

Dealing With Offenses – Luke 17:1-4

I. INTRODUCTION - RR

A. *How Long?*

1. How long ought it take for a Christian to be taught & trained in the Faith?
2. How long till he/she is ready to go out and turn the world upside down for Christ?
3. The typical Masters of Divinity degree many denominations require in order to become a minister takes about 6 years.
4. A *few* denominations require an additional 2 years and a PhD. in theological studies.
5. Or you can go the simpler route and attend an independent Bible college. In 4 years you'll have a credential that will affirm you're now qualified to enter the ministry.
6. I wonder what Jesus thinks of this.
 - a. He didn't go to the Jewish theological schools to pick His disciples.
 - b. He didn't take the cream of the crop from the yeshivas.
 - c. He found young men engaged in everyday, common labor, and took *them* as His students.
 - d. Then He spent *only 3 years* pouring into them by word and example.
 - e. And at the end of that 3 years, He set them loose on the world with a mandate to win it to Faith.
7. Here we are, 2000 years later.
 - a. There are about 6 billion people on Planet Earth, with some 2 Billion of them professing Christians.
 - b. From 11 to 2 billion – and those first 11 only had 3 years of training.
8. How long ought it take for a Christian today to be taught & trained in the Faith to the point where they live a life so radically different that it turns the world upside down?

B. *The Scene*

1. As we come to our text today, Jesus & the disciples are approaching the end of their 3 years together.
2. They're traveling around the southern region of Judea,

- a. And as Jesus ministers to the crowds that gathers round every where He goes,
- b. He's also concerned to pour in to the disciples the lessons He wants them to remember.
- c. As time runs out on His mission, He makes sure they understand what they're to be about after he's gone.
3. Chs. 12-19 are Luke's record of Jesus' teaching during this period.
 - a. And much of what we find here is **repeated** in other places.
 - b. Jesus used repetition as a way to make sure the disciples **caught** what He was saying.
4. What we're looking at this morning is something you've probably heard before; more than once.
5. But just as Jesus repeated it to the **disciples** as the final sands slipped through the hourglass of His mission, I believe the Spirit of God want us to read & heed these words **today** with a sense of **urgency**.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

¹Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! ²It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

1. Jesus was a realist!
2. I get so tired of reading the opinions of modern day scholars who say Jesus was merely a Jewish reformer who wanted to restore the religion of His day to its moral roots.
 - a. They cast Him as nothing more than an **idealist**,
 - b. A **moralist** who upset the profitable business of the Jewish priesthood, and was killed for it.
3. This is absurd. Jesus was the consummate REALIST, as v. 1 proves.
4. He makes it clear – because we live in a fallen world, a world in rebellion against God,
 - a. A world in which men & women have traded in the purpose for their existence for something lesser, something selfish & petty,
 - b. It's inevitable offenses will come.

Sin happens!

5. But the inevitability of sin does not excuse the sinner.
 - a. Because we're realists, we know people are going to lie, cheat, & steal.
 - b. But we don't think they ought to get away with it.
 - c. We know people will commit murder, but we *certainly* don't think murderers ought to be excused just because we know they'll commit the act.

6. The word Jesus uses here for *offenses* is the Greek word "*skandalon*" & referred to something placed in the way that causes another to stumble & fall.
 - a. This isn't something one does in secret, some sin that harms just the sinner.
 - b. An *offense* is something you do that harms another & tempts them to sin as a *reaction* to what you've done.
 - c. An insult is an offense because it tempts the one insulted to fire back an insult.
 - d. A slap on the face is an offense because it invites retaliation.
 - e. When a Christian sins publicly & it emboldens others to follow their example, that's an offense.
 - f. Sins that harm the unity of God's people are offenses.
7. Jesus wants the disciples to be aware as they live the life in the midst of this fallen world that they will come face to face with offenses.
8. But they must make sure *they* are not the ones dishing them out.

9. Christian, listen – this world *hates* God. It's in determined rebellion against Him
 - a. It's *inevitable* that offenses will come, so be aware & on guard.
 - b. Don't assume that just because we live in the good ole' USA, a nation with Christian origins, we're somehow *exempt* from the darker manifestations of evil.
 - c. In some ways, the US *leads the world* in decadence & debauchery.
 - d. As we go out into this world, we're surrounded by people lost in sin.
 - e. It's *inevitable* that you will see sin, and you'll be confronted with the temptation to *join* that sin.
 - 1) Either its lust will *appeal* to you

- 2) Or you'll be tempted to *retaliate* against it in a manner that draws you *into* sin.
10. Jesus intends His people to be realists; to *know* that offenses will come, and to have a plan in place so they won't fall.
 11. Christian – do you have a plan for how to deal with temptation?
 - a. At work when the coarse jesting begins, and the temptation comes to find acceptance, to fit in, what will you do; what will you say?
 - b. When your friends begin to gossip, spreading dirt on another, and you're tempted to join in, what are you going to do?
 - c. As you approach that familiar 4 way stop where the selfish so often jump the gun & take off before their turn, and you're tempted to show them your great displeasure, how will you handle it?
 12. In v. 1, Jesus says "Sin happens. Don't let it happen to you."
 - a. Stumbling blocks will be laid before you – don't trip!
 - b. Snares will be set, walk around them.
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13. In v. 2 Jesus says regarding the one who causes offenses . . .
²It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.
- a. A millstone was a massive stone that had been carved into the shape of a disk with a hole in the center.
 - b. A log was then placed in the hole and the millstone was set on edge in a circular trough.
 - c. Grain was placed in the trough, & a team of oxen would pull the log, causing the millstone to crush the grain.
 - d. Millstones were many times heavier than the boulders ships used for anchors.
 - e. So this image was really a rather humorous one.
 - f. A guy with a rope around his neck, the other end tied to a millstone, and tossed into the sea would *shoot* to the bottom.
 - g. It'd be a bad way to go – and that's what Jesus is saying – that the man or woman who causes others to stumble faces serious judgment.
14. By "little ones," Jesus means His followers.
 - a. He's not just referring to children, but to His flock.
 - b. They are His sheep, His precious little ones for whom He is

- about to pour out His life.
15. Heavy judgment rests upon those who cause young believers to stumble.
- a. False teachers who spread damnable heresies are in a very dangerous place.
 - b. Jude had a lot to say in his short letter about those wolves in sheep's clothing who come in and rip off the flock.
 - c. They use religious & spiritual sounding words, but pour different meanings into them, twisting the minds of young believers into something very different from the gospel of Christ.
 - d. And the whole time, those gullible Christians think what they're following is the real deal.
 - e. It's not, it's a counterfeit, & they will discover it so when their world turns over & they realize their faith has been built on a house of cards, a clever scheme to enrich the false teachers at their expense.
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16. There's a subtle pressure today for pastors & Christian leaders to *refrain* from labeling certain teachings & their teachers as false.
- a. Political correctness demands that we tolerate all ideas & respect each other's right to say & believe what we want.
 - b. It seems the only sin today is to *dare* to call someone wrong & warn people *against* their error.
 - c. To do so is to run the risk of being declared guilty of hate speech & being sent to jail.
 - d. But all of this political correctness is based on the assumption that there's *no* objective truth; that every idea is as good as another.
 - 1) Modernity sees all religions as *equally irrelevant*,
 - 2) So no one has an exclusive claim on truth.
17. And there in lies the mistake of political correctness.
18. There *is* an Objective reality. There *is* an unalterable Truth. There is a real right & wrong, good & evil.
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19. If I'm driving down my street and see my neighbor's second story on fire, & look in to see the Smiths sitting in the living room downstairs watching TV,
- a. I'm going to pull over, get out, & run as fast as I can to the front door.

- b. I'm not going to knock or ring the doorbell, I'm going to kick the door down & shout as loud as I can that they need to get out of there because their lives are in danger.
 - c. If the smoke has already knocked them out, I'm going to carry them to safety & give CPR.
20. If I just drove on by, went home & said to my wife, "Hey, guess what Honey; the Smith's house is on fire & they're just sitting there watching TV. Silly people!" I'd be considered grossly negligent by anyone's reasonable assessment.
- a. You see, I knew about the mortal danger the Smiths were in but did nothing.
 - b. I'd be culpable for their harm even though I didn't directly cause it.
 - c. I could have stopped it – but didn't.
21. This world is ablaze with sin, & the smoke of a lot of false teaching has lulled many to sleep.
22. To *not speak* out against falsehood is criminal, because what we believe is a matter of life & death.
23. Christian – be careful what you listen to.
- a. Just because someone is on the radio, the TV, or has written a book doesn't mean it's true.
 - b. You must check *everything* against the Word of God.
 - c. Including what you hear from *this* pulpit.

B. Vs. 3-4

³Take heed to yourselves.

1. Literally – "Pay attention *to yourselves*."
2. Jesus turns from speaking of outsiders & charlatans who will cause trouble, to trouble that comes from our own ranks as believers.
3. All of us are in process. None of us is perfect yet.
 - a. And as a result, we're going to fail & disappoint each other.
 - b. We're going to hurt & offend one another.
 - c. How we handle these offenses is crucial.

³Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

4. The process Jesus defines here is simple.
 - a. A fellow believer commits some sin against you, there's some

- breach that violates the relationship.
- b. **Your duty** as the offended one is to **rebuke** the offender.
 - c. That rebuke isn't retaliation; it's not aimed at getting even.
 - d. Rebuke **always** aims at **healing the breach & restoring** the relationship.
 - e. So rebuke is measured out in mercy & grace. It's shaped by loving tact.
5. Let me give an illustration.
- a. Mike is a young believer who's not quite got control over his speech yet.
 - b. At home group one evening, Mike was trying to be humorous & insulted Ben to get a laugh from the others in the group.
 - c. Ben was hurt, really hurt. So he sat quietly through the rest of the evening.
 - 1) As he sat, he thought about what to do.
 - 2) He thought of several really good digs to put Mike in his place.
 - 3) Was tempted to quit the group, maybe even stop going to church, if that's the way he was going to be treated.
 - 4) But he knew the source of all these temptations & quickly put them down.
 - 5) He knew he needed to **confront** Mike.
 - 6) Not just to get even, but because if Mike didn't change, others were going to be hurt, and Mike would himself end up lonely.
 - 7) Ben knew that his friendship **with Mike** would be good for Mike, but the insult had put a barrier between them.
 - 8) So, as soon as the discussion time was over, Ben approached Mike and asked if he could see him for a few minutes **privately**.
 - 9) They headed into the other room, & Ben simply told Mike his insult had hurt.
 - 10) Ben spoke carefully, making sure he wasn't provoking Mike.
 - d. His goal was **reconciliation**, not retaliation.
6. All too often people will **hide retaliation** behind the **guise** of a **desire for restoration**. That is not Biblical rebuke.
7. But the far more common error we make is a **refusal** to rebuke

altogether.

- a. Many have the mistaken idea that rebuke is a form of *judging*, & they know well the time-honored proverb, “Judge not, lest ye be judged!”
 - b. The Bible no where says that we are not to judge.
 - c. Rather, it says is we’re not to be *judgmental*, setting ourselves up as the supreme court & passing sentence on everyone else. [Mat. 7:1 Luke 6:37]
 - d. In John 7:24 Jesus says our judgment is to be marked by righteous criteria, not merely selfishness.
8. Elisabeth Elliot said that, “The current popular notion that judging others is in itself a sin leads to such inappropriate maxims as ‘I’m okay and you’re okay.’ It encourages a conspiracy of moral indifference which says, ‘If you never tell me that anything I’m doing is wrong, I’ll never tell you that anything you’re doing is wrong.’”
9. It’s a “live & let live” attitude that refuses to take responsibility for the spiritual welfare of those around us.
10. Like it or not, we *are* our brother’s keeper.
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11. Then Jesus says, once rebuked, *if the offender repents*; that is, admits his/her error & shows a change of heart,
- a. Wanting to heal the breach caused by their sin,
 - b. Then the offended one must forgive & restore the relationship.
- 4And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”**
12. The rabbis taught that forgiveness was to be granted a *maximum* of 3 times.
- a. If someone sinned against you after that, you could write them off.
 - b. In fact, it was said that to forgive *more* than 3 times was to deny the seriousness of sin.
13. Here Jesus says they were to forgive the same person 7 times, ON THE SAME DAY!
- a. The Jews attached *significance* to their numbers, & 7 was the number of perfection, of fulfillment & completion.
 - b. When Jesus said they were to forgive the same sin, 7 times in a single day, they understood Him to mean there was to be *no*

- limit* to their forgiveness.
- c. Forgiveness wasn't something they measured out, one offense at a time.
 - d. It was to be the way *they lived*.
14. And this is why rebuke & repentance, confrontation & restoration, challenge & renewal would be so regular, so *expected & normal* among the followers of Christ -
15. Because forgiveness would be the *commitment* they would make to each other.
16. *Rebuke* becomes *easy* when we have the confidence of knowing *repentance will follow*.
17. And *repentance* is *easy* when we know *forgiveness awaits*.
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18. Jesus called His followers to celebrate Communion *often*.
- a. He wants us to be reminded of our covenant with Him,
 - b. A covenant that brings us into relationship, not just with Him, but with one another.
 - c. Paul wrote a portion of 1 Cor. to get this truth across. [Ch. 11]
 - 1) The Corinthians church didn't understand their call to be *united* in the Spirit.
 - 2) They were a church of warring factions,
 - 3) The communion table, which was supposed to be a rallying point for their oneness, had degenerated into just one more means of offense.
 - 4) And for this reason, Paul said, some had fallen ill, while others had even died.
 - d. Communion is meant to remind us that our covenant with God is based on *forgiveness*.
 - e. Forgiveness is the spiritual air we breathe, the ground we stand on, not just before God, *but with one another*.
 - f. *Unforgiveness* is as foreign to the Christian life as quality & dependability are to French cars.
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19. Just as we ought not be surprised at offenses because we live in a fallen world, we can expect that because none of us are yet perfect, we're going to sin against one another in the Body of Christ.
- a. Knowing this, and knowing that Jesus expects us to "get over it"

- b. We must install *a commitment to forgiveness*.
 - c. And we must be committed to one another in such a way that *when offenses come*, we rebuke each other in the Love of Christ.
 - d. When rebuked, we must repent, and ask that forgiveness heal the breach our foolishness has created.
20. A *failure to rebuke* is a sin against the love we've pledged to Jesus and His people.
 21. A *failure to repent* when rebuked is to commit yet another sin.
 22. And a *failure to forgive* is nothing less than a sin which threatens to isolate us from our covenant with Christ, a covenant *based on forgiveness*.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Urgency

1. Lately I've been sensing a strong urging of the Spirit to do what we read here --
2. To keep a very short list of things that need correcting in terms of my relationships with others.
3. I've been impressed of the need to make sure I'm in good standing with others, and any unfinished business be wrapped up.
4. As I've taken action to do that, I've sensed the Spirit saying I need to share this with you.
5. There's an urgency to urge God's people to take care of business,
 - a. To rebuke where rebuke needs to be made,
 - b. To repent where repentance needs to be done,
 - c. And to forgive where forgiveness has been lacking.

B. Loving One Another

1. Just this week a pastor friend emailed this verse to me –
Heb 12:14 • Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:
 7. The peace we're to pursue is not the false peace of pretending everything is fine when it's not.
 - a. It's the peace that comes from *dealing honestly* with our faults & committing to each other in love,
 - b. A love not thwarted by failure & disappointment.
 - c. A love that endures hurt, & presses through into an even deeper relationship through the expression of forgiveness.

2. We must love enough to want what's best for each other.
3. True love will compel us to provoke each other, not to sin, but to good.
4. In Heb 10 we find this –
24 Let us [take careful thought for] one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.
5. I believe this has *far more application* for us this morning than when first penned 2000 years ago.
6. The signs of the imminence of Jesus' return are clear for those who will see them.
7. The time of His return is at hand.
8. So, we must encourage & exhort one another to go on & press in.
9. There is no time for petty differences & silly games among us as the children of God.

C. Forgiveness Is Yours For The Asking

1. My words so far today have been directed to Christians.
2. As we end, I want to speak to those here who aren't believers.
3. You may be surprised to hear that the shared life Christians are called to enjoy is one marked by *forgiveness*.
4. And the appeal of that is very attractive to you.
5. Deep in your heart is the knowledge you don't measure up, that you've fallen short of what's required of you.
6. And the thought that there's forgiveness available to you is so appealing, you find yourself saying, "If only it were true."
7. I have good news – *It is true* – every word of it.
8. Ernest Hemingway wrote a story about a father and Paco, his teenage son.
 - a. The relationship was marred by continual conflict & the son ran away.
 - b. After some months, the father began a journey in search of his rebel child.
 - c. The trail went cold in Madrid, Spain, & the father, in a last desperate attempt to find his son, put an ad in the local newspaper.

- d. The ad read: “Dear Paco, Meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father.”
 - e. The next day, in front of the newspaper office, over 800 Pacos showed up.
 - f. They were all seeking forgiveness & the love of their father.
9. I’m Paco. You’re Paco – And the cross is The Father’s good news calling us home to forgiveness & love.