

CONTENTS

Introduction: Those Impossible People	7
1. Satan's Mixed Bag of Offenses	15
2. The Blinding Power of an Offense	25
3. Meet Cain the Destroyer	41
4. Families at War: When Trust Fails	57
5. Dodging Spears	75
6. Christians in the Courtroom	97
7. From Bitterness to Blessing	113
8. The High Cost of Reconciliation	133
9. When Reconciliation Fails	151
Notes	171

SATAN'S MIXED BAG OF OFFENSES

“WHAT YOU DON’T FORGIVE, you pass on” a counselor wisely pointed out to a woman whose husband lived a double life for twenty-five years. Only when he was dying of AIDS did she realize that the man she had tried so hard to trust had deceived her and potentially could have passed the disease on to her. Now, a few years after his demise, she was faced with a decision: Should she keep her anger and desire for vengeance alive, or would she give it up for her own benefit and in obedience to the Lord she had come to love?

In this chapter we will describe some of the common offenses that many of us have had to bear, and in the next chapter we will describe what happens to those who do not deal with offenses in healthy ways. If you have never been

offended, or if you are not facing a difficult standoff with another person, you can still benefit from this chapter by grasping the dilemma of some who feel keenly the pain of broken relationships.

BETRAYAL

King David, the second king of Israel, was no stranger to personal offenses. Not only was he a hurter at times, inflicting his own brand of justice on the unsuspecting, he himself endured occasions when enemies railed against him because of his trust in God. But the most painful times in David's life were those when people closest to him betrayed him. Few things are more painful to us than when someone close to us wounds us deeply.

Read carefully David's words in Psalm 55. Perhaps you can relate to the intensity of his struggle.

Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger. My heart is in anguish within me. (Psalm 55:1-4)

Clearly, the offense David described brought him to the point of anguish and despair. But it's not until later in the psalm that he reveals the surprising source of the injury—a personal friend.

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God. (verses 12–14)

David admits that such offenses would be a little easier to endure coming from his enemies—he'd expect that from them. But he puts powerful expression to those difficult feelings we've all felt when we've been injured by a close friend or a loved one or someone we believed we could trust.

That's one of the reasons why divorces grow nasty and bitter. It's because someone I love, someone who is in my house, someone with whom I shared a bed has become my vilest enemy. It happens among business partners and ministry colleagues as well. And because so much rides on these personal relationships, Satan loves to inflict his harm. Often these offenses seem amazingly petty and inconsequential—but in the hands of the Enemy they can exact inestimable damage.

WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

Satan uses a mixed bag of offenses to keep people bound. Let's examine a few of them, and then in the next chapter we will find out what happens to these unresolved issues within the human heart. This will help us understand why reconciliation is often so difficult and sometimes impossible.

The first painful offense in this bag is a *broken promise*. Hear the cry of this woman: "Pray for me again . . . I failed the

human test. I believed another man's lies that he was going to marry me. Of course I broke God's Word's teaching about sex. I am a Christian woman and love Jesus with all my heart. But I'm weak when it comes to the human touch. Men continue to lie and I believe them. . . . I am so deceived and Satan uses this need of mine."

Her letter goes on to say that she dated the man for two years, they served in a church together, and he appeared to be everything she had prayed for. But when his parents discovered that the two wanted to get married, they turned on their son, fearing they were losing control over him. They said that his girlfriend had no right to expect marriage, particularly because she was not properly meeting his sexual needs anyway. He in turn began having sex with a woman he met on the Internet, and now he cursed the woman he had promised to marry. The depth of her anger can be felt as she continues: "I had no idea I was dating a demon controlled by 'devil parents.'"

This dear woman—may God help her—says she has been abused by men since she was fourteen, and she is now forty-six years old. This man was one of a long list of men who had deceived her, and he chose to break their relationship on her birthday to add insult to injury. What this woman does with her pain is very important and will determine her mental health in the years to come.

To a lesser degree, all of us have experienced the pain of betrayal. You lend a friend money and he says, "You know I'll get it back to you as soon as I have it." Later on, he has a job and prospers and when he sees you he pretends as if everything is fine.

I heard of a dentist who did a lot of work for Christians. He stopped going to church because he said there were too many choir members singing through teeth he had fixed that had not been paid for! Broken promises actually caused him to renounce church! A broken leg may heal so well that the event is long forgotten; broken promises can cause lifelong injury.

A young pastor began a ministry on Saturday mornings to the inmates of the local county jail. Each week he'd go into the jail cells and conduct Bible studies and prayer sessions among the inmates—mostly young white men who were doing time for anything from burglary to habitual drug use. As he'd enter the jail the despair and anger among these nineteen- to twenty-four-year-olds was palpable. When the young pastor asked the warden how so many young men with great promise could end up in such a place, the warden sighed and said, “This place is filled with boys who got tired of waiting for their dads to keep their promises—promises to provide, promises to show up and spend time with them, promises to come home at night—they finally got so angry with the injustice of it, they went out and did stupid things.”

Young men waiting for their dads to keep their promises! What a sobering reminder that broken promises can help send a young man down a road of personal destruction. Accept the fact that all of us live with promises we have broken or promises others have made to us that were not kept.

The second offense in this bag is the *breaking of confidence*.

A young man told his pastor about his struggle with homosexuality. He thought that his frank talk was confidential, since he was earnestly seeking help. Yet, a few weeks later, the pastor

blurted out in a sermon, “Recently a young man in our church shared his own struggles with homosexual tendencies. . . .” He gave enough other details for people in the small congregation to suspect that it was the young man who had indeed shared his inmost thoughts and battles. Rumors began circulating and the crushed young man left the church never to return again. Humiliated, betrayed, used.

Where do you turn when people you thought you could trust betray your inner soul? Sadly, many churches have split, friendships ended, and ministries struggled amid the turbulence of breached confidences.

Satan’s bag contains a third offense: *personal rejection*. We could include in this category all sorts of verbal, emotional, and racial rejection as well as slander and gossip. I recall as a boy learning that ditty, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never harm me.” I don’t know who wrote it, but it should be banned! Who hasn’t felt the sting of an unkind word, or a teasing remark from a bully or peer, or from a racial slur? Such barbs slice deep into the human soul. One cutting remark has the power to paralyze a child’s emotional development and send him/her to a life of compensating for the hurt.

Fourth, this bag contains the offense of a *false accusation*. For instance, a teenage girl, motivated by jealousy, falsely accuses a boy of something he didn’t do. When he denies it, the two families wind up in a feud over the truth. The offenses shatter all trust and the relationships become strained and hollow. And at times, the rupture from a false accusation can run so deep that reconciliation seems impossible. Walls go up so high they become virtually impenetrable.

A BAGFUL OF PAIN

The offense—and sometimes offenses—that can bring pain into your life and relationships are engineered by Satan to attempt to bind you and me to sin. The offenses are:

1. *A broken promise.* Do you still remember a broken promise? Have you forgiven the person who broke it?
2. *A broken confidence.* If someone has betrayed your confidence, how have you responded?
3. *Personal rejection.* This includes not only verbal and emotional rejection but slander and gossip as well.
4. *False accusation.* Being charged falsely with wrongdoing can hurt your reputation and damage relationships. It is difficult to forgive the accuser and restore trust.
5. *Abuse.* Physical or verbal abuse often leaves enduring emotional scars. God, however, can bring healing and the ability to forgive the abuser.

Fifth, this bag holds the awful offense of *abuse*, such as when the parent inflicts physical and emotional pain upon a child. These hurts penetrate into the life and perception of a child who will struggle with anger and self-hatred, and this baggage will be taken with him into adulthood. At first glance it seems as if there can be no redeemable value to the evil that is being inflicted upon some children even as you read this paragraph. The horrors are too gruesome to describe, and the emotional wounds are difficult to turn into scars that would

prove that healing has taken place. Yet, even here we must believe in God's grace and healing.

Five ugly pieces of pain. Any one or more of these offenses results in a broken relationship, and typically the offended becomes enflamed with bitterness and resentment. Satan exploits the pain by making it the central focus of the man's (or woman's) thoughts and attitudes. The Enemy jumps at the chance to debilitate a potentially effective follower of Christ by using a personal offense to hold him or her in spiritual limbo.

BARRIERS TO RECONCILIATION

Two sisters had grown apart throughout the years, the younger one rejecting a Christian lifestyle and the older one following Christ wholeheartedly. The younger, Christine, who married unhappily, evidently resented her older sister who is married to a fine Christian man. Despite their differences in outlook and values, Christine frequently calls Monica, wanting to "get together."

But the conversation typically goes something like this . . .

"You never come to see us."

"We want to, Christine, but when we do you always find some reason to not be available."

"Well, there are lots of reasons. Our children are all over the house . . . You know, it's hard to keep the place clean. Anyway, you haven't exactly been supporting me over the years. I mean, why didn't you defend me when Mom and Dad were abusing me?"

"I was only a girl of nine at the time and there wasn't much I could do because at that time I didn't realize how serious it all was."

“When I was sleeping with Don before we were married, you didn’t support me either.”

“Well, no, I believed it was wrong then and I believe it is wrong now.”

“Yeah, but that shows you hate me, don’t you?”

“No, I don’t hate you. . . . I have never hated you.”

“Sure you hate me. Come on, Monica! You never defended me when Mom and Dad were abusing me and you refused to support my marriage. Ever since Don and I slept together, you’ve thought you were better than me.

“And I resent that Mom and Dad gave you money for college but they didn’t give any to me.”

“I didn’t ask Mom and Dad for money for college.”

“Well, maybe not, but you took it and you didn’t care about me.”

“I did care about you, I—”

“You hate me and you’ve always taken advantage of me.”

“No, I don’t hate you, Christine, and we will try to visit, but we have to agree on some rules between your children and mine.”

“So that’s what you think of me! You think my children aren’t good enough for your goody-two-shoes kids!! You think your kids are perfect, right? You believe they are perfect and my kids are devils. That’s what you think, isn’t it?”

“No, that’s not what I think . . . I just know that when the kids get together, yours are a little wild . . . uh, they need guidance. I mean, we just have to agree on some things for our family to visit you.”

“See, you do hate me . . . and you think I’m evil, don’t you?”

Monica feels as though she's been slapped in the face. Her eyes begin to water. She wonders, *Have I just accused my sister?*

“Chris, you are *not evil*, and I have never hated you. But I must admit that you have eroded some trust by the lies you've told me in the past.”

“So, since you claim to be a Christian, then where is your forgiveness? I can't believe the way you hold grudges, bringing up things that go back a couple of years—and *you still remember those things! What a memory!*”

Enough.

Do you think there is any chance that these two sisters can get together for a nice leisurely stroll in the park? I don't think so . . .

In the next chapter we will discover why the bitter Christine puts up barriers to reconciliation that Monica finds impossible to overcome. We'll discover the blinding power of bitterness, the blinding power of an offense.

And in the process, we might just discover ourselves.

A PRAYER FOR HONESTY

Father, I pray that You will give me the honesty to let You uncover the hidden sins I've tolerated because of my past. Help me look at all that happened, and then spill my bitterness like a pitcher of water at the foot of Jesus' cross. Deliver me from the irrationality of sin, which makes me defensive and suspicious of all relationships. Let my words to others be wholesome, wise, and true. In Jesus' name. Amen.