

Are You “Offended”?

It's no secret, and therefore should come as no surprise, that people sometimes use words differently than the Bible does. “Offend” is just such a word. Many use “offend” to mean: I *disagree* with you, therefore your statement “offends” me; I *disapprove* of your conduct, therefore it “offends” me; or, You *hurt my feelings*, therefore I am “offended.” I didn't consult a common dictionary, since they sometimes *define* a word by its common usage more than its true meaning. However, since this is intended to be a bible-based article, I did do some research into the biblical (NT) meaning and usage of the word “*offend*” and some of its derivatives....

When Paul urged the Corinthians NOT to “*give no offense*” (cf. 1Cor.10:32; 2Cor.6:3), the word translated as such is *asprokopos*, which literally refers to a *smooth road*, or *having nothing to strike against*; as in not *leaving* or *placing a stumblingblock* over which one would (spiritually) *stumble* and *fall into sin*. Thus, *giving offense* is, by specific actions or general mode of life, *causing another to sin*. But what about *being offended*?

The other NT word sometimes translated as “*offend*” (or “*offence*”) is the Greek term *skandalizo* (*skan-dal-id-zo*). Obviously, it bears resemblance to our word *scandal*, and shares somewhat in meaning also. *Skandalizo* appears 29 times, and carries the idea of either *being caused to fall/sin*, or *causing another to fall/sin*, by word, deed, or manner of life.

What does this mean to/for us? Primarily, that either when we *offend* or are ourselves *offended*, some word, action, or lifestyle **has caused sin/apostasy** to occur, *e.g.* Matt.5:29,20; 13:21; 18:6,8,9; 26:31,33; 1Cor.8:13; 2Cor.11:29. Thus, if we are to use “biblical words in biblical ways,” when we are or have been “offended,” another's words or deeds **have caused us to sin**. Likewise, if we “offend,” we have, by our words or actions, **caused someone else to sin**. The biblical words do not, in contrast to common usage today, mean that someone *got their feelings hurt*, or simply *disagrees*, and therefore *disapproves*.

I'm NOT suggesting that a Christian cannot use the word “offend” to mean something other than what it means in Scripture. I AM suggesting that we should be more careful how and when we use the term. If someone says or does something that *hurts your feelings*, and you feel they should know as much, say so. Likewise, if you *disapprove* of what another has said or done, and feel they should know as much, say so. And, if you *disagree* with what another has said or done, and feel they should know as much, say so. But can we please stop **being “offended”** by everything? If we weren't *caused to stumble* and/or *led to sin*, then we weren't really “offended,” we probably just disagree, disapprove, or got our feelings hurt.

Since every *effect* has a *cause(s)* adequate to have produced it, why are we so *easily offended* these days? I'll proffer a couple possibilities and you can decide their relative validity and worth:

1. We use the word, even in a spiritual context, without really knowing what it means. Such is unwise and even dangerous, 1Pet.4:11.
2. We are too *easily provoked* and perhaps are even seeking to *take into account wrongs suffered*, both of which are contrary to living by divine love, cf. 1Cor.13:5.

3. We've succumbed to a culture of "victimhood" that sees benefit in being *offended* in as many ways and as often as possible.

What should we do instead of the above? When speaking of being *offended* or *offending* in a spiritual context, use it correctly or utilize other more appropriate terms. If it didn't *lead someone to sin*, they probably just got their feelings hurt. Toughen up. We live in a *sinful* world. If we spend all our time and energy being "appalled and offended" by every sin, we're a lot less likely to see and utilize ways we can influence others for truth and righteousness, cf. Matt.9:10-13. Stop playing the Christian "victim" card. It just makes you look weak, and remember that "*God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline,*" 2Tim.1:7. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)