

Handling Offended and Offensive People: Your role as a Vineyard Leader

The purpose of this discussion this morning is to spell out what is expected of you as leaders in your Ministry or small group, and to help get you in a frame of mind, give you tips to empower you to address the small stuff, and also to give you the wisdom to know when to get some help for the bigger stuff. But first, we want you to be empowered and educated on what YOU can do to help combat this challenge.

In Bondage to Offenses

There are some Christians who walk in bondage to continual hurt feelings. They love the Lord, but have somehow resisted submitting their sensitive feelings to the Lord. Unfortunately, these “touchy” Christians are sensitive about too many things. They spend much of their time, hurt or upset at people or circumstances. For these ones we must continue to be loving and patient, while encouraging them to grow up. As leaders we must be aware that their sensitivity is brought about by their own inner, personal struggles. Our job is to encourage them, help teach them a better approach, but also to hold them accountable when they stumble.

It is a problem we all struggle with. It was # 4, where we talked about surrendering our “SELF” to God.

I want to stop a minute right here to clarify something. When I am asking you as leaders to coach, support, and hold accountable people in your Ministry or small groups, I am referring to people who “know better”. This is referring to people who have “taken offense” from something, NOT people who are needy for prayer, healing, etc. These are people who DO know better, but act that way anyway. These are not the people who may be new Christians, or new to the Vineyard and don’t know any better.

So, as Leaders, dealing with people who have “taken offense” is real. Our church is coming up against this. It is keeping people from seeing Jesus, from moving towards Jesus. It is “squenching the fire”, and it “slows the progress of the Kingdom of God”.

You are going to hear it in small groups, See it on Facebook or other social media, and you’ll hear it in conversations in the community.

So what should you do about it?

Matthew 18:15-17 The Message (MSG)

¹⁵⁻¹⁷ “If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you’ve made a friend. If he won’t listen, take one or two others

along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love.

In this text Jesus is discussing real sin, an **actual violation** of God's law, is important for two reasons.

1.) It means that Christians should not take offense over personality differences, cultural differences, and socio-economic differences and so on. Be real!! There are many rubs and offenses that occur in life that may not be directly the result of sin. Some Christians are offended over trivial matters that are not sins at all. Proverbs 10:12 says: "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers a multitude of sins." Plainly every rub and offense cannot be raised and settled. As followers of Jesus, we have to learn in love, to forgive and pass by many slights, annoyances and offenses. Much heart break and much needless trouble often come of 'offenses' which exist only in the imagination.

People who are frequently offended often seem to have a "chip" on their shoulder which is quick to misinterpret most things as an offense. They usually blame their offenses upon others, but fail to recognize their own touchiness. This usually indicates deeper wounds, emotional scars, and insecurities which they must allow the Lord to heal. In some cases there may be harbored sins of un-forgiveness toward others which have caused a root of bitterness, which must be surrendered to the Lord. While often not realized, sensitive feelings are a means that Satan uses to oppress and manipulate people. Too often individuals lose their joy and live in defeat because they are so easily hurt or upset. It's not uncommon for such persons to actually stop going to Church or serving the Lord over petty offenses. This type of tragedy is unnecessary if we can simply accept what really causes offenses and be willing to surrender the problem to the Lord.

And the second reason is, God saves all sorts of people, people who you may think are weird, odd, strange, or whatever. Remember, in this scripture, Jesus is talking about sin.

As leaders we can educate our small groups and people in our Ministry around the "attitudes" that we need to have as Christians, the 10 things I just talked about, to help deal with the irritation of every-day life. We can help them grow by talking about these attitudes when things are going smooth, don't wait until there is a crisis to try to roll them out. Those discussions will help us as a church grow in wisdom and mature. Abraham Lincoln once said "We should be too big to take offense and too noble to give it." That part about being noble doesn't happen overnight. So, talking about this in the context of your group will help the frequency of this happening.

Sin is another matter.

Matthew 18:15-17 The Message (MSG)

15-17 “If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you’ve made a friend. If he won’t listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won’t listen, tell the church. If he won’t listen to the church, you’ll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God’s forgiving love.

Matthew 18:15-17 New Living Translation (NLT)

15 “If another believer ^[a] sins against you, ^[b] go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

Now let’s go through this passage and figure out how it should look. This is how WE should handle offenses, and how you, as leaders, should teach others to handle it.

WHO GOES WHERE?

First, the person who is offended must “go and tell him—work it out between the two of you.” Why does the person who has been “wronged” have to go? You may be asked that by the person you are talking to? Because Christian love always regards the welfare of a brother as more important than oneself.

Remember, the whole context of our passage is humility and concern for the little ones of the kingdom. Christ has just spoken about the lost sheep and about the need to go to great lengths to rescue the one stray lamb. How are you to approach the sinning brother? First, you are to approach your brother in a spirit of Christian love and humility. You do not go to your brother to punish and humiliate but to help and to save. Receiving personal justice and satisfaction for our hurt feelings takes second place to seeing our brother repent. Any believer who takes a gleeful satisfaction in the downfall and public humiliation of other professing Christians is not acting in accordance with the spirit of love, concern, and humility which runs throughout chapter 18, but rather, they are acting out of their own sin. It is helpful to remember or point out that this “DRAMA” isn’t what you or they are made for. They are made for advancing the Kingdom of God!!

Second, you need to go and point out your brother’s sin in a calm, rational manner. You are there to convince, to win over your brother. You will not succeed at your task if you lose control of your temper and insult or mock your

brother. Acting like an arrogant jerk is not the way to convince anyone. "Christian reproof is an ordinance of Christ for the bringing of sinners to repentance." It is not a license to be a jerk. Remember, this is your brother for whom Christ died. No matter what he has done, remember, see him or her as Christ does. Don't let your mouth jeopardize restoration.

Third, although the text assumes that actual sin has been committed, no matter how convinced in your own mind of the justice of your cause, you must carefully listen to and weigh your brother's argument. (This assumes of course that he doesn't immediately agree with you and repent.) Christians have been mistaken on many occasions; therefore, you must carefully examine your brother's case. You must consider the possibility that your accusation may be a mistake. Even if you believe that you have an open and shut case, you must give your brother a thorough opportunity to respond. You must have an open mind and be willing to hear what they have to say. For real.

HOW SHOULD I GO?

You are to go alone; that is, in private. Jesus has set up a very good rule in His church for His people Proverbs 11:13 says "that Christians should not speak of our brother's faults to others, 'till we have first spoken about them to that person personally, and privately." Proverbs 26:20: "Fire goes out without wood, and quarrels disappear when gossip stops." Think about the dignity of everyone involved. How do you want to be treated if you ever find yourself in this situation? Protect each other's reputation. Jesus so identifies Himself with His body, the church, that to care for His people is to care for Him; that to persecute His people is to persecute Him; that to ignore the needs of His people is to ignore Him. Thus for believers to ignore Christ's command to go privately to our brother and instead seriously damage his reputation through gossip is a great sin. It shows a lack of love and concern for our brother.

Another reason to go to your brother privately is to protect your own reputation. Christians are not infallible. Sometimes we are totally wrong concerning the behavior of a brother. We, as Believers have heard things wrong, misunderstood statements and actions and jumped to all kinds of conclusions. So, if you go to your brother privately and discuss the matter and discover that your perception and/or accusation are wrong, then you can ask for forgiveness (if necessary) and reconcile. The issue is settled right there, privately, and no harm of reputation comes to you or your neighbor. If you go and spread false and damaging information around the church about a brother, then whose reputation will be seriously damaged when the truth is discovered? Uh, yours! You will suffer a loss

of trust and credibility in the congregation. Who wants that? (Besides the Enemy?)

A third reason to go to your brother privately is to preserve the peace of the church. Often when accusations are leveled against a brother behind his back and spread throughout the church and the accuser and accused disagree, factions will develop within the church. People have a tendency to take sides in a dispute. People choose camps. How many churches have a split because someone did not obey Christ's simple command to go to a brother privately and keep the matter secret? We are seeing some of this happening among our members and all of us as Leaders; need to do our part to help this to STOP.

Fourth, sins are to be kept private and dealt with immediately in order not to bring reproach on the name of Jesus Christ. We are Jesus' representatives to the world. We are supposed to set an example before the world of the power of Jesus to save and sanctify. When professing believers treat each like crap, the world notices and mocks both Christ and His church. Who wants to be that person?

WHAT IF THIS DOESN'T WORK?

As leaders, this is where you may want to ask for some help from another leader, or pastoral staff. If you find yourself at this point in personally, or if a member you're working with gets to this step, and comes to you, this is a great time to ask for some help.

So, what if you go to your brother and make a real effort to convince him of his sin and he rejects your counsel? What is the next step? Verse 16: **"If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again."**

We can't just give up on them. Jesus commands you to take one or two other Christians with you as witnesses and try again. The bringing of one or two other believers serves two purposes.

The main reason is to provide witnesses. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 19:15: "In order that by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established." A man is not to be condemned solely on the account of one witness. It is important to realize that these additional witnesses are not witnesses to the sin committed (for the text is discussing a sin committed to only one person) but are to be witnesses to the reconciliation process. They are there

to certify that a sincere effort was made at reconciliation by the one wronged, and if need be, to serve as witnesses before the church if the matter escalates.

Another reason to involve witnesses at this point is because the seriousness of this second step should also make the accuser reflect on the nature of his charges. “Is my case really so serious that I can get one or two other persons of sound judgment to go with me; or am I, perhaps, making a mountain out of a mole-hill?”¹⁹ Was it really sin that occurred? Could I be mistaken? Was God’s law actually violated or am I upset because my feelings were hurt? Was it just a misunderstanding or personality difference? Perhaps I should just drop the issue altogether, etc.? Sometimes witnesses are brought in and discover that the accuser’s charges are frivolous. The great wisdom of this second step is that most cases that are frivolous, wrong, based on legalism and so forth, are dealt with before the church Board or Pastoral staff has to get involved and before the issue becomes public. Once again not only are reputations preserved, but also the peace of the church is preserved. The serious nature of this second step requires that the witnesses chosen are mature, objective, and knowledgeable in the Scriptures. You want witnesses who will help the situation, not make it worse, or have taken sides.

WAIT, WHERE IS THE STEP WHERE I TELL EVERYONE ELSE HOW BAD THIS OTHER PERSON IS???

There is none! Now, this does not mean that we stop talking to each other? No, but INTENT becomes really, really important! If I am involved in a personal conflict, or have had an interaction that I am struggling with, I can talk to a trusted peer about it IF my intention is to better understand MY feelings. I can explain the situation, but my INTENT needs to be to spend more time talking about ME and MY reaction/thought process/sin nature than the other person.

It is NOT appropriate for me to go to someone else for the purpose of slamming the “offender”. I am NOT supposed to be a character assassin!

If you are doing this when your feelings get hurt, STOP IMMEDIATELY! Seriously. STOP. It is counter-productive, hurtful and dangerous. We talked already about how Satan uses this kind of behavior as a foothold. Don’t give the enemy a foothold. You, as Leaders, need to help **others** STOP doing this too, and that happens thru teaching, coaching and loving each other into better, healthier, and more God-Blessed ways. You cannot view this as a Ross/Tim/Nate job! It is ALL of us! We ALL have that job! So, what does that

look like if you know that this has happened, or is happening in your Ministry or small group?

Step 1

You start by having a conversation with the person who has been offended, and is trying to build a coalition against someone else thru gossip, slander, social media, etc. I am assuming, for the sake of this example, that you have a relationship with this person already. This conversation is most appropriate for someone who HAS an established relationship with this person who is talking smack about someone else. I am assuming as a Ministry/Small Group Leader, you have this. If not, find someone who IS that person. They can help with this step.

In this conversation, you review the healthy Christian attitudes we must employ (10 Ways to stop taking everything so personally) and you work with them to determine if this is something that stops with them? If so, you follow up with them a few more times to see if this really did stop. If so, keep working within your groups to talk about the healthy attitudes. If not, you need to have another discussion with them and be honest about what their actions are saying to you and others. IF this is something more serious, you review with them the Matthew 18:15-17 directions that Jesus gave us. Cover the points we talked about why THEY must go, and that it needs to be a 1:1 conversation initially, and WHY. Get them to commit to a date by when they will do this, and set up a follow up meeting for the 2 of you to debrief how it went and to determine if reconciliation was achieved.

During the initial conversation, it is really important that you ask them if they told anyone else about this offense, and if so, who they told. Seriously, get a list of people. This is really important because you will quickly be able to see how serious and sincere the intent of this person is. If they are sincere, they will give you the info, and if they struggle with that, you may have to work together a little more to get them to see the seriousness of their actions. You want them to realize that telling other people, and not the other party directly involved was not the Jesus way of handling this. Then, tell them that you want to help them get this resolved well, but they need to follow up with each person they told and acknowledge that they made a mistake in saying anything to them instead of the person they have the offense with. They should also tell these folks they are sorry for putting them in an awkward position, and that furthermore, they would appreciate it if they kept the information they shared with them confidential so that they can get this worked out with the person involved in a Jesus honoring way.

An example of a script for the person to share with the “coalition people” is:
“I made a mistake....you weren’t the right person to talk to about this. Please forgive me for involving you in my mess. I am sorry. I will address the correct people. This ends with me. I would greatly appreciate it if you do not repeat what I said to anyone else.”

Your job as Leader is to help them grow as Christians. You are not responsible for solving their problems. You are not responsible to “fix it” for them. Talking to them, and sharing your knowledge, support, and expectations with them is how you help them grow. But, you need to put in the face time. Have the discussions, have the follow up meetings, and you will make an impact on this for our entire church. And remember, you are not alone. Ask for help when you need it. We are all in this together!

And may God Bless your Sweet, Round Heads!