Fear Not - Part 4

# Freedom from Offense

## (Matthew 5:21-26)

We are in week number four of our series entitled “Fear Not” and over the last few weeks we have been allowing God’s word to speak to us about how to overcome fear in our lives. This is extremely important because we are living in a culture of fear and yet the Bible tells us,

“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).

And so, how do we balance living by faith when we are living in a culture of fear? It’s like so much in the world has gotten out of control, fear is spreading through our culture like a wildfire, and the media isn’t helping because it’s like they are just throwing gas on the fire.

One newsflash or update, one little exaggeration or misrepresentation of the facts, and it sets us off spiraling into irrational scenarios of “What if this or what if that?” And so, how do we process all of this fear when we have no idea what’s going to happen to our kids, our jobs, and our families in the next weeks and months of this pandemic? It’s like there is no end in sight, this disease continues, the economy is getting worse, there is the threat of wars, and natural disasters and the future is honestly kind of scary. And yet, over and over and over God has spoken throughout the millennia saying, “Fear Not.”

And so, today I want to encourage you to just take a deep breath, slow down for a moment, and consider all that has been happening, because it’s really not new. It’s just history repeated, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, all just repackaged in our current context. And the Bible says it this way in Ecclesiastes chapter one, the Spirit of God revealed to Solomon before the introduction of radio, television, or the Internet, “What has been will be again…”

He said, “What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time” (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10).

2000 years ago, the disciples were trying to process all that Jesus had taught and all that they had seen unfolding before their eyes. They’re struggling to understand prophecy fulfilled and that which was yet to come and so they asked Jesus,

"When will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3, NKJV).

As they are struggling to find peace in the moment and hope for the future, the answer Jesus gives them is almost like a history lesson for us today because we are living in this age. Jesus answered them saying,

"Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:4-8, NKJV).

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another” (Matthew 24:9-10, NKJV).

“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:11-13, NKJV).

Today I want to talk about “Gaining Freedom from Offense,” because I believe this will help us as followers of Christ to rise up, to stand firm, and to endure in a culture of fear. Jesus said, in this age “many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” And so, I want to share with you some scriptures that God has put in my heart, helping me to overcome offense, so that together we are prepared for this season.

I wonder how many of you know someone that is easily offended?

Now, don’t look at them or elbow them, just keep a straight face because if they knew you were thinking about them, they would be so offended. But I wonder how many of you would admit that you are offended more often than you should be?

You see, it’s a really difficult thing to admit, but for many years that was me, and honestly, it’s so easy to become offended, irritated by someone else. It could be in your car on your way to work, or the store, when someone pulls out in front of you. It could be in your home, your workplace, or even in your church, and it may just be little things, maybe just those little annoying habits, but it was weighing me down spiritually.

The problem is that when we hold onto the offenses they begin to accumulate and when we let the offenses begin to accumulate, they begin to seep into our hearts and affect our attitudes. And the reality is that for many of us there are significant wounds, someone will say something about you, even betraying you and letting you down; and our families are divided, friendships end, because our hearts are closed to someone that we are called to love. And so, I want to share with you the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, because I believe that he is going to set some people free from offense today.

In verse 21, Jesus takes the word of God, the Law given to Moses, and reveals to us the spirit of the text. With perfect wisdom he says,

"You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell” (Matthew 5:21-22, NLT).

Now, when Jesus says, “You are in danger of the fires of hell” he’s not using symbolism, this isn’t a parable, the actual word he used here is Gehenna, “the valley of the sons of Hinnom.” This was a deep, narrow glen to the south of Jerusalem where idolatrous Jews used to sacrifice their children in pagan rituals of worship to Molech. King Josiah put an end to that in second Kings chapter 23 and now it was just a large garbage dump where all the trash and dead bodies of both animals and criminals alike were cast to be consumed by the fire which was always kept burning.

And so, in the process of time Gehenna became the image of a place of everlasting destruction and Jesus used that term in that context many times, referring to this smoldering dump where the fire never went out. He’s bringing up this place in Matthew chapter 5 to say that offenses and unresolved conflict in your heart actually create a smoldering, burning, living hell in your life and in your relationships. In other words, he’s trying to communicate that what starts in the heart, doesn’t stay in the heart. What starts in the heart, becomes a thought, which turns into a word, which once spoken creates an atmosphere or environment where you would rather not be. And therefore, the Bible says,

“Take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).

Because we have to process what we hear so that it doesn’t begin to express itself in our own attitudes. You see, each one of us take on offense, after offense, after offense, and we have to process that and release it. Because if you don’t your love begins to grow cold, the person that you used to be, that you were created to be, begins to corrode from the toxicity of built-up offenses.

I don’t know if you’ve noticed or not, but it seems to me that we live in an age of perpetual offense? I mean, everybody is offended about everything all the time, and that’s exactly what Jesus said,

“And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another” (Matthew 24:10, NKJV).

And so, we spend much of our time tiptoeing around so that we don’t offend somebody. In fact, you wouldn’t think it would be this way, but Christians can be some of the most offendable people. It’s kind of weird, because you would think that Christians would be the most gracious people considering that our faith revolves around a relationship with a God who has dropped every offense that we’ve ever committed against him.

And so, the foundation of our faith is built on forgiveness, and yet we know that our enemy’s agenda is destruction. The devil’s strategy is division. Jesus said, “a house is divided against itself cannot stand” (Mark 3:25). And so, the first thing the devil will attempt to do to destroy your house is to divide your house. This principle applies to all of our relationships, whether friendships, marriage, or the church, and

“We’re not unaware of (the devil’s) schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

We know that his agenda is our destruction, his strategy is division, and his method is offense.

And so, here in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus gives us a look at the devil’s playbook so that we can protect ourselves. We know that he wants to destroy our relationships, but he’s not going to come making an announcement, “Hey, the thief is here! I’m coming to kill, steal, and destroy” (John 10:10). But he’s going to come quietly. And so, we know that he is going to try, but we don’t need to let him, we can get ready. The Bible says you can,

“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Ephesians 6:11).

And so, what Jesus is doing in Matthew chapter 5 is he is showing us how to deal with offenses so that we can get the upper hand against the schemes of the enemy.

This is important because we know that he’s going to come quietly, he’s going to start with something small, and so he will just use the littlest offense. It could be just a word, something as small as a word, because nobody can hurt you or make you really mad like someone you trust or someone that you love. And so, the closer the relationship, the greater the opportunity for offense, and it always begins just one little offense at a time. That’s why the Bible warns in Hebrews chapter 12, don’t nurse that grudge, don’t rehearse that offense,

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:15).

In other words, becoming a smoldering garbage dump of fire destroying the potential of that relationship.

And so, we come to church smiling like everything is okay, because nobody can see what’s going on behind-the-scenes, but deep down in our heart it’s smoldering. And so, Jesus says in verse 23,

"If you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God” (Matthew 5:23-24, NLT).

In other words, if you’re worshiping and remember that someone was offended by you or that you have an offense against someone else. Maybe it’s you that is holding a grudge against a brother or sister, Jesus says go get it right with that person, be reconciled to that person before you start worshiping. He says, don’t start singing and praying, ignoring the fact that your relationships are under attack, because he sees what’s going on in your heart. And it started so small, just one offense at a time, maybe simply calling someone an idiot, and the next thing you know everybody is overreacting, tension is high, and you’re in danger of the fires of hell.

And so, Jesus said we need to learn to recognize the offense, to deal with those little things before they become big things. Look at it in verse 25, he says deal with it,

"When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison. And if that happens, you surely won't be free again until you have paid the last penny” (Matthew 5:25-26, NLT).

In other words, Jesus says if you don’t learn how to deal with offense, settling your differences quickly, it could blow up out of proportion and it won’t end well for you.

No matter whether you’ve caused the offense or if you’re the one offended, Jesus warns,

“It is impossible that no offenses should come” (Luke 17:1, NKJV).

And so, it’s not even that we purposely try to offend one another, but we say things unintentionally. How many of you guys know that we just say stuff and we don’t even realize what we’re saying? Or other times, it’s not what we say, it’s what we don’t do, it’s those unmet expectations. Expectations whether they have been expressed or not are a breeding ground of offenses in relationships. And I know to you it may just be a little thing, but to them it is a big thing, and so we need to work through this, because to live offended as a believer in Jesus Christ is a contradiction.

In other words, to stay that way, to live that way, to worship that way, allowing that root of bitterness to grow is a denial of the very nature of the salvation you have received. And so, we want to make some decisions today because life is too short to be stuck struggling under the weight, the burden of carrying all these offenses, incapacitated and unable to carry out God’s calling. Life is too short, the Bible says,

“You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14).

Some of us have stuff happening back at home, happening in our hearts, happening in our relationships, and today we want to release the offenses. We’ve come to worship, we’ve come to the altar, not just to sing a song, not just to hear a message, but to come into the presence of God so that we don’t leave the way that we came.

My prayer is that as we are seeking to become more like Christ, we can overcome the tendency to be so easily offended, because we are the church; we are the hands and feet of Jesus reflecting his love on earth, and life is too short and our calling is too great to be offended by something so small. And so, we can’t live offended, we can’t let something so small drag us down, we’ve got to learn to let it go. In fact, the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 19,

“A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11).

In other words, it’s a choice, a real-time decision to let it go. It’s a form of forgiveness, not pretending that it didn’t happen, but overlooking the fact that it already did happen. It’s making a conscious decision that I am going to rise above this, and I am going to choose not to let this get into my heart and affect my relationships.

In fact, in Ephesians chapter 4, we find the apostle Paul pleading with the church not to allow themselves to be easily offended so that they are distracted from God’s calling. He said,

“I beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.” (Ephesians 4:1-2, NLT).

This is such a great verse because I don’t know anybody who is perfect, we all have faults, we all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory. Therefore, we need to make allowance for each other’s faults, recognizing that when someone else seems to be uncaring, unkind, unfriendly, or just inattentive it may just be communicating the type of day they are having. Their unresponsiveness, their driving habits, or their rude comments are most likely not really about you at all. And so, we’ve got to learn to do better, to have compassion, considering what they’re dealing with instead of judging them and immediately taking offense.

What we want to do is have the same attitude of Christ, recognizing that life is too short and our calling is too great. The Bible says it this way in Colossians chapter 3,

“Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others” (Colossians 3:12-13, NLT).

Maybe you’re thinking of somebody right now and you’re wondering how do I forgive somebody that did something that was so wrong, so unforgivable, something that hurt so deeply? How do we “Make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive anyone who offends us?” How do we forgive like that? Well, verse 13 says, “Remember” and so we need to remember that the Lord forgave us. The Bible says, “the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” And so, we forgive just as we have been forgiven.

Now, I certainly can’t speak for anybody else, but I know that I have been forgiven a lot. I’ve been dishonest, I’ve let people down, I’ve hurt people, and I have blatantly sinned against God. I’ve been forgiven of a lot and the Bible says I am to forgive in the same way that I have been forgiven.

If you’re hearing this today, if God is speaking to you, would you let him crack open your heart a little bit? Don’t let the offenses of this world hold you back, don’t keep rehearsing it in your mind, but release it and draw near to God. Because the Lord forgave you, forgive those who have offended you, make allowances for each other’s faults because of Jesus. Don’t let the accumulation of offenses hold you back, slow you down, or keep you from what God called you to do.

There are those of you today that I believe God is doing a healing work in you right now. You’re no longer going to be under the weight, the burden, or the guilt of something that happened in the past. The Bible said, it is to your glory to overlook an offense, because life is too short to live offended, and your calling is too great. God saved you, gave you the Holy Spirit, gave you a spiritual gift, and put you at this moment in history so that you can glorify him and do his will. He’s called us to forgive in the same way that we have been forgiven, and when we do, it doesn’t change what happened in the past, but it does change what God can do in the future.

Let’s pray together.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

October 24, 2021

(301) 447-4224

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, PC Study Bible, Preaching Library, and Sermon Central. Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*