

Default Settings

Week 4: A Guide to Being Unoffendable in an Offensive World

Romans 12:9-21

As we get started today, I want to take a page from Matt's sermon last week and give you a list of all the people *I'm* better than.

I was at a conference for part of last week with some of our staff and key leaders and the running joke as we drove through the craziness of Orlando was, "I'm not better than them." Someone would fly past me on the interstate, or cut me off, or be going too slow...anytime we felt ourselves getting angry or annoyed or offended, someone in the car would just say that line, "I'm not better than them." Or "That's another person I'm not better than."

It became a verbal reminder of what Matt taught us last week...the mercy of God is enormous. And if the mercy of God is enormous for me, then how can I not take the good I've received and give it away to others? If mercy was not withheld from me and my sin, then who am I to withhold it from someone else.

So now, whenever I feel a certain way about something or someone, I'm trying to change my default setting from anger to "I'm not better than they are." Which, if I'm not careful, will just turn into the same thing as, "Awe, bless their little heart." Just a nice way of saying what I'm actually feeling!

And that's why we've been saying throughout this series that this topic of anger and being offended, it's a matter of the heart. It's not just about what happens to us or around us, it's about what's in us. We've said it like this, Anger is not about what's happening "out there" but "in here."

Ever since the Fall in Genesis 3, when Satan got in there and messed with all of our default settings, our hearts have been set towards pride and envy and greed and anger. Our default setting is to look out for ourselves and our own interests...and when you have 8 billion people in the world looking out for themselves and their own interests, we're going to bump into each other, and sparks are going to fly.

But, Jesus wants to change that default setting inside of you. And as you follow him...as you live like him and love like him, then you will take on his attitude and actions towards others. As you grow in being united with Christ, then you will do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

Jesus changes our default setting from anger and offense to mercy and grace. But, what does that look like in our life? Today, we're going to hear from two different voices that will teach us how to be unoffendable in an offensive world and the good that can come when we allow Jesus to transform us.

The first voice is the Apostle Paul. In Romans 12, Paul writes some of my favorite verses when it comes to this topic. I'm going to read these verses slowly, and as I do, think about them in light of what we've been talking about in this series. Think about them in light of your own struggles with being easily angered or offended by others. And if there's a word or a phrase that stands out to you while I read, allow yourself some time to linger there. The Holy Spirit is the best teacher, and there might be something he wants you to reflect on for a minute.

So, everyone get comfortable...(READ Romans 12:9-21 NIV)

Now I'm going to read the same passage in a different translation. Keep listening to see what stands out to you and linger on those words...(READ Romans 12:9-21 MSG)

What came to mind as I read those words? Was there anything convicting about them? Challenging? Comforting? I asked some friends last week to read through this passage a few times and share their thoughts with me. They dropped some incredible wisdom. I told a few of them that this made me want to crowdsource my sermon prep more often! Here's a snapshot of what they said. Maybe you felt something similar...

- "I want to get revenge because I'm afraid God won't handle things the way I'd like. Staying angry gives me a sense of control. If they don't feel my anger, then it feels like I'm letting them get away with something. I want to love everyone and let God deal with them later."
- "Often times I find myself hating things that annoy or inconvenience me rather than things that are evil. I want to hate what is evil, not what is just annoying."
- So many actions we see, especially online, seem to lack any accountability or consequence, so I feel like I need to take matters into my own hands. I want to trust God and be better at overcoming evil with good.
- Be patient, even when things, or people, aren't going your way.
- Seeing others the way God sees them helps me have more kindness and compassion for them.
- Verse 18 – The most conditional verse in the Bible! "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." It's like Paul knows this isn't always possible and he's saying, "I know things may be out of your control, but you need to do your part in living peacefully with all." Not, "live at peace with those who don't offend you, or that agree with you, or vote like you, or believe what you believe. Do your part to live at peace with all people."

- Verse 16 reminds me of the importance of spending time with people who are different than me. She said, “Volunteering at A Friend’s Place has given us a chance to be face to face with homelessness. My heart towards the homeless people I see and encounter has completely changed as I now see them more as humans than I did before.

My heart breaks for their pain, but I also see that I’m not above them. Rather than being annoyed with their presence, I see their needs. I know them by their names, not their label, and it’s hard to be frustrated with people who you know their story.”

To my friend, those words, “I’m not better than you” are not just nice things to say to disguise her true feelings. It’s what she’s learning and becoming as Jesus is changing her default settings. Centuries after Paul wrote these words, some people came along and put chapters and verse numbers to them. And in some Bibles there are section headings.

In my Bible, between verse 8 and 9, the section heading says this: **Love in Action**. That’s the message of these 13 verse. As we take the love we have received in Jesus and put it into action in the way we love others, our default setting will start looking more like Romans 12 and less like the world around me. I’ll start to look more like Jesus and less like who I used to be. **Love in action is the only hope for changing anything in us and the world around us.**

And, to help us see the power of love in action, in a culture that’s not always friendly to followers of Jesus, I want to invite Ajai Lall to join me on the stage. Will you help me welcome him.

Interview with Ajai

1. Tell us a little about the ministry of CICM and the people and places where you serve.
2. In those places you serve, what is the culture’s posture towards followers of Jesus? Do you all experience some opposition?
3. As you listened to Paul’s words in Romans 12:9-21, what stood out to you, particularly when it comes to your ministry and the people and places you serve that might not always be the most friendly towards you?
4. When you’ve experienced persecution, how have you been able to keep your focus on Jesus and make sure that you’re fighting the right battles?
5. I’ve been saying for a while that, as our culture becomes more post-Christian, we’re going to be reaching out to our supported missionaries saying, “Please teach us how to live

in this new world we find ourselves in!” A world that is not as friendly and sometimes outright opposes what we believe. What would you say to those of us who find ourselves getting angry and offended by the changing world around us? How can we stay focused on Jesus and putting our love into action?

6. What are some ways you all have seen the Holy Spirit move as you rose above the “culture wars” and chose not to engage with anger or offense? In other words, as you’ve focused on putting your love into action and fighting the right battles, how have you seen Jesus transform the people you serve?

7. Any final words about letting Jesus change our default settings from anger and offense to love and mercy?

I said it earlier, but it’s so true. **Love in action is the only hope for changing anything in us and the world around us.** As we put our love into action, we are transformed more and more into the image of Christ; living how he lived and loving how he loved. And as we boldly and humbly take the good we’ve received in Christ and give it away to others, they will find the hope of Jesus that has the power to transform them, too.

In Romans 12:12, Paul writes, **“Be joyful in hope.”** What’s your hope anchored in? Because it makes all the difference. If your sense of hope is riding on the next election going your way, or that one of the other 8 billion people in this world don’t bump up against you in some way, then your hope is fleeting.

And when your hope is lost, it’s easy to become like that cornered animal that starts fighting and clawing its way out for self-preservation. We see that all over our world today because our hope is anchored in ourselves and our own interests. And when other people don’t think about us as much as WE think about us, we get angry, annoyed, and offended.

But, if your hope is in Jesus, then it is anchored in a firm foundation that cannot be moved. It is sealed and secure in Christ and there is a sense of joy in him that, no matter what comes at you, or WHO comes at you, it cannot be taken away. You will be able to live and love and serve others as a non-anxious presence in our angry world and you will be able to live with a peace in your life that surpasses all understanding.