

Stumbling Blocks Of Offense Luke 17:1-4

As I observe the mood of the culture that has evolved within our nation over these recent years, it would seem clear that there is a rapid drift towards anger and bitterness and resentment taking place. And I would suggest, intentionally so!

Some who hear me say these words might disagree as to the intentionality of it all, and perhaps I'm seeing things that aren't there, but nonetheless, most of us would agree that yes, this present-day generation is far more easily angered than any other generation we have experienced in our lifetimes.

And as we proceed on into what our scriptures call the "last days", we are told there that "the love of many will wax cold". And that truly does seem to be some of what is taking place all around us each day.

The subject that our Lord wants us to consider within this scripture passage given to us here today is what He calls "offenses", both those times and those matters that we get involved in in which we might by our words, our actions, our behaviors offend other people. And also, those times when we ourselves are being offended by the people around us.

And while yes, here the Lord Jesus is obviously teaching us about offenses that are of a "Spiritual nature", as we well know, even the most "secular" of matters can also be intermixed and have a Spiritual context, making it sometimes hard to conveniently separate out those things that are Spiritual and those things that are secular.

Let's read these words of our Lord here in Luke chapter 17 and carefully consider what He is teaching us with them. Verse 1,

¹ Then He (the Lord Jesus) said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses (No stumbling block or temptations to sin) should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!

² It 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.

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

⁴ And 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." (Luke 17:1-4)

May I begin by asking us the question, "What are those things that are offensive to us, those things that are stumbling blocks, those many things of our day that bring temptations for us to sin?"

Very honestly, given a moment to consider the question, I can think of a lot of things that fit these words well . . . and probably, so can you.

Those who drive too closely behind me offend me. Yes, they really are a threat to me and my family. But probably equally so, they are just plain offensive to me, insisting on being exactly in the same place my car is while I am still there. Why can't they be content to remain a safe distance away?

Is that the kind of offense that Jesus was speaking about here as He was teaching His disciples? Probably so, at least to some degree. Because for me, I have found that my anger can quickly and foolishly get out-of-hand, leading to more serious responses.

But in these words from the Lord Jesus, I would suggest that He was far more concerned with other, more serious forms of stumbling blocks of offense, especially offenses of a "Spiritual nature". And through these words, He wanted His disciples then, and you and me now, to know, to understand, to accept that in this world, offenses and stumbling blocks and temptations to sin of every kind will surely come to us. They are inevitable.

And we must not be surprised when they do take place. And neither should we be consumed with insisting that there be anything different. If we do, we will live a life that is filled with one disappointment and frustration after another.

Why would that be so? Why does Jesus tell us here that it is inevitable that offenses will be a continual way of life for each one of us? It is because it simply is the natural way of every human heart born on this earth, and that without exception. Again, those familiar words that I quote for us often from Jeremiah chapter 17 verse 9.

⁹"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

This truth is given to us by our Lord plainly and simply and it is without exception.

A newspaper cartoon character of times past, "Pogo" would often quote the adage, "we have met the enemy and he is us." And that is so. The human personality seems naturally fitted for just such a condition.

Each and every one of us is born into this world with a heart that is deceitful and desperately wicked, firmly fixed upon self and the desires of self. We want all that our eyes can see and we want all things to be done our way. And when our wants and our needs are ignored or denied, we become offended.

It is simply the way of a self-centered heart. And again, yes, without exception, each of us absolutely does have the same inclination.

And so, with such a "bent" fully consuming us, we each, to some degree or another, go throughout our day, either offending the other people around us, or else ourselves being offended by them, always wearing our feelings on our shirtsleeves and daring anyone else to touch us.

Living daily in the crowded teenager-filled environment of the school where we worked for so many years, we were able to see all those self-centered personality traits in clear view. Yes, some teenagers are shy and their self-centeredness is a bit more passive, but it is still clearly there.

Walking down a hallway or through a doorway, if one person bumps into another one and does not immediately acknowledge them and apologize to them, offense is taken. How dare they do that!

But folks, as adults, we are often no different! Yes, with age, we have learned to hide our offenses a bit better, but those feelings are still there.

And often, our offenses will take place with our closest of friends and family members. If we don't immediately see a response we are looking for, we are offended. It does not matter that that person intended offense or not, we take it anyway.

I confess to you that I have that kind of offense present within my own dear family. During a very emotional time that took place within our family, I either did or did not do something that I was expected to do. And though I intended

no offense, offense was taken and that offense has been long lasting, with no forgiveness in sight.

And yes again, offense can be a two-way occurrence. Sometimes we are the offender, at other times, we are the one being offended.

All these things are what Jesus is warning us about here. Because of the sinful nature that is born into our souls at birth, offense in one form or another, is inevitable, and continual. And with our self-centered, “touchy”, “thin-skinned” nature and attitude, we should expect nothing less.

Verse 1 again,

¹ . . . "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. (Luke 17:1-2)

Here within these words, Jesus does not give way to debate or to the “what ifs” that each of us seems to always get caught up within. He instead goes straight to the point. He said, “Offenses will take place, but woe to the person through whom they come”!

May I say at this point that accidentally bumping into a person and being too consumed with our own self to stop and apologize is wrong, but such things are only the “tip of the iceberg” of offenses? And while Jesus really does want us to begin with those more minor offenses, these next words of Jesus cause us to know that far-greater offenses can and will take place. And that we must be very careful in our handling of them. He said,

¹ . . . woe to him through whom (the offenses) 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. (Luke 17:1-2)

As I studied through these words in my Greek lexicon, I found that while there are similar words that bespeak “offense”, sometimes of the minor, unintentional kind, these particular words of the Lord Jesus also bespeak a far more serious form of offense.

These words translated here as “offense” and “offend” are from the Greek words “skandalon” and “skandalizo”, from which we get the words scandal and scandalous.

They imply circumstances and incidents that are scandalous, that employ trickery, and enticement, and a desire to trap a person within a tangled web, intentionally becoming a stumbling block and a tempter towards sin.

The “word picture” being drawn for us here by Jesus assumes two characters, one that is perhaps innocent or naïve, but the other character is not. And this offender is deliberate, intentional and conniving in their offenses.

It is God's desire that you and I be as the first character in this word picture, innocent children, giving no offense and being careful about our offenses of others.

In Matthew chapter 18, in Jesus addressing the question about who would be greatest in the kingdom of God, He,

² . . . called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,

³ and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

⁵ Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

⁶ "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matthew 18:2-6)

And then Jesus went on to say words similar to the ones here in our passage today. He said,

⁷ Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

⁸ If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.

⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

¹⁰ "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to

you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:7-10)

As you hear these words, are you able to understand the severity with which our Lord considers these offenses. When the word “despise” is used in these scriptures, it means “to think of someone as having little or no value at all”. And that truly is a very serious matter to our Lord and it will carry serious consequences for those who callously think of His “little ones” as being of little or no value at all.

And note in these words that “their angel” is right there with them “making their report to God”. Nothing, no offense or temptation of any kind is hidden from God. He knows full-well when you cause one of His little ones to sin.

Note also within these words that Jesus addressed two groups of possible offenders. He spoke first about the unbelieving world. Verse 7,

⁷ Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! (Matthew 18:7)

But then, in the very next verse, He began to address you and me, believers who can also be guilty of offenses. Verse 8,

⁸ If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.

⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

¹⁰ “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:8-10)

While you and I cannot lose our salvation once we are truly saved, here Jesus saw fit to go ahead and warn us about the severity of such a sin as this.

And please understand that these words imply two forms of offenses and temptations, those offenses and temptations that we might bring to another person, yes. But these words also speak about those offenses and temptations that we might even bring to ourselves, to our own souls. We cannot, we dare not foolishly flaunt tempting circumstances before our own eyes. We must do as

Joseph did when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife. We must immediately flee from the temptation.

Oh dear Christian, this is a stern warning that's being given here, and we dare not allow our own souls to get involved in offenses and temptations.

As we have said so often, our lives are a continual stream of choices, God allowing us to become involved in many different circumstances and conditions. But then allowing us to make our free-will choices, all the while, Him desiring us to "Will to do His will".

Oh dear Christian, as Jesus is telling us here, we are the Body of Christ and we must guard ourselves and the other members of the Body of Christ very carefully. We truly do have need of one another, fellow church members and fellow believers. We cannot function well at all without each other. And if we become offensive to another part of the Body of Christ, they will separate themselves out from us and then neither of us can help the other.

Listen to the way our Lord describes our need for each other in 1 Corinthians 12. In verse 25 we read that there must

²⁵ . . . be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Corinthians 12:25-26)

Folks, within this Body Of Christ, the believing community, are most all of the "Little Ones" that the Lord Jesus is teaching us about here in our scripture passage. And it is His desire that you and I intentionally and deliberately show love, honor and respect towards one another, protecting one another, all those "little ones" within the believing community, including ourselves, our own souls. Because no place is given for us to be self-centered, self-seeking offensive people. Such offenders simply do not fit within the believing community of God.

Now, with all of this being said, because the Lord Jesus warns us within these words that it seems inevitable that offenses and temptations will come to us, may we go back and repeat some of these warnings that our Lord is giving. His beginning words again,

¹ Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses (No stumbling block or temptations to sin) should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! (Luke 17:1)

Here in these words, understanding clearly the makeup of our human heart, Jesus gives us this stern warning, telling us that even though we are part of the believing community, and even though we know better than to go around offending each other, for some foolish reason we still will do it.

And why is that? It's because a corrupt residue from that deceitful and desperately wicked heart that was born into us at birth will still remain within us all the days of our lives.

And here, Jesus tells us what we are supposed to do, what we are commanded to do when one part of the Body of Christ is offensive to another part of it. Here He tells us,

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

⁴ And 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." (Luke 17:3-4)

Dear Christian, as we are clearly told in another part of these scriptures, anger is never allowed to be held overnight. Offenses are to be dealt with and forgiven. Grudges are never, never to be allowed to develop. Forgiveness is the answer, the only answer. And no exceptions are permitted.

And as Jesus tells us here, it really does not matter if our neighbor is a "repeat offender". We are simply to be a "repeat forgiver".

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

⁴ And 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." (Luke 17:3-4)

You might ask, but what if he or she does not repent. Folks, that is not your part of the dealings. That is between that person and the Lord. The Lord will deal with his or her unrepentant sin. Your response and my response is plain and simple. It is to obey Christ, to gently rebuke our brother or sister in the Lord and then leave the rest of the matter to the Lord.

And yes, we are to be forgiving of the offender regardless of whether or not they repent. Why? It's because if you or I hold an offense against a person, it can easily develop into a sinful bitterness corrupting our own heart. And that must never be allowed.

We really must be humble and recognize when the problem is within the heart of that other person and we must not allow one to develop within our own heart.

And also yes, there may be times when we should obey the instruction given later on here in Matthew chapter 18 and take our unrepentant brother or sister to the Elders of the church. But may we leave that discussion for another day and simply leave our instruction for today being,

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

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." (Luke 17:3-4)

Pray with me.