

**Sermon:** The Beauty of Offense – August 9, 2015 (Scripture is from the ESV)

**Location:** New Philadelphia Church, Sillim Campus – 3pm service

### **Introduction**

Good afternoon, Sillim. It's great to be with you all today. For those of you who are new to the church, welcome. We're glad you can join us.

Please open your Bibles to Proverbs 19:11 and let's get into this message...

**Proverbs 19:11 – Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.**

Proverbs 19:11 reads, "It is his glory to overlook an offense." The word, "glory," in the Hebrew basically means "beauty" or "splendor." So the same verse could read, "It is to a person's beauty to overlook an offense."

**Today's message is titled, "The Beauty of Offense."**

Today I want to share with you why God brings offense into our lives, how we're meant to handle offense, and will close with how handling offense with God is critical for the end times.

Google's dictionary defines offense as: "annoyance or resentment brought about by a perceived insult to or disregard for oneself or one's standard of principles."

Who here enjoys being offended? If you plan to live here in Korea for a while then you better prepare yourself to be offended. Koreans enjoy speaking in a frank way. The Korean word is "솔직히." For example, "You are very pretty... except for your eyes. You should get them fixed." Or, "Let's grade each other's beauty. You're average. You're average. You're too fat. You're average. Done!" While I've heard these comments spoken among different people a number of times in Korea, you would never hear such words in America. People are much more easily offended in America.

Offense can create division, isolation, bitterness, and hate. Offense can cause two friends to suddenly not talk to each other again for a long period of time. Offense can cause a family member to move away. Offense is powerful and dangerous, and can completely shut your heart to the person who offended you.

When we experience offense in our hearts, it's often because of two reasons...

- 1. Offense in our hearts is a sign that our identity isn't secure.** Living here in Korea I have heard a number of harsh, overly frank comments towards people, especially regarding their looks. I've seen some women crumble or get really upset when certain blemishes or faults on their bodies are pointed out. I've seen other women simply shrug their shoulders, laugh it off, or even respond strongly that they are proud of the way God made them. For those that were deeply hurt, it was clear that they weren't confident in themselves, particularly their identity in Christ. No one is perfect by the world's standards, but at the same time all of us were fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God. When we are proud and confident of our identity, we are unshakeable.

This isn't just for looks either. I have seen some of the most "confident" people completely shaken when they heard an offensive remark made against them. For such people the offense revealed that their identity wasn't in God, but rather was in their own pride and their own works. And so while they seemed confident, their confidence was in themselves rather than in their God given identity. I've seen this with many preachers. Almost every preacher I know has had a church member or visitor speak critically and even offensively about one of their sermons. For the preachers whose confidence was in themselves, often the offense pierces them sharply and they respond in anger or in depression. But for those whose identity was secure and whose confidence was in God, they were able to either process through the offense and receive from the criticism or completely shake it off if the critical words had absolutely no benefit.

Whenever we experience offense we need to examine our identity. Why did the offense shake us? Here is the other key reason why we can experience offense...

2. **Offense is also a sign we are still in our flesh.** It's our flesh that causes us to respond in disgust, fear, rage, or sadness. Such responses are not from the fruit of the Spirit, they are from our old selves. But those who are living in the Spirit cannot be offended by what is of the earth. Those living in the Spirit aren't afraid of what man can do to them. Those living in the Spirit are already dead to this world! They are living for eternity, so petty matters here on earth have little effect on them. Think about it: It's impossible to offend a dead person. You could speak slanderous language to someone here on earth and greatly offend them. But once that person is dead, that person has moved on. Your words, no matter how offensive they might be, have no power whatsoever.

So when a person is offended it's often a sign that the person is either weak in their identity, or they are still living in their flesh rather than living by the Spirit. But here is where there can be beauty in offense. Let me read Proverbs 19:11 again...

Proverbs 19:11 – Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

### **Why God Brings Offense**

"It is his beauty to overlook an offense." As much as we hate offense, we must understand that in every offensive situation there is an opportunity for glory and for beauty. Some of the most beautiful people in world history were people who chose to overlook offenses. Martin Luther King Jr. endured offense his whole life, but refused to respond in hate or violence. Gandhi lived the same way. Gandhi wasn't Christian, but his responses to offense and violence still captivated the world. Jesus Christ was the greatest example of beauty being revealed amidst offense. The greatest picture of love and righteousness that we have is of Jesus enduring the mocking, the whipping, and the Cross on our behalf, though He deserved none of it.

This is why God doesn't just allow offense in our lives, but will often purposefully set us in settings where we can be offended. **God wants to bring out His beauty in you.** God wants to strengthen your identity in Him. God wants you to be so removed from your flesh that even the most offensive situations can't rattle you. And so if you are truly led by His Spirit, it is *inevitable* that God will bring some offensive people and some offensive settings into your life. God doesn't want weak sauce politically correct babies. God wants strong men and women secure in their identity and in their faith.

## How We Are Meant to Handle Offense

Some offensive matters are not that offensive at all if we are confident in our identity in Christ and are living by His Spirit. If someone were to tell you, “You’ve gotten fat and you don’t look that healthy,” how would you respond? Is such a statement outright offensive? Its offensive if you’re sensitive, insecure, and in the flesh. But if you really have gained weight and don’t look that healthy, it could be just the word you need to hear to motivate yourself to get healthy again. A sensitive, insecure person would crumble from such a word. A secure person could look over the offense, which is beautiful according Proverbs 19:11, and instead get something positive from it.

But while some such offense is more due to a weak identity or to still living in the flesh, there are other times when what is said or done is blatantly offensive. If I were to begin shouting out different racial stereotypes and make strong comments against women, I would likely offend everyone in this room. But the key for this such offense is: “Are you being offended personally by what is said, or are you offended on behalf of everyone else in the room?” I can pretty much guarantee you that when Martin Luther King Jr. endured racial name calling and other slander, he took it like Jesus and didn’t open his mouth in response. But when such slander was pointed at his wife or his children, I imagine the offense in him was stronger. He was still able to process it in a healthy way, but that didn’t mean that what was said wasn’t offensive. So when it isn’t necessarily unhealthy if we feel offense, rather it’s how we process it that is important.

So how are we meant to process offense? Google dictionary’s definition said part of offense is “annoyance or resentment brought about by a **perceived** insult.” The word, “perceived,” is crucial. Often times offense isn’t brought about so much by a clear sin or clear attack, but rather by the way words or actions are interpreted. “Was she laughing with me, or at me?” “Was she laughing lightheartedly, or was she mocking me?” “When I asked my husband if I looked nice and he paused before answering, was it because he was distracted, or was it because he really doesn’t think I look nice? And how could he ever be distracted!?”

Perception is dangerous. Satan is all about acting. He masquerades as an angel of light. Satan loves to distort perceptions and create division.

1. So the first most important thing to do in handling offense is bringing it to the Lord and **asking this question: Who just offended me?** If you were offended by some stranger, then that just shows your identity needs to be strengthened and you need to grow in the Spirit. A stranger’s words shouldn’t have any power to mess you up. But if you do happen to get messed up by a stranger’s words, then you need to find a spiritual leader who loves you and share with that person so that he or she can pray for you and set you straight.

But if you were offended by someone you are close with or by someone who has authority over you, then the words can have a lot more weight. And that’s when you need to **take a timeout** and remember who this person is. If your spouse offended you deeply, then you likely need to take a moment by yourself and reflect on why you married him or her and what you appreciate that person for. The same goes for a friend or a family member or someone from the church. **The more you can reflect and remember why you love and trust that person, the less offense you will feel.**

2. After you’ve been able to get a clear picture of who offended you, you can move to the next step: **Pray for the person!** Ask God to give you His heart for the person and

ask God to help you see the person as God sees them. If your boss said or did something really offensive, often by taking time alone to pray for him or her the offense will gradually fade. Some people, especially those who aren't saved, are just plain offensive. Prayer is about all you can do for the person. It's important that if the person said or did something directly offensive to you that you forgive the person in prayer. Along with forgiving the person, you need to renounce any false identities you felt pierce you and then declare your true identity in Christ. "I forgive my co-worker for his sexist comments. I pray that he may know your grace and your truth. I renounce the lie I need to flirt more to be attractive. I declare I'm already the apple of God's eye."

3. If some of the offense lingers, or if what the person had done could seriously damage other people, then after this time of timeout and prayer you should **talk to the person** if you're able to. You must not be in the flesh though when you confront, and you should also make sure your identity isn't overly shaky. Through the timeout and the prayer time your identity should be more secure and you should be more in the Spirit and not in the flesh when you talk to the person. Explain how you felt from what happened. By talking with the person you won't be feeling any more perceptions, but rather will get the clear facts. Even if the other person isn't repentant, often talking it out can help bring a release. **Talking to the person directly is so much better than gossiping about it to someone else or allowing false perceptions to fester.**

But for some people you aren't going to have a chance to talk to them. They might not be accessible. In that case you need to bring your struggle to your spiritual leader... whether your CG leader, your familia leader, or your pastor. If your offense is with Pastor Christian, then speak to me or Pastor Sky. If your offense is with Pastor Jon, and you've prayed about it, then speak to him directly. But once again, don't go to the person you're offended by to unload on the person all sorts of accusations and hurt or to gossip. That in of itself is offensive. We must be confident in our identity in Christ and moving in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

This is what separates us from the world today. While previous generations used to be more secure, in recent years people have grown soft and selfish. Society hates being offended so much that being "politically correct" has become so emphasized that often it's best to not even address sensitive topics out of fear of offending someone. Society is so sensitive and weak now. This has caused many preachers to avoid controversial topics out of fear of offending a group of their church and them leaving. How sad. I would hope if I said something that offended you that rather than walking out or blowing up at me in disgust, you would take some time alone to reflect and to pray for me, and then, if necessary, talk to me about it. The church is not meant to be a bunch of weak, easily offended people. The church is meant to be strong and unshakeable. God is our Rock and we will not be shaken. We are rooted in His Truth and we will not be moved.

**I'll tell you two topics that really offend people: the idolatry of money and the idolatry of romance.** I've seen the most spiritual people suddenly revert to their flesh when the topic of their finances or their romance life comes up. "What, you want to have a say in this specific area of my life? That is OFFENSIVE!" Why is it offensive? Because your trust and your desires regarding these two topics are more in your flesh than in the Spirit. **Whenever someone tries to speak into another person's idol, offense will come up strong.** If I were to go to a diehard Beyonce fan and tell the person that one of her songs is outright demonic, the diehard Beyonce fan would likely be deeply offended. It's not that my words were wrong,

it's that I spoke them and shook up the person's reality. Hopefully this person would take a timeout to reflect on the situation and to pray. Were my motivations love or hate? Is there any truth to what was said? Am I someone that can be trusted? Why was the offense so strong? In cases like this where no clear wrong has happened, strong offense is often a sign of idolatry.

God wants us beautiful. A beautiful church is a church without idols and without fear. That means God will often allow offense in the areas that He knows we need to deal with.

### **Jesus Offended People**

While many preachers today fear offending the people, Jesus had no problem with offense. Jesus didn't just say things how they were, Jesus even said some things in *blatantly offensive* ways. Jesus wasn't interested in being politically correct. Jesus' concern was with our hearts. And the truth is, as birth pains have been increasing and we have been witnessing more signs of the end times, **now is the most important time for the church to be unoffendable.**

Let me read just a few verses about Jesus from the Gospels...

In Matthew 15 Jesus speaks the harsh truth to the Pharisees about their hypocrisy. Jesus did this all the time. In verse 12 we read His disciples response...

**Matthew 15:12 – Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?”**

Of course the Pharisees were offended. Their identity was more in themselves and their own pride rather than in God. Jesus was calling out their sin and they didn't want to hear any of it, so they were offended. But Jesus didn't keep his strong words just for the Pharisees, He even made His teaching difficult for those who listened.

In John 6 Jesus gave a very offensive teaching about how He is the bread of life and that “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:54). Let me read His disciples response in verses 60-61.

**John 6:60-61 – When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this?”**

Sadly many of his disciples were greatly offended and ended up leaving Him. We never read of Jesus feeling sad when people left Him because of offense. Rather Jesus seemed to enjoy poking and refining His disciples. He wanted their trust in Him to be foolproof. **He wanted disciples to follow Him not because of logic or because of good feelings, but rather because of faith.**

### **Why Handling Offense is Critical for the End Times**

So how does handling offense relate to the end times? Why is it more important than ever in this hour for us to deal with our offense towards God and towards other people? Let me read one more example of Jesus bringing offense to people. Turn with me to Matthew 11:2...

**Matthew 11:2-6 – Now when John (the Baptist) heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the**

dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

John the Baptist was the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah. But for the Jewish people, their expectation of the Messiah was not as a gentle shepherd, but rather of a powerful military leader. They imagined their Messiah would be like Joshua in the Old Testament, a great warrior who would lead the Jews in freedom against the Roman Empire and would set up Israel as a powerful empire once again. Joshua wasn't just a warrior, he exterminated the Promised Land. Joshua lined up foreign kings and put his foot on their necks and then hung them. Joshua left no survivors. Joshua was a scary man.

But Jesus was gentle and loving. Jesus was reaching out to the poor and teaching them love, not teaching them how to fight in battle or calling down fire from heaven. So John, like many of the other Jews at the time, was having trouble believing Jesus was who He really was. Jesus response to John's question of, “Are you really the Messiah?” was, “Look at all the people healed and how the poor have good news preached to them. Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

Jesus' first coming was not how the people expected. Rather than coming as a wrathful military king who would judge all of the Jews' enemies, Jesus came as a humble carpenter and as a teacher and healer to the people. Jesus endured mocking and torture and didn't open His mouth. He was crucified and died and was buried. He didn't seem to fit their idea of the Messiah in any stretch, and so many Jews completely missed Him. They had no idea that the Messiah they had been waiting for had passed by them. Their perception of God had been off, so Jesus had been offensive to them.

Soon Jesus will be returning again. And once again, the perception most of His believers have of Him are off. What is the first image you have when I say “Jesus.”? For most people it is either of Jesus hanging on the Cross or Jesus in a humble prayer position, perhaps with a little lamb next to Him. Jesus is our gentle, loving Savior. Jesus accepts everyone. Jesus is kind. These perceptions have led people to condone sinners in the church and to support immorality for the sake of “accepting people.” Likely if such people have any end times belief it's that when Jesus returns we will all hold hands in a circle and sing together.

But what does the Bible say about Jesus' return? Let me read Revelation 19:11-16 for you...

Revelation 19:11-16 – Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of Lords.”

How is Jesus going to return? As a gentle shepherd? No, as a mighty warrior who is far scarier than Joshua ever was. While Joshua killed all the enemies in the Promised Land, Jesus is going to kill all the enemies in the whole world.

This is why it is crucial in this hour, more than any other, to allow God to cleanse us of all offense inside. We must learn how to process offense in the healthiest way possible, otherwise we are going to fall away like many of Jesus' original followers did. **Jesus is returning for a pure, beautiful, unoffendable church; a church whose identity is fully in Him and who is living by the Spirit and not by the flesh.**

If we are still living in our flesh then we can't let go of our comfort. The thought of judgment on America or wherever we might be living can seem offensive. If we are finding our identity more in this world than the thought of judgment on sinners and unsaved friends and family members can seem very offensive. But we aren't meant to belong to this world. Jesus Himself said that He had come to bring division, not peace. In Luke 12 Jesus shares that father will be against son, mother against daughter, and so on. Will we choose our earthly family? Or will we choose God? Will we choose to keep our identity set here on earth, or will we choose to put our identity in Christ and live for heaven? This requires faith. And if you are lacking, God calls you to ask for Him. He is the one who is able to make you unoffendable.

### Conclusion

Let me recap what has been shared today. Offense often occurs because of one, an insecure identity, and two, because we are acting in our flesh and not in the Spirit. God will allow offense in our lives to test us, refine us, and beautify us. This doesn't mean we should seek out to be offended, but rather whenever we do feel offense in our hearts we need to work on processing it in a healthy way. We need to take a moment to process what happened: were you offended by someone who should have no power over you to offend you, or was it someone you trust or love? And if this was someone you trust and love, can you remember why you trust and love this person? Pray for the person who offended you. Ask for God's eyes, to see the person how God sees them. And if you feel a prompting to talk to the person, ask for God's grace and strength and then go talk to the person, not in anger or bitterness, but in love and patience.

God wants to beautify us. It is to our beauty to be able to overlook an offense. And the more unoffendable we become, the more ready we are for Christ's return. There will be great offense in the last days, but God's pure bride will not be shaken by anything.

Invite praise team up.

### Altar Call

If people have offense against someone or against God, have them stand as the praise team comes up. Give them a chance to repent for any bitterness or hate. Have them pray for the person who has offended them and ask for God to help them see the person as God sees the person. If they sense they need to talk to the person, have them pray for strength to do it and to not let the offense linger any longer.

Pray for them.

**Matthew 5:23-24 – So if you are offering your gift as the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**