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John Robinson's Farewell Address to the Pilgrims: Timeless and Timely Counsel for Believers

As we gather as families to give thanks to the Almighty for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us this year, may we take a few minutes and share with our loved ones the following sermon preached by John Robinson to the Pilgrim Fathers that were soon to set sail for the New World, seeking the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience, rather than according to the whim and caprice of the Crown.



As they sat in their borrowed space in a building in the Netherlands — having been forced to flee their native England — the Separatists (commonly called Pilgrims) listened intently as their beloved pastor gave them his final words of counsel and comfort before boarding the ship *Speedwell* in Delfshaven, and setting off for England to join with the *Mayflower* and make their way over the Atlantic to their safe haven in America.

In a sermon that lasted “a good part of the day,” Robinson delivered the following address, the content of which was quoted often by our Founding Fathers.

One last note: After the departure of the Separatists and others for America, John Robinson continued preaching and pastoring the Separatist church in Holland, but passed away on March 1, 1625, never making the journey to the New World.

May his words of wisdom never be forgotten, today or any day, and may you find in John Robinson's address, as did our Pilgrim Fathers, guidance for your journey across the seas of life toward your own promised land.

(Note: The spelling, punctuation, and grammar have been modernized. Readers are encouraged to search for John Robinson's Farewell Address to the Pilgrims to read the text in its original form.)

John Robinson's “Farewell Address to the Pilgrims,” Delivered in Leiden, Holland (1620)

Now next after this heavenly peace with God and our own consciences, we are carefully to provide, with all that lies in us, for peace with all men, especially with our associates, and for that, we must be very watchful that we neither give offense ourselves at all, nor easily take offense given by others.

Woe be unto the world for offenses. For although it be necessary (considering the malice of



Satan and man's corruption) that offenses come, woe unto the man or woman who gives offense, saith Christ (Matt. 18:7). And if offenses in the unseasonable use of things that are of themselves indifferent are more to be feared than death itself, as the Apostle Paul teaches (1. Cor. 9:15), how much more feared should be things that are purely evil, in which neither honor of God, nor love of man is thought worthy to be regarded.

And it is not sufficient that we keep ourselves, by the grace of God, from giving offense, but we must also arm ourselves against the taking of offense when it is given by others. For how imperfect and lame is the work of grace in that person who lacks that charity that covers a multitude of offenses, as the scriptures teach. Neither are you to be exhorted to this grace only upon the common grounds of Christianity, which are, that persons ready to take offense either lack charity to cover their own offenses, or wisdom enough to weigh human frailty; or lastly, are gross hypocrites, as Christ our Lord teaches (Matt. 7:1, 2, 3). In fact, in my own experience, few or none have been found which, if they easily give offense, aren't easily offended, as well. Such people which have nourished such a sensitive personality have never proved sound or profitable members of society.

But besides these, there are many other motives which should convince you to take great care and conscience this way. First, most of you are strangers to each other and as such you do not know each other's weaknesses. Thus, you stand in need of even more watchfulness regarding the giving and taking of offense. Otherwise, when someone does or says something unexpected or unfamiliar, you will be inordinately affected by it. This fact demands so much wisdom and charity from you so that you neither accidentally give offense, nor accidentally take offense when none is meant.

Next, your intended course of being united in one community will create continual occasion of giving and taking offense and that will be as fuel for the fire of anger at being offended, unless you diligently quench it with brotherly forbearance.

And if taking offense easily or where none is intended must be so carefully avoided, how much more heed is to be taken that we take not offense at God himself, which we certainly do so often by murmuring about the crosses He asks us to bear, or when we impatiently endure the afflictions He allows us to suffer. Therefore, store up patience against that evil day, without which we would take offense at the Lord himself, in his holy and just works.

Another thing is carefully to be provided for: that you join affection for each other with your living with each other. Your affection for each other will cause you to truly care more for the general good, avoiding as the plague focusing on your personal comfort and constantly thinking how to get your way or make things work to your personal advantage. Every man should suppress in himself that impulse to go against the common good, and from seeking any personal goal that goes against the general good of the community.

Finally, just as people are careful not to have a new house to be violently shaken before it is well settled and all the parts of it firmly joined together, I beseech you, brethren, to be much more careful that the house of God which you are, and which you are building, is not shaken with unnecessary plans or disagreements or novelty until your house is well settled and all the members be firmly joined together.



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