say, even when it's 100 percent in love. But you have to love even your worst detractors.

That's never been truer than in recent months. Most of you seem to enjoy this weekly column, but you'd be surprised at the vitriolic (a fancy writer's word to describe acidic speech) emails I get from some readers. It never feels particularly good for people to judge your heart.

In the early days of ministry, my skin was so thin you could practically see my heart beating through my chest. I could literally feel the adrenaline flowing through my body as I digested the verbal attacks. I sent the hate mail I received around to all my trusted friends so they could assure me I was on the side of truth. I used to get offended at some of the hate-mail writers who mocked my physical appearance, even down to the color of my hair.

Now I have thick skin, but not a calloused heart. (Importance difference!) When someone launches a fiery dart of accusation because I call sin *sin*, I realize it's only because the rock I threw into the enemy's camp chipped away at their justification for transgressing.

When someone takes a **prophetic word** out of context, twists it in an unrecognizable knot and calls me a **false prophet**, I

rejoice in the **persecution**. When someone judges my heart, I **pray** for them because they are opening the door for someone to judge their heart. I refuse to fall into the enemy's snare.

Don't Bite the Bait

What about you? Do you have thick skin and a big heart? You may not have to deal with hate mail like I do, or bloggers coming against your character or your physical looks because they don't like the truth coming off your lips. But it doesn't take a **prophet** to foresee that you run into your fair share of opportunities to get offended. That's one of the reasons the Bible says to guard your heart with all diligence—out of it flow the issues of life (see Prov. 4:23).

The Greek word for *offense* in the Bible is *skandalon*, which is the name for the part of the trap on which bait dangles to catch prey. We know that Satan roams about like a roaring lion, seeking prey to devour (see 1 Peter 5:8). And he often uses offense as his bait. *Vine's Dictionary* defines offense as a hindrance or a stumbling block. The offense is a hindrance to walking in God's best plan for your life because it can lead to resentment, **unforgiveness**, bitterness and even hatred.

If you are easily offended, ask the **Holy Spirit** what Satan has found in you. What strings is he pulling? Maybe you are selfish and get offended with people who won't do things your way. Maybe you have some hidden insecurity and you feel rejected (and offended) when someone disagrees with you. Maybe you have some pride issues and get offended easily when someone offers constructive feedback about your work.

What Would Jesus Do?

If anyone had opportunities to be offended, it was Jesus. Jesus' relatives were ashamed of Him. His disciples couldn't stay awake with Him to pray for even one hour during a critical turning point in his life. The Pharisees said He had a devil. And let's not forget that Peter actually denied Him—three times—and Judas betrayed Him. On the cross, one of

the sinners at His side mocked Him.

Jesus had plenty of “natural” reasons to be offended. Those are just a few. But Jesus didn’t take the bait. Satan found no place in Him. Jesus knew who He was in God. Jesus’ security in the Father allowed Him not to react in offense. His response: “**Forgive** them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:24, KJV).

Jesus saw the big picture and He knew who He was: the Son of God. Do you know who you are? You are a son of God—the bride of Christ. You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. You are the head and not the tail, above and not beneath. You are blessed going in and blessed coming out. Blessings chase you down and overtake you—unless you stumble over offense.

Who cares if you didn’t get invited to the birthday party? Who cares if someone forgot yours? Who cares if the clerk in the grocery store was rude? Who cares if someone interrupts you while you are talking? Who cares if the pastor didn’t say hello to you on the way out the door? Who cares if nobody agrees with you? When you get all wrought up over these sorts of things, you are hurting yourself. Sure, you may upset other people with your cold shoulders or tantrums, but ultimately offense leaves you in bondage.

I could get offended with the bloggers who call me a **false prophet** or the commenters who judge my heart and label me with all sorts of mean-spirited monikers. I could get offended, but instead I take pity on the ones who are bringing the offensive words. Jesus said, “Woe to the man by whom the offense comes!” (Matt. 18:7, NKJV) Sometimes offenses are imagined. Other times they are real. Either way, when you begin to feel offended, **pray** for the one bringing the offense. Ask the Lord to forgive them and bless them. It keeps your heart clean. Amen.

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