

BEWARE OF OFFENCES

Matthew 18:6-7, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

The 18th chapter of Matthew is one that provides much instruction for the life and experience of a child of grace in this world. The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, knew that the believers would need guidance throughout the gospel dispensation concerning offenses and dealing with them when they themselves would be offended.

The word offense, in its simple definition, means to cause another to stumble or to cause/entice another to sin. When a person is offended, his or her walk of life is altered, causing them to lose step toward a goal or temporal end.

In Matthew 18, verses 6-7, the Lord Jesus Christ warns the believer of the judgment that one will face if he or she causes an offense. Without question, these two verses declare unto us the love and care that the Lord has for His little children. The Lord says, you offend one of mine, and it will be better for you if you were cast into the sea with a weight tied around your neck (my words).

When we examine the subject of offences, we can readily gather at least three ways in which we can offend another child of grace. Neither is greater than the other, and neither is easier or more difficult to do. Please consider that we can offend:

(1) In word! The 3rd chapter of the Epistle of James is primarily directed to this offense. James warns of the damage that can come about by not controlling our tongues. James would teach that the tongue is like a little fire that is able to consume a great forest (James 3:5). When you consider the huge forest fires that have destroyed so much wildlife and even homes and personal property, all of those fires started with a little flame. Our tongue, if gone uncontrolled, can destroy much by the hurt it causes to others. James would teach that "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (James 3:2).

(2) In deeds, or our actions! The Lord calls on His people to be "kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph 4:32). The actions that we are exhorted to do are, according to scripture, be done without respect of persons (James 2:1). Since actions often speak louder than words, the child of God not only must continually beware of his or her words, but also how their actions and deeds will affect another.

(3) By our example! The eyes of others are always watching. I personally at this time have two small children. It is of most importance that I labor diligently not to give them an example which would cause them to stray from a devoted service to the Lord. The Apostle Paul instructed Titus to show himself a "pattern of good works" (Titus 2:7). How important, but often neglected is our example to others. Whether it be our children, neighbors, friends, co-workers or even our spouse, we should always put forth every effort to encourage, not discourage, others in their obedient walk with the Lord.

Dear reader, our Lord did not waste His words. When He warns us of the consequences of wrong doing, He is serious. Several years ago, when on a fishing trip, I fell out of the boat into the lake water. My clothes quickly absorbed the water and became very heavy. When I tried to swim to the boat with the weight of saturated clothing, I soon became very fatigued. My body longed for rest and my fear of sinking caused me to panic. Sometimes life can be very similar to this experience. In life we have those times when we are struggling, but not getting anywhere, and no matter how much we

try, we feel to be sinking in the troubled waters of this world. One way to prevent some of these experiences is by always considering our lives before the Lord and how we affect others. A person that lives in such a way to not offend and always to help God's little children is bound for much peace in his or her life. And, the peace that comes from the Lord, "passeth all understanding" (Phil 4:7). So let us labor to fulfill the Lord's command, to never offend one of His little children. Amen!

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