

## **Disciples Take Heed**

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### **Luke 17:1-19**

There are three verses in our text I want to highlight to start us off. They are just phrases from these verses. Verse 1, "Then He said to the disciples." That's who Jesus is teaching, who He is speaking to. In verse 3, He says, "Take heed to yourselves." That's the central theme. He is speaking to His disciples telling them to "Take heed to yourselves." Then in verse 11 it says, "Now it happened as he went to Jerusalem."

We're still in that section, beginning in chapter 9, verse 51, where Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. It is a long section of Luke's Gospel known as "the journey teaching." He had been dealing with the Pharisees and Scribes, and now he is speaking to the disciples, of which we, as believers, are included. So it has application to each of our lives today.

On Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, He continued to teach and now warn the disciples. In our text, Jesus warns the disciples to "Take heed to yourselves" in three areas. Number one, in forgiveness; number two, in faithfulness; and number three, in thankfulness. He wants us, as His followers, to be forgiving, faithful and thankful. It's time for some spiritual inventory.

First, in verses 1-6, Jesus deals with the subject of forgiveness. If you are going to be a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ, you're going to have to learn to forgive. It says, "Then He said to the disciples, 'It is impossible that no offenses should come.'" What He's basically saying is that it is inevitable that you will offend someone and someone will offend you. "...but woe to him through whom they do come!" So He's warning us not to be someone who offends or stumbles another.

Verse 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. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." These are instructions for us to forgive. "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." And the apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'" What they were saying is, "Ain't no way! No way, José, can I forgive 'seven times in a day!'" "So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea," and it would obey you.'"

Most of the commentaries I read on these passages say there is no real unity of thought in this whole section; it is just a collage of different teachings that Jesus is giving. But I wrapped them up in one theme for those who are His disciples, for those who are following Jesus Christ, expressed in the verse, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Jesus was going to Jerusalem. You want to follow Him? He's going to be crucified there. He's going to be hung on a cross.

So we are His disciples when we die to ourselves, we take up our cross and follow Him. That includes learning to forgive and not stumble other people.

Verse 1, "Then He said to the disciples, 'It is impossible that no offenses should come.'" What He means by that is it is inevitable. If you're a member of a church for any length of time, someone in that church will offend you. And you will certainly offend others, as well.

But you don't go find another church. "Well, they didn't shake my hand! They didn't say, 'Hi.'" What happens in the next church when they don't shake your hand and they don't say, "Hi"? Are you going to go from church to church? I call them "steeple chasers." They're always looking for the "friendly" church. Some churches even advertise, "The end of your search for a friendly church." How friendly? Super friendly? Perfectly friendly?

Somebody's going to offend you, and you're going to offend somebody. So you have to learn how to deal with that as a disciple. There are going to be offenses. The word "offenses," in verse 1, is the Greek word "skandalon"; we get our word "scandal" from it. A skandalon was actually a trip-stick or wire that a bird fowler used. He would make a trap with a trip stick in order to catch birds or fowl.

When I was a little boy, we used to get a cardboard box, prop up one end with a stick, put some bread under it and attached a long string to the box. Then we would back up around the corner of the house, and one time a big, black crow went to eat the bread, so I yanked on the string and caught the crow. But what are you going to do with it once you catch it? You gonna eat crow?! I freaked out and just let the thing go.

A skandalon is a little stick that trips you up and catches people. So what it is saying is if you are going to offend someone and someone is going to offend you, "Woe to him through whom they do come." This is a very stern word about trouble.

Verses 1-2 are directed at those who would offend others. How do we offend people? By our words, by our conduct and maybe by our liberty that we exercise, so that we trip or stumble someone. So we should be praying, as disciples, "Lord, help me not to make other people stumble. Help me to be a stepping stone, not a stumbling stone."

If you stumble someone, "It would be better for [you] if a millstone were hung around [your] neck, and [you] were thrown into the sea, than that [you] should offend one of these little ones." What He means by "little ones" we can't be sure. In Matthew 18:3, it seems to indicate young children.

And may God help us, as adults in this church, never to stumble children! Children are watching our marriages. They are watching the way we live. And we are to be examples to them, not stumbling them.

Another text would seem to indicate "little ones" refers to younger believers, new Christians. We don't want to use our liberty in a way that would stumble them, hurt them or offend them.

Always in the exercise of our liberties we should think, Would this stumble a weaker brother? Does it glorify Christ? Will it bring me into bondage? You want to be living in love for others. It would be better that you had a big, heavy millstone around your neck and be thrown into the sea than offend someone.

In verses 3-4, Jesus changes the focus on you stumbling others to how you should respond when someone offends you. He said, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you..." the same idea of offending you "...rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." What does it mean to "rebuke him"? In Matthew 18, He makes it clearer. You go to that person who offended you, in humility and love, and you share with them that what they did or said was wrong. You're wanting them to admit their sin and repent, which is the word "metanoia" or "to change your mind" and turn around.

This concerns a personal offense. You don't just go around the church saying, "I rebuke people. That's my gift," and you just rebuke people at random. No; it's a personal interaction, like someone hurting you. So we need to be careful with this. Sometimes people overreact. They're being too sensitive, and on the least, little bit of offense they freak out.

But if someone has actually wronged you, you should go to them, seeking to win them in love. The Bible says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1-2).

So the steps are that you rebuke them in love, and if they repent, forgive them. You ask, "What if they don't repent?" You still want to let the bitterness, anger and unforgiveness go. It's not necessary that they repent in your relationship; it's just that you have to let it go before God. You don't want to carry that hatred, that unforgiveness in your heart.

Verse 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." Why seven times? Seven is the number of completion and it's kind of a rounded number where He basically is saying that you need to get into a habit of learning to be forgiving. Peter said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Peter said "seven times." Jesus said, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22).

Now forgiveness is not a matter of mathematics; we're not to be keeping numbers or writing it down. We're to just get into the habit and pattern of learning to forgive.

Last week my wife and I celebrated 48 years of marriage. And you don't do 48 years of marriage unless you learn to forgive over and over and over. After 48 years, you wake up and say, "Please forgive me! I love you. I'm sorry." You get in the groove. That can change your marriage. So you get in the habit of forgiving, like Jesus said.

Verse 5, "And the apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'" And He goes on to say that when the apostles heard that, they basically said, "Are You kidding me?! I already forgave you

of that three times today! You're out, buster!" No; we keep on forgiving.

Matthew 18 has a lot more detail: go to them privately, speak to them, try to restore them and heal your relationship.

So in verse 5, still thinking about the need to forgive, the apostles said, "Lord, increase our faith." They didn't ask to have their love increased. You would think that they would ask, "Lord, give us more love." No, they didn't.

A common problem people have with faith is that they get the idea—and a lot of televangelists spread this false concept—that the issue with faith is the amount you have and how strong it is. The issue with faith is not the amount or how strong but who the object of your faith is.

When you put faith in money, you get what money can buy. When you put your faith in man, you get what man can do for you. When you put your faith in government, you get zero. When you put your faith in something, you can only get what that object can produce. But when you put your faith in God, "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

If you are struggling with forgiveness in your marriage relationship, have faith in God, trust in God, look to God and have a soft heart before God. Don't let your heart become hardened toward your spouse. Be willing to forgive them. It's so very important. So a disciple is marked by forgiveness.

That's what He means where He says, in verse 6, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." The mustard seed was the smallest seed they knew about at that time. It was used as a term for something that was small, weak and insignificant. The mulberry tree or sycamore tree was known for its longevity, strength and deep-root system. So even the smallest faith in God can produce great results.

In Ephesians 4:31-32, Paul tells us, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" or "hatred." "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Those are the instructions.

When Jesus was hanging on the Cross and was praying for those who crucified Him, He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Mark 23:34). Jesus is our example. Charles Spurgeon, the great prince of preachers, said, "Let us go to Calvary to learn that we may be forgiven, and let us linger there to learn how to forgive."

"Am I a forgiving disciple? Do I forgive others who sin against me?"

The number two quality of discipleship is faithfulness. Am I faithful in serving God, faithful in living for God and faithful in doing His commands? Verses 7-10 say, "And which of you, having a servant..." the word is "doulos" or "slave" "...plowing or tending sheep..." so he's working hard out in the field "...will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit

down to eat'?"

So the scenario is that your servant is working in your fields and comes in. You don't say to him, "You've been working hard. Sit down, feed yourself." No, you don't do that. So Jesus asks a series of rhetorical questions. Notice the question marks. You won't tell a servant to go sit down to his dinner first. So the question is expecting a "No" answer.

Verse 8, "But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'?" We're a little sensitive to the master-slave relationship. But this is a *doulos*, a man who voluntarily, out of love, decided to serve this individual and was given a job. So he was doing a task, and the master doesn't necessarily commend him for that; he was just doing his duty. Verse 9, "Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not."

Verse 10, which is the application, says, "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

There are two dangers to avoid in serving God. First, is to serve out of slave labor; we do it because we have to. "I'm gritting my teeth as I serve God. I don't want to, but I'm going to do it anyway." Second, is to serve to obligate God, so He will bless me. This is a very dangerous thing when it comes to serving the Lord.

Remember the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son. What did he say to his father in bitterness? "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends" (Luke 15:29). You hear all that poison coming out of his heart. What was his motive for serving his father all those years? That he would get a fatted calf and get a party with his friends. He wasn't just serving out of love. He wasn't just doing his duty; he was doing it out of being a slave to obligate God. That's the key.

What is our proper response as Christians? Ephesians 6:6 says, "doing the will of God from the heart." When you serve God as a disciple, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23). And Psalm 40:8 says, "I delight to do your will, O my God." So it's very important to faithfully serve the Lord from your heart, to humbly be grateful for God's grace.

I've been a pastor for many years, and I know that sometimes you get discouraged in the Lord's work. So sometimes your attitude is wrong. You say, "God, You owe me! I've done all this for so many years. You should bless me. You should heal me. You should prosper me. I deserve the blessings, Lord!"

God will never be your debtor. You cannot obligate God to bless you.

Here was the problem with the Pharisees. They taught that if you did good things, God

rewarded you by blessing you materially and physically. And if you did bad things, God punished you by afflicting you with suffering and pain. So when they saw someone suffering, like Lazarus at the rich man's gate, they thought, He must have sinned. He must have done something wrong.

When Job had all the calamity come into his life, his friends said, "Okay, confess. What did you do? You must have done something wrong. Obviously God is punishing you." Not so. God was using Job to vindicate God, that He was worthy to be served apart from the gifts that He gives. So to correct that, Jesus says in this parable that you don't commend the steward for just doing his job.

For us as God's servants, the amazing thing is that when we get to heaven, in God's grace, He is going to reward us. He doesn't have to. He's not obligated to do that. "Because I went to church every Sunday for 35 years, You had better have a big crown waiting for me!" Or maybe God called you to Barstow and you went there. "That had better be a big crown; I went to Barstow!" Whatever.

God will not be your debtor; you can't obligate God to you. If you've been serving the Lord, but you're suffering, God owes you nothing. We get so disappointed. "Oh, I did this! God, you owe me!" No. God doesn't owe us anything. Salvation and service are all by the grace of God. We serve God out of love, out of His grace and out of His mercy. He will reward us, but He owes us nothing.

I have a theory that when we get to heaven, even when we hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23), that we will be broken, humbled and overwhelmed by the grace and love of God. We'll say, "I don't deserve anything, because You saved me by Your grace. You've given me eternal life. You've done all these marvelous things in my life. God, You owe me nothing!" So we need to do the will of God from the heart. Psalm 40:8 says, "I delight to do Your will, O my God." How important it is that we have a heart to do the will of God.

That is something I struggle with and pray for myself; that no matter what comes about in my life, I would be humbly faithful, serving God and thanking God for the least of His blessings. All of these virtues take humility and love.

Number three characteristic of a true disciple is thankfulness, verses 11-19. "Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee." So this is kind of a running narrative. Jesus is leaving Galilee in the north and going through Samaria. Samaritans were despised by the Jewish people. They were half Jew and half Gentile. They weren't pure Jewish blood.

In John 4:9, Jesus met with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. She said, "'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?' For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." The Jews didn't, but Jesus did. And Luke's Gospel has as its theme that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He was always reaching out to

the outcast and the downcast.

Now in verses 11-13, we have the sick men. Notice verses 12-13: “Then as He entered a certain village...” doesn’t name it “...there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’”

What does it mean that they were lepers? It means they had leprosy. Today we call it Hansen’s Disease. From the Bible days up until the 1980s, there was no cure for leprosy or Hansen’s Disease. If anyone was cured, it had to be a miracle of God. So they would be outcast, ostracized from society. You think Covid was bad? In those days, you had to be 150 yards away from others. Wherever you went, you had to yell out, “Unclean! Unclean!” You talk about ruining your social life! That really took a toll. People would run from them. It was a dreaded disease. But Jesus had mercy on them.

How beautiful it is when we see our need for Jesus, and we cry out to Him for mercy! He sees us and hears our cry. Then He answers us in our distress.

Now we move from the sick men to the Master, verse 14. “So when He saw them...” slow down when you read your Bible. Jesus saw them. It’s wonderful to know that whenever I’m suffering, whenever I’m in need, whenever I need the Lord’s help, He sees me. We use the term for God as Jehovah Jireh, which means “God will provide.” But the etymology is that “God sees.” It eventually came to mean “God will provide,” because whatever God sees, God provides. Isn’t that wonderful?! And God sees what your needs are right now. When you cry out to Him, He knows what you need.

First He saw these 10 lepers and then “He said to them, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.” Dr. Luke makes it clear that on the way to see the priests, these lepers were cleansed or healed of their leprosy.

What does it mean, “Go show yourselves to the priests”? In Leviticus 13-14, there are instructions that the priests should diagnose leprosy. And if they were ever cleansed, there were instructions on how the priests were to pronounce them clean, so they could be introduced back into society.

The amazing thing to me is when these leprous men showed up to be cleansed of their leprosy, the priests must have been mind-blown, because they had never had to use those sections of Leviticus to declare someone clean. No one had ever been cleansed of leprosy until Jesus came!

Here you have a picture of Jesus’ deity, power and Messiahship. Jesus healed them—not by laying hands on them but by telling them to go show themselves to the priests. The key here is that they had to start moving forward in faith toward the priests, and as they went, they were healed. He didn’t heal them and then say, “Go.” He said, “Go,” and then He healed them. So they first had to take a step of faith. They had to step into the Jordan River, so to speak, before the waters would part.

We don't want to step into the waters; we want God to build a bridge over the waters, and then we'll take a step. But we have to obey His commands.

All 10 lepers had faith to obediently turn and head for the priests. And as they went, they saw their skin was healed. What joy must have filled their hearts!

But as the story goes on the nine went straight to the priests, but one saw he had been healed and went back to thank Jesus, the Messiah. So we move now in our story to the healed Samaritan. Verse 15, "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God..." indicating he was a distance from Jesus, who is God "...and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks." Then Jesus drops a bomb: "And he was a Samaritan." They were hated by the Jews. "So Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?'" He was referring to the Samaritan. "And He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.'"

There are many lessons we can learn from this amazing story. Let me give you three. Number one, ten lepers cried out to Jesus, but only one thanked Him.

Isn't that so much like today? He forgives us, He saves us—and we don't take the time to thank Him?! How do you feel when you do something for somebody, and they don't even say "Thank you"? So how does God feel?

Have you thanked the Lord for all the good things He has done for you? The Bible says we should be thankful to Him. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." God's will for us is that in everything we should be thankful to God. Psalm 100:4 says, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name." Psalm 107:1 says, "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever."

So only one out of the ten lepers thanked Jesus for their healing. I think the percentage is much the same today; very few people are thankful to God for the blessings he bestows on them.

Number two, ten were healed but only one was saved, verse 19. Jesus said to this man of Samaria, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole," it says in the King James translation. The word "whole" indicates salvation of his soul. Jesus wasn't talking about his body; he had already been healed. Jesus said that he had now been forgiven; he was saved. The Bible says, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). That's the most important blessing we could ever receive that God gives to us—saved from sin.

We should wake up every morning and say, "Lord, thank You for saving me." No matter what goes wrong during the day, just say, "Thank You for saving me." The car blows up—"I'm going to heaven! I'm not getting to work today, but I'm going to heaven!" Salvation.

Number three, ten got something temporal, but only one got something eternal. Some people relate to God only on the temporal. "God, heal me. God, prosper me. God, give me health and wealth!" The Bible says, "The things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). So all ten got a temporary blessing, their healing. But eventually they would die.

We make such a big deal out of healing. It is wonderful that God can and does heal our bodies, but if He doesn't, we're all going to die anyway. I thought I'd just encourage you today. But whether he heals you or not, you're going to heaven. You have eternal life as a Christian.

Let me summarize by giving you three characteristics Jesus wants His true disciples to have. Number one is to have a forgiving spirit. An unforgiving heart is the sign of an unregenerated heart.

When I saw Erica Kirk at her husband's funeral service say, "I forgive you" to the man who killed her husband, I started to weep. There is no greater example of Christianity than to forgive someone who has offended you. An unforgiving heart is an indication of an unregenerated heart.

So do a little inventory. Are you unforgiving? Is there someone you have written off? Is there someone you've given up on and you're unwilling to let the Lord take care of it? God says, "'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). He'll take care of it. We need to trust Him by faith. If we need to forgive others, we need to say, like the disciples, "Lord, help me to have stronger faith." And the object of your faith needs to be in Christ.

Number two is to be faithful. Go where He wants you to go, do what He wants you to do, say what He wants you to say and be what He wants you to be. Make that the goal of your life.

"I'll live for Him who died for me;

How happy then my life shall be.

My Savior and my God."

Every true Christian should have a burning desire to say, "Here I am, Lord; use me. I want to serve You."

And number three is to be thankful. Have a thankful heart. It's the mark of a true disciple.