

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 16 FEBRUARY 2020



## How to Overlook an Offence

Scott Hubbard

*“Good sense makes one slow to anger,  
and it is his glory to overlook an offence.”*

Proverbs 19:11

In moments of calm, the wise man’s counsel sounds so right, so sane. Overlooking offences is our *glory*. Then the offences actually come, and we often find them too large to look over.

The actual size of the offence often matters little. A spouse’s consistent fault-finding, a boss’s unfair criticism, a stranger’s unaccountable rudeness – given the right circumstances, any of these may rise up in front of us like a son of Anak, its shoulders stretching to heaven (Numbers 13:33).

Peripherals blur, tunnel vision ensues, and we have eyes only for *The Offence*.

Even if sanity swiftly returns, the damage is often already done. We returned tone for tone, passive aggression for passive aggression, jab for jab. Or we restrained ourselves externally, but only as a small volcano erupted inside of us. Or we quietly smouldered, playing the incident on repeat the rest of the day.

### Mindful of God

Peter, writing to Christians familiar with offence, comes alongside Proverbs to show us a different way: “This is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly” (1 Peter 2:19). In three little words, Peter shares one

of the keys to overlooking offences great and small: we become *mindful of God*.

In other words, we don’t focus on the offence itself. We don’t stare at something that merely distracts us from what’s really important. We certainly don’t look within ourselves. Rather, we overlook offences by looking up to *God*, by becoming mindful of who He is for us in this very moment – in the office, at the dinner table, on the phone call, during the meeting.

To be sure, Peter’s readers were dealing with offences more severe than the kind Westerners typically face: physical abuse (1 Peter 2:20), ridicule (1 Peter 4:4), fiery trials (1 Peter 4:12).

But learning to overlook the biggest offences usually begins with learning to overlook the smallest. Enduring slander begins with enduring a sarcastic remark. Enduring a beating begins with enduring a cold shoulder. Being mindful of God in everyday offences trains us to be mindful of Him when the worst comes.

What, then, are we mindful of when we are mindful of God?

### 1. God Sees Every Offence

Offences have a way of turning us into momentary atheists. In our tunnel vision, we can think and feel and act as if there were no God in the world – much less in the room.

Being *mindful of God* means, first, remembering that God is here, and He sees: “If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing *in the sight of God*” (1 Peter 2:20).

No offence happens offstage, in some unobserved corner of the universe.

Being mindful of God pulls back the curtains, puts us in the spotlight, and reminds us that we live and move and have our being before the eyes of an audience more important than a thousand kings and presidents.

God’s all-seeing eye carries a warning with it, to be sure (Hebrews 4:13). But Peter makes the opposite application: the fact that *God sees* assures us that He whose smile matters most is watching. The world may look on a Christian’s patient endurance and see only weakness. God looks on and sees a precious child, a person for His own possession (1 Peter 2:10), a beautiful imitator of His beloved Son.

Offences are opportunities for the God of the universe to look down on us and say, “*This* is a gracious thing in my sight.”

*Offences have a way of turning us into momentary atheists.*

## 2. God Sends Every Offence

God does not, however, observe our offences as a mere member of the audience, but as the director of the whole drama.

In the theatre of the universe, every offence – no matter how trifling – is part of the play. Every word, every gesture has been given its act, scene, and line by the One who sends “various trials,” including offences, so that our faith might be tested, proven, and precious (1 Peter 1:6-7).

On this side of heaven, in fact, offences are part of our *calling* as Christians: “To this you have been *called*,” Peter tells us (1 Peter 2:21). And why? “Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Following Jesus means imitating Jesus, and imitating the Man of Sorrows cannot happen apart from trouble, distress, and offence. *These* are the stages where God calls us to proclaim His excellencies (1 Peter 2:9).

Therefore, as Calvin writes,

“When we are unjustly wounded by men, let us overlook their wickedness (which would but worsen our pain and sharpen our minds to revenge), remember to mount up to God, and learn to believe for certain that whatever our enemy has wickedly committed against us was permitted and sent by God’s just dispensation.” (*Institutes*, 1.17.8)

God sends every offence. Therefore, mount up to God – be *mindful* of God – and know that the daggers others throw your way will become in God’s hand chisels to fashion you into the image of Christ.

## 3. God Will Judge Every Offence

We can overlook offences not only because God *sees* our offences and *sends* our offences, but also because God will *judge* every offence.

Christians follow the pattern of Jesus, who did not exact vengeance when He hung on the cross, though He could have called down twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). Instead, He handed His handfuls of agony to His Father, and “continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

We naturally consider the judgment of God in the context of the greatest of wrongs – as we should. The Day is coming when the Son of God will descend to earth with a sword, casting down every proud oppressor and raising up the meek to inherit the earth (Revelation 19:15; Matthew 5:5).

“Vengeance is mine” is a well deep enough for even the most mistreated to draw hope from (Romans 12:19). But God’s judgment changes how we react to small offences as well. If God will right even the biggest wrongs, then we do not need to take even the smallest into our own hands.

Whether the offences against us are titanic or trifling, God’s judgment frees us to exchange bitterness for patience, retribution for mercy.

The very word *judgment* brings to mind our own offences against God, offences that cried out for our blood until Jesus shed His own. It reminds us that our offender, if outside of Christ, deserves our pity and, if inside Christ, needs our brotherly love. It removes all self-righteousness from our mouths and replaces it with the Christlike plea of “Lord, forgive them.” It beckons us to release our “right” to get even, and to hand over our cause to Him who judges justly.

## Where Is God in the Offence?

God sees every offence, God sends every offence, and God will judge every offence.

Finally, those who are mindful of God go one step further: they trust that God Himself can *satisfy* them in the midst of offence. Of all the refuges we can run to when offences come – bitterness, revenge, fantasy, distraction, pleasure, self-justification – only one can fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8). Only one can call us back from darkness (1 Peter 2:9). Only one cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). *God*.

If we repay offence for offence, we will have our reward. But if we learn to overlook offenses, we will lean into fellowship with “the Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls” (1 Peter 2:25). We will hear His whispers of “Well done” here and now. We will find that God is able to invade our tunnel vision, enthrall us with His beauty and worth, and free us to overlook the offence.

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