

BODY OF PROOF: WEEK FOUR
OFFENSE

If we were to look at the New Testament church through first century eyes, we would see believers not just living out their surrender to Christ's Lordship but living with a sense of deep commitment to being His Body in their city. They would have had a profound sense of not just being connected but being interconnected, where each one's life was radically dependent not just on The Spirit, but each other.

The fact that we are all members of Christ's Body underscores how much we affect each other, in healthy ways and in unhealthy ways. [1 Corinthians 12.12-27] We are not simply private individual Christians who choose to associate with other Christians from time to time; we are collectively the interconnected dwelling place of God. [2 Corinthians 6.16] So, there is a sense in which our actions and attitudes are no longer just our private business. They affect our local church culture. If we are members of The Body of Christ, we have accepted the joy and the obligation that what we do and how we live, even in the privacy of our own hearts, affects each other.

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What causes you to withhold from living interconnected in the Body of Christ?• How does being withdrawn in a local church affect those around you in the body?
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Due to our interconnectedness, when we get an offense in our hearts towards another, especially in the local church, the whole body is affected.

The reality is that we will all offend each other, even if we aren't offensive. All of us are on our own personal and unique journey with God. Just as parents train and disciple their children according to their unique ways and wirings, so all of God's children are different, and God disciplines and shepherds us according to the unique designs He has given us. On top of that, all of us come from diverse histories with all kinds of life experiences, some more painful than others. Often our widely differing rhythms of life clash with each other. Where God is currently working in one person's life doesn't always harmonize perfectly with where God is working in another. Offense doesn't have to be rooted in a sinful attitude; we can rub someone the wrong way simply due to our differences.

The fallenness of our world means that we will all experience hurt, rejection, and emotional pain. All of us have been robbed. All of us have failed. All of us have rebelled. All of us have been hurt and wounded. All of us have been stinky and have had stink done to us. When all of us are experiencing many of these kinds of things in community together, it can be very disorienting to us. All these dynamics create the potential for misunderstanding, fears of rejection, and self-protecting behaviors which make us all susceptible to becoming offended.

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offense can sneak into our lives. How do you know when you are carrying an offense?• How do you navigate differences in personalities, opinions, gifting, and life's journey?• How do you have relationship with someone not intentionally being mean, yet still offending you?
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One of the great foundational attitudes to being truly membered in the body of Christ is to have an unoffendable heart. We need to recognize roots of offense and trust God to reveal if our hearts are vulnerable in those areas.

Misplaced expectations are one of the primary roots of offense. When you think about it, Judas betrayed Jesus because he had become offended with Jesus. Judas had an expectation of Jesus that was misplaced. He expected Jesus to be a political Messiah who would conquer Rome. Instead, he soon realized that he was following a Messiah who said His mission was to die. Were Judas' desires for freedom from oppression understandable? Absolutely. But he mistakenly placed those desires of a political Messiah on Jesus, and when Jesus didn't fulfill his expectations, he was so emotionally devastated that his betrayal was automatic!

One of the main reasons we become offended with each other or with our local church, is due to unmet expectations. We put expectations on our fellow-believers that only God can, or should, fulfill. When we put misplaced expectations on the members of Christ's body, we will eventually betray those members as surely as Judas betrayed Christ. One of my mentors, Campbell McAlpine, in one of his famous messages, *The Judas Factor*, sums it up this way: "Offense leads to disloyalty and disloyalty leads to betrayal." We might express disloyalty by subtly withdrawing from those we feel offended by, or we might ever so slightly cast a negative shadow on them in conversations with others. But this unaddressed disloyalty will eventually cause the offended to betray those they feel have offended them.

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of expectations do we put on people or church leadership that should really only be put on God?
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Anger over boundaries is another common root of offense. Some have suggested that the reason Lucifer rebelled against God is that he had 'gotten wind' that God was creating a new creature – MAN – that was also going to be given the privilege of closeness to God's presence. And this meant that Lucifer's boundaries were being re-arranged, the role he had had exclusively was now to be shared with another creature. And this angered Lucifer greatly. When God 'moved his boundaries', as it were, Lucifer chose to act independently of God. It is sobering to think that the path toward independence began in Lucifer's heart when he became dissatisfied with the boundaries God had given him.

We too can become angry when our boundaries are moved or lie in what we feel are restrictive places. When we become territorial about areas of our lives, we can become pugnacious and controlling. When something we feel entitled to is threatened, we can become angry and offended.

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you trust God with boundaries in your life or do you feel fear that man will hold you back? • How do you rightly address disagreements over boundaries with authority figures in your life?
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We are continually invited in to experience the nature of God, even in difficult things in our lives like offense. Peter tells us that one of the most amazing parts of belonging to Jesus is that we get to participate in the divine nature: "**His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.**" [2 Peter 1.3-4] What the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit know in their love and compassion towards us, is now something that we can experience. We can know the same joy Jesus did living in humility, forgiving, healing brokenness, and restoring people to the Father's love. Offense presents us with the opportunity to experience the pleasure of God's redeeming power!

Final Take-Home Thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God uses the pain of offense to reveal things going on in our own hearts. Are you vulnerable to offense? Are there roots you need Jesus to address in you? • Is it difficult for you to respond in humility when you have offended someone? Why? • Have you experienced Christ's joy in showing compassion, forgiving, and restoring someone?
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Prayer Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray through any seeds of offense you are carrying in your heart. Release people from expectations. Release all control to God again.
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Share With The Lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an unbeliever shares about an offense in their life, you can share about the roots of offense and how you have found freedom in allowing Jesus to meet your needs and be in control of your boundaries. Share an example!
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