

The Gospel According to
Luke

“The Best Defense is No Offense”

Chapter 17:1-10

Introduction

I must have been about eight or nine years old that Halloween. I'd gathered a pillowcase full of candy trick-or-treating. I was at the local Haunted House when an older boy, perhaps junior high age, came up to me, harassed me, took away my pillowcase, and began to walk off.

What he didn't know, but was about to find out, was that I lived right across the street. I ran home crying. I told my dad and my two older brothers what had just happened. My brother Tony was out of high school by then; Richard was the outstanding middle linebacker on the varsity football team.

I remember three things:

1. I pointed out the boy who had stolen my candy.
2. My brothers ran after him.
3. I got my candy back.

What exactly happened to him has always been shrouded in mystery – *although I know it wasn't pleasant!*

Parents and siblings will go to great lengths to protect their children and younger brothers and sisters. *Woe to the person or people who try to harm your children!*

Jesus taps into this universal feeling, but He applies it to your spiritual family, to your brothers and sisters in the Church. He describes you as a servant among other servants in God's household of faith. Sometimes, while serving together, we might offend a fellow servant, or be offended by a fellow servant. It's inevitable; it's understandable;

but it's not insignificant or inconsequential. It's important we do something about offenses.

We'll organize our thoughts around those two points: #1 Jesus Exhorts You To Be Inoffensive, and #2 Jesus Expects You To Be Indefensive.

#1 Jesus Exhorts You To Be Inoffensive (v1-4)

By 'inoffensive' I mean you should do all you can to avoid offending others; and I mean you should not be so easily offended by others.

Easier said than done! Jesus recognized that offenses were going to be a part of living until His return. He gave you some ground rules for *avoiding* offending others, and for *averting* being offended by others.

First: Avoid offending others:

Luke 17:1 Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!"

It is impossible that no offenses should come because we remain in a sinful world and struggle against our sinful flesh. It's not an excuse, but it is reality.

It might be a good idea to pause and try to determine what Jesus meant by the word **offense**. It's a Greek word we would pronounce as *skandalon*. Our word scandal is derived from it. In verse three, Jesus will discuss what you should do when you are offended; there He uses the word **sin** in place of *skandalon*. We're talking about offending someone, or being offended by someone, as a result of sin.

Skandalon also means to set a *snare*, or to set-up a *stumbling* block. It's describing a person walking along who suddenly gets tripped-up and cannot make any further progress.

The general idea is that you offend your fellow servant when you do or say something sinful that hinders their walk with the Lord. Instead of enjoying their walk with Jesus, they become ensnared, or they stumble and fall, because of your scandalous words or ways.

I want to suggest to you, from the beginning, that Jesus had in mind serious offenses. That's not to say we should ignore or overlook anything. But it is to say that too often Christians have their feelings hurt. Having hurt feelings does not mean you've been offended! It does not mean someone sinned against you.

With that in mind, you want to avoid offending others. The way to do it is by attending to your own walk with the Lord:

1. First, don't get involved in things that are scandalous. In other words, deal with sin in your life.
2. Second, don't ensnare others. For example: Let's say you have liberty in some area to engage in a certain behavior that others might consider questionable. It's not sin in and of itself; it's not sin for you; but it could be sin to others. If you openly flaunt it, or even encourage it, you set a trap for your brothers and sisters to become ensnared.
3. Third, don't stumble others by setting up obstacles in their walk. For example: Don't set unbiblical standards of behavior that you claim to have achieved. It was the Pharisee's self-righteousness that stumbled the common people. It was their legalism. Emphasize the grace of God.

Offending another believer is serious:

Luke 17:2 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.

A **millstone** was a huge, heavy, flat grinding stone that was pulled by an ox or donkey to crush grain. It would be better for you to die this horrible drowning death than to offend a fellow believer! In verse one, Jesus said, **Woe to him** who offends. He never explains what **woe** awaits you if you're the offender; *better to not know!*

Why all the tough talk? I think it is to emphasize how much God the Father cares for His children. Like any dad, but even more, He wants to protect His children. As their brothers and sisters, we should want to protect them as well. We should want to mutually care for our siblings in the Church. Just like God, as our Father, has our best

interests in mind; so should we look upon one another's best spiritual interests – even if it means sacrificing things in our own lives.

You're exhorted to avoid offending others; next you are exhorted to avert being offended by others:

Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

This verse tells us several important things:

1. First, Jesus explains plainly that an **offense** is equivalent to a **sin**. It's *not* a sin just because you feel offended. Sin is a serious, selfish, willful, act of omission or of co-mission.
2. Second, you have not just the right, but the responsibility to **rebuke** your **brother** or sister who has sinned against you. This is a great insight: **Even if you are the offended party, you should be more concerned with the offender than with yourself!** You have a spiritual responsibility to go to them, to help them deal with their sin.
3. Third, you are to go to the person directly, one-on-one, with a heart to resolve the matter quietly, and to restore fellowship. You should be ready to forgive.

If you apply just these things, you will put offenses into perspective. You will deal with them biblically, ***or you will let them go!***

We're always looking for a loophole. Jesus said, **if he repents, forgive him**. How do I know if someone has repented? I might assume it's when that person no longer **sins against** me. So, if they continue to offend, then I am no longer obligated to forgive them, right? **Wrong!**

Luke 17:4 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."

I think this emphasizes that you should be ready to forgive; you should desire to be restored; you should have a heart that wants what is best, not just for you, but for your brother or sister and for your Father in heaven.

I think I'm safe in saying that each of us sins more than seven times each day; and sometimes it's the same sin. Does Jesus forgive you? Or does He tell you that your repentance isn't real? **Treat others the way Jesus treats you.**

This is all very simple; but it seems impossible! The disciples are going to speak for all of us when they say to Jesus, in verse five, **Increase our faith.** It leads us into our second point,

#2 Jesus Expects You To Be Indefensive (v5-10)

By 'indefensive' I mean you should look past people to Jesus and realize that you are serving the Lord. People can let you down. They might not recognize your service and sacrifice; they can take advantage of you. If you look past them to Jesus, you will avoid and avert most offenses; you will be indefensive in your attitudes and free to act towards others in ways that Jesus has commanded.

A request from His disciples was the segue Jesus needed to make this second point:

Luke 17:5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

Their request for more **faith** seems reasonable. Faith can grow and increase. But, in this case, Jesus told them they already had enough faith:

Luke 17:6 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."

Jesus doesn't want us to go around as spiritual landscapers, uprooting trees and replanting them in the ocean! It's an exaggeration. He was telling them that even the smallest amount of faith could accomplish mighty deeds. They already had sufficient faith to accomplish what He was asking.

Listen: Jesus does not, and will not, ask you to do anything that He has not already equipped or empowered you to accomplish. You may have to step-out in faith; He may be stretching you. But you can

do all the things He asks. It's usually not more faith you need, but a willingness to obey.

To drive home His point, and to tie everything together, Jesus used a common illustration.

Luke 17:7 And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'?

Luke 17:8 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'?

Luke 17:9 Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.

The master expects his servant to serve, not be served. The servant expects to be treated as a servant.

What does that have to do with our topic? *Plenty!* Many offenses come because we are treated as servants and we feel as though we deserve something better, or something more. We didn't receive a kind word of encouragement; we weren't openly mentioned or recognized.

At those moments, you need to ask yourself, *Who am I serving?* If it is a person, or people, you will be offended. But if you are looking past them and serving the Lord, you will be indefensive, and go about your business with His equipping and empowering.

Look again at the illustration Jesus used. The only relationship you see is that between Master and servant. The only serving is what you are asked to do, using the resources provided by your Master. What is there to be offended by? Nothing! Just go about your business and be a faithful servant.

That's why Jesus said, in verse ten,

Luke 17:10 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.'

Unprofitable means you don't deserve any special merit for what you do. You are only doing what is required of you as a servant. You can

compare it to a job situation. Let's say you work at McDonalds. When you open your meager paycheck, do you expect more money, or a bonus, because you didn't reuse the freedom fries that fell on the ground? You shouldn't; that's your job!

The Lord isn't dissing your service. He's putting it into a good perspective. Remember, this section began with the disciples exclaiming they could not do what He was asking without a grant of more **faith**. Yes, they could do what He was asking; and they should do it – without any complaint, and without growing discouraged. They could live indefensively towards one another – avoiding and averting offending one another. It was, and is, the normal expectation of a servant in God's household. It doesn't require any special grant of faith; only obedience.

But you must see yourself as the Lord's servant – looking past your service to others. It's when we get our eyes on the people we are asked to serve that we can offend and be offended. Look past them to Jesus.

Here's something to consider. One day, you will come in from your service and you be served supper by your Master! Earlier, in Luke 12:36-37, Jesus said,

Luke 12:36 and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.

Luke 12:37 Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.

You are to serve others as if you were serving the Lord, with no expectation of approval or merit on earth. But, as you serve them and look to the Lord, you know that in eternity **He will serve you** for your faithfulness.

Applying God's Word

If you are a Christian... It might be time for you to put certain offenses to rest. If someone has sinned against you – go to them, with the desire to restore them to fellowship with the Lord, then yourself. If

you are the offender – if you have sinned against someone – go to them and ask forgiveness.

First, **think it through**. Was sin really involved? Or are you offended because you are defensive? If that is the case, I would recommend you let it go, and look past the person or the people to the Lord. Cultivate becoming more indefensive.

Maybe you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ... You've seen Christian tempers and tongues, and you're wondering why you need to get saved. Well, sure, we have problems – just like any other family. But, in the end, we're forgiven our sins, and can forgive others who've sinned against us.

If you're not a Christian, your sins need forgiving. Only God can forgive sins; and He does it when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior.