

## Dealing with Offenses

I appreciate so much the gift my children gave me for Christmas, the most recent and exhaustive biography of Lincoln to date. It is a two volume set entitled *Abraham Lincoln, A Life*, by Michael Burlingame. In the chapter entitled, *I Have Seen a Good Deal of the Back Side of This World*, Burlingame records these words: “One day in the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln stole time from his busy schedule to pen some wise paternal advice to a young Union captain who had been squabbling with his superiors. Quoting from *Hamlet*, the president wrote that a father’s admonition to his son- ‘Beware of entrance into a quarrel; but being in, bear it that the opposed may beware of thee’- was good counsel ‘and yet not the best.’ Instead, Lincoln enjoined the captain: ‘Quarrel not at all.’ The reasons Lincoln gave were practical: ‘No man resolved to make the most of himself, can spare time for personal contention. Still less can he afford to take all the consequences, including the vitiating of his temper, and the loss of self-control. Yield larger things to which you can show no more equal right; and yield lesser ones, though clearly your own. Better give your path to a dog, than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite.’ Born into emotional and economic poverty, Lincoln early on ‘resolved to make the most of himself’ and did so adhering to those precepts.”

While I was a professor at college, we had a staff and faculty meeting. One of the administrative staff members, Judson Mitchell declared he could resolve every problem we had at college. In interest, the room grew very quiet as Mitchell continued, “Yes, that’s right, every problem we have.” Then he catapulted this word, “Get rid of all the people. Because as long as you have people, you will have problems.” Everyone enjoyed a good laugh. Cloaked in the humor was the strain of truth. As long as we deal with people we will have problems. So in this interaction that we must have with people we will find ourselves from time to time navigating the troubled waters of offense. Jesus said, “...*It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!*” (Luke 17:1). Our Lord is teaching us that in the real world we will be offended, but He pronounces a “woe” unto those who give offense. If we love the Bible and it’s teaching, a promise is offered: “*Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them*” (Psalm 119:165). I like the thought that Abraham Lincoln early on “resolved to make the most of himself” by avoiding personal contention and adhered to that precept all his life. This resolution is a great reason that a sitting president in the midst of the greatest national crisis could maintain good government. The man first governed himself. I am reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul who said, “*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection...*” (I Corinthians 9:27). How should we deal with offenses?

### 1. Take lightly perceived or actual offenses.

G. K. Chesterton said, “Angels *can* fly because they *can* take themselves lightly.” Many of us take ourselves far too seriously. I sometimes see the sense that my critics make and try to learn from them and if all possible, laugh with my faux pas and go on with life. We can no more go back and undo events, actions and deeds of our life anymore than we can put toothpaste back into the tube once it’s been squeezed out. As a sidebar to this subject, we can keep from being the offending party if we weigh our words, possible actions and deeds before we say or act. “*He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding*” (Proverbs 17: 27,28). “*A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards*” (Proverbs 29:11). Better to keep hurtful thoughts to yourself than express them quickly in an angered moment only to regret them later and have to apologize and do damage control.

How do we handle hurt inflicted to us? Try not to take things so personally. The offending party may be wounded over something that is totally unrelated to you and them, you happen to be the

person they hurt in a wild kind of vengeful spree in an effort (vain, I might add) to exorcise their own demons. An even more serious situation is that their anger may be toward God in a rebellious fashion. When you act Christ-like, you are behaving and speaking like the God they are angry with. So since they are not on speaking terms with the Lord, they strike out at ones who are. Their problem is not with you, but the God you serve. Smile, be sweet and go on. *“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken”* (Proverbs 15:13). The word for “merry” in Hebrew is *sameach*, which means: blithe or gleeful, be glad, be joyful. The word “blithe” means showing a casual and cheerful indifference. I know it may be hard, but love Jesus and others and attempt to take lightly offenses to you.

## **2. Do not feel compelled to respond.**

Jesus said, “Turn the other cheek. *“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also”* (Matthew 5:39). Better to be thought of as indifferent than throw the proverbial “oil on the fire” by rebuttal and the spirit of debate. *“If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences”* (Ecclesiastes 10:4). Give the offender time to cool off. Many times they will be coming to you with an apology later. And if not, at least be consoled that you have done what Jesus would have you do.

## **3. Mind your own business.**

*“And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you”* (I Thessalonians 4:11). *“And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not”* (I Timothy 5:13). A busybody is one who meddles in other peoples’ business. One of the hardest things I have to do in counsel is to sort through the tangled bad advice given from well meaning acquaintances who have pried into business not pertaining to them in an effort to fix (according their opinion) their friend’s “messed up” life. Often, Mr. or Mrs. Busybody makes the situation worse. *“He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears”* (Proverbs 26:17). Talk to God about whom you should discuss your personal situation with and don’t take anything and everything to just anybody or everybody. And don’t pry into other’s business if it does not involve you. Remember Lincoln’s words: “Better give your path to a dog, than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite.”

## **4. Pray for the offender and those involved.**

When I cannot or should not talk to people, I can pray. When confronted with problems, wait on the Lord before speaking or acting. You see, every problem we have in some way or another involves sin. As a parent or friend, we cannot get inside of people and make them do right. Only God can get inside people. People must deal with their sin before a holy and righteous God. Far better for them to be convinced by God than me. The best method more often is to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) then back off and pray.

*“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren”* (Luke 22:32). Think of it: When our Lord saw the Devil working on Peter, He did not tear Satan off his disciple and throw him (the Devil) into the bottomless pit and free Peter from the test. He allowed Peter to go through the trial of denial, hurt and tears. But when Peter got right, he became a great lion for God and the preacher of Pentecost. Peter was prayed for by Jesus and our Lord’s prayers were answered. E. M. Bounds said, “I would rather talk to God for men, than talk to

men for God.” We should do both, but our talking to men will be so much more effective if we pray for them.

- Pastor Pope

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