

# The Offended Brother

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**Posted by admin**

Yes ago I heard a message that changed the way I view most of my relationships. I was being trained to be a counselor in a Billy Graham crusade and listened as Lorne Sanny (then president of The Navigators) was teaching. He made this comment. "Why does God use Billy Graham the way he does? I believe it is because Billy, more than any other leader I know of, consistently practices Acts 24:16." Immediately you heard the rustling of Bible pages turning to that verse which says, "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." It left a deep and lasting impression on me and affects me to this day. Good leadership is about maintaining healthy relationships in all directions.

Some time ago I was leading a small group when one of our members reacted quite strongly to the way the group was going. We had a great discussion as to what we might want to change to deal with his perceptions. A couple of days later as I was on my morning run, I replayed in my mind what took place that evening. I wonder, I was thinking, if there is something else at stake. Have I offended this man in some way? Do I threaten him? By who or what I am, or the way I lead? I set up an appointment to talk with him to give him an opportunity to speak his mind to see if there was a deeper issue we needed to explore. To me this is an application of Acts 24:16. Once someone is offended and it is not quickly and appropriately dealt with, lots of things can go south, and probably will.

A church I know of is experiencing some difficulties with a former member. He is on the warpath. Talking with current members, writing accusatory emails to the leadership, and the beat goes on. At a meeting the idea surfaced that he was offended months ago and it has never been resolved. Plans are in progress to sit down with this "offended brother" to make amends and ask for forgiveness where it is called for. I have seen one person destroy a church or organization due to an offense that was ignored or not sufficiently resolved. Others take up one person's offense and the rift continues to grow.

I could continue to give you one story after the other from my own life or in the life of groups and organizations I am acquainted with that have experienced splits, people leaving and pastors resigning, due to people who have been offended (sometimes years ago). Some call it "keeping short accounts." "Dealing with issues between people as quickly as possible is so crucial. Hebrews 12:15 speak about bitterness springing up and defiling many people.

Matthew 5:23-26 and Matthew 18:15-17 contain clear guidelines regarding the responsibility to make things right if an offense is suspected. Both passages of scripture state that it is my move whether I have offended (sinned against) somebody or they have

offended (sinned against) me. Too much is at stake to leave it alone and hope that time will take care of it. It has been my experience that elapsed time causes more problems than it resolves.

Proverbs 18:19 says, “An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.” The longer I wait, the more unyielding and barred they become.

As I look back over my life, one of my regrets is that I didn't take more initiative to go to people to make things right when I suspected that they had been offended. When I ask myself why, pride, fear and stubbornness come to mind. I play the blame game, like a kid who says, “Johnny hit me first.” Which is to say, it's Johnny's responsibility to make it right and not mine. The problem, of course, is that Johnny is saying the same thing about me; that I hit him first and it is my responsibility. So nobody makes a move and the wound remains and grows, eventually affecting many others that soon line up to take sides on the issue.

Okay, let's get up close and personal here. Can you think of a person whom you may have offended or has offended you? Is the relationship at a standstill? Are you on talking terms? Is it colder than the North Pole between you? Is there a good chance others will soon be affected? Let me encourage you with Jesus' words in Matthew 5:25, “Settle matters quickly with your adversary.” Don't concern yourself with who started it or whose fault it may be. Just do it and do it now!