

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*If He Repents Forgive Him*"ⁱ

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse, and we find ourselves at **Luke 17:3**.

Let me give you an idea of where we have been, where we are going this morning, and where we are going next week.

Where we have been: last week we dealt with the beginning of the verse. In particular, the words **pay attention to yourselves**.

This morning we are going to deal with most of the rest of the verse: **if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him**.

I said most of the rest of this verse because next week we are going to deal with the repeated phrase **if he repents**. Notice it is in **verse 3 and verse 4**...

Luke 17:3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and IF HE REPENTS, forgive him, 4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I REPENT,' YOU MUST FORGIVE HIM."

Twice we are told to forgive our brother **if he repents**. What question does this leave you with?

What if he doesn't repent?

Next Sunday's sermon is titled, "*Is Repentance a Condition for Forgiveness, or Should We Forgive Unconditionally?*"

For now, notice that even though the verse only says **if your brother sins**, we know from the context that it means **if your brother sins against you**.

Also, the parallel account in **Matthew 18** says **if your brother sins against you**.

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: Rebuking sin is a wisdom issue.

Rebuking sin is a wisdom issue, versus a black and white issue, because there are verses encouraging us to rebuke sins against us, and there are verses encouraging us to overlook sins against us...

Proverbs 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and IT IS HIS GLORY TO OVERLOOK AN OFFENSE.

The Amplified says, "**It is his honor and glory to overlook a transgression or an offense [without seeking revenge and harboring resentment].**"

It is a credit to us, or sign of maturity, to overlook an offense:

- The more mature you are the greater the offense you can overlook.
- The more immature you are the more easily you are offended and the less you can overlook.

Proverbs 12:16 The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.

One more time...

Proverbs 12:16 The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.

Vexation means wrath, which is how it's translated in the NKJV, or anger, which is how it's translated in the NASB.

Fools are quickly filled with wrath or anger, but the **prudent** – or wise – **ignore** – or overlook insults.

This brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: Christians should be the most difficult people to offend.

I can look back on times when I was offended, and I'm ashamed by some of the things that offended me:

- I can look back on times when people were NOT offended, and I was impressed. It was a sign of their maturity.
- And I can look back on times when people WERE offended, and it made them seem petty and immature.

When you think about the people in your life who are the most easily offended, you probably are not thinking about mature people. You are probably thinking about immature people...and maybe we should be thinking about ourselves.

Some of you might remember some of our good friends from California, Dave and Naida Gomes. They served as mentors to us. Dave seemed like nothing ever offended him. I asked him about it one time and he said...

"It is impossible to offend a dead person."

He meant that when we become believers we die to self. The flesh is dead, so we shouldn't let it be stirred up by offenses.

And if that's not a good enough reason to avoid being offended then I would offer this...

Some of the most miserable people are the most easily offended. They go through life regularly upset at the people around them. They regularly feel like they are being mistreated:

- They are upset in the workplace
- They are upset in their marriage
- They are upset in their church

And here are a few more verses making a similar point that we should overlook offenses...

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers – or forgives – all offenses.

The word **covers** is synonymous with forgives. Think of the word atone, which literally means cover, and is associated with forgiveness. People offered sacrifices that atoned for, or covered sin, until they could be forgiven by Christ's sacrifice.

So if we love people that love is going to cover or forgive their offenses. And this verse is quoted in the New Testament...

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since LOVE COVERS – OR FORGIVES – A MULTITUDE OF SINS.

I have shared with you before that the world causes us to look at certain words un-biblically. For example, the world wants us to believe love is a feeling or emotion over which we have no control. But the Bible presents love as a

choice over which we have complete control. We choose whether to love people by our actions toward them, hence being able to love our enemies.

Patience is another word that the world causes us to think about un-biblically.

For example, the world wants us to think that being patient means you're good at waiting.

If you are patient, you don't mind sitting at a red light. You have been in line at Walmart for forty-five minutes while there are thirty-seven open registers without cashiers. But you have a smile on your face, and when you finally get to the cashier, my brother-in-law Boyd says, "I am sorry about the wait," but you say, "No problem at all. It just gave me time to recite Scripture that I have memorized and pray for different people."

Biblically, patience is more synonymous with endurance, perseverance, and longsuffering...which is how the Greek word for patience is often translated.

Being patient means you put up with a lot, whether it is trials or offenses, without getting upset or becoming offended.

The Greek word for **patience** is [hypomonē](#) (who-pah-muh-nay) and part of the definition is, "bear ill treatments bravely and calmly."

Listen to the way this verse summarizes it for us...

Ephesians 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, WITH PATIENCE, BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.

This verse says **patience** is bearing with people in love or being longsuffering.

What does it mean to [**bear**] with [**people**]?

Basically, it means putting up with them...well. That's what it means to be patient.

So all this makes it seem like overlooking offenses is mature.

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Maybe you heard the title of this sermon and thought, "This means I'm going to get to rebuke all the people who have upset me, but now you're saying the opposite."

There is a place for that as we'll see, but the balance is that it can be mature to overlook and NOT rebuke.

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Now regarding overlooking, I'll add...

If we think we have overlooked something we must be honest about whether we have are not.

What I mean is, if we say we have overlooked something, but:

- We keep thinking about what the person did
- We are still upset with the person
- We treat the person differently
- Our relationship with the person is damaged
- Things are awkward
- Whenever we see them we are reminded of the offense.

We clearly haven't been able to overlook the offense and we need to rebuke the person.

In these instances, saying we overlooked the offense isn't a sign of maturity. It's a sign of immaturity.

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Because here's what I have seen a few times...

People don't want to go to the person that sinned against them. They say, "I have overlooked the offense. I am not offended. Everything is fine." But they are offended, they haven't overlooked the offense, and everything is not fine.

And because the offended person won't acknowledge that they are offended it is very hard to improve the relationship.

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And this is one of the main reasons bitterness takes place...and it brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: Rebuke sin to prevent bitterness.

People are offended, they don't go to the person, and bitterness sets in.

Hebrews 12:14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

We are told to strive to be at peace with people, which involves overlooking offenses, but then right after that we are told one of the greatest threats to being at peace with people: **bitterness**...

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

Bitterness is described as having a root, which makes perfect sense because:

- Roots grow and spread over time...like bitterness grows and spreads over time.
- Roots can wrap around pipes or foundations and damage them...like bitterness can wrap around people's hearts and damage them.
- Roots become stronger over time and harder to remove...like bitterness becomes stronger over time and harder to remove.

Roots are below the surface and hard to see...like bitterness is often below the surface and hard to see.

I don't mean it is hard to see in others. Bitterness is frequently easy to see in others. I mean it is hard to see in ourselves. You will not find many bitter people who admit that they are bitter.

You suspect someone is bitter so you say, "*You seem pretty upset with this person. Do you think you might be bitter?*"

The person responds, "*No. How could you say that to me? I can't stand the person. I never want to see them again. I try to avoid them as much as possible. But I'm not bitter.*"

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Finally, it says the root **causes trouble and defiles many**.

It doesn't say **HURTS many**. If someone was murdered, we can imagine how many people would be hurt. It says **defiled**, which is the Greek word *miainō* (pronounced me-eye-know), which means "pollute." It only occurs 4 times in Scripture.

After being in ministry for 16 years I can't tell you how many people I have seen **defiled** just as this verse describes.

Here's how it happens...

Bitter people don't go to the people they are bitter toward. Instead, they gossip about these people to others, and it **defiles** the people who listen to the slander.

Also, I want to stress the way that I worded this: I said "people who listen to the slander," versus "people who heard the slander." We can't always choose what we hear, but we can choose what we listen to.

Whenever slander occurs there are always two parties:

1. The person choosing to slander
2. The person choosing to listen

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And here's how the **defiling** takes place...

The people who choose to listen to the slander take up an offense for the bitter person against the person who was slandered and now this person is **defiled**, or polluted.

There would be so much more peace in the body of Christ if people would obey what the Bible says about offenses and not picking up other people's offenses and making them their own.

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This is why **Matthew 18** and **Luke 17** command going to the person...versus others. Both passages keep the circle of knowledge small until it must be enlarged, but sadly, the opposite is what ends up happening:

- The person who should be part of the circle is excluded
- People who should not be part of the circle are included

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Now one more thing related to **verse 3** before we move on from it that can further complicate things...

Even if we can overlook the offense, oftentimes we should **STILL** rebuke the person.

The verse says, "**If your brother sins, rebuke him.**" It doesn't say, "**If your brother sins AND YOU ARE OFFENDED, rebuke him, BUT IF YOU ARE NOT OFFENDED, don't rebuke him.**"

In other words, when people are in sin we must confront them even if we aren't offended. More about this next week.

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Also notice it says **if he repents, forgive him**, versus **if he SEEMS repentant, forgive him** or **IF YOU'RE SURE HE'S REPENTANT, forgive him**.

We are not supposed to judge people's repentance. We should assume people are repentant until they cause us to think otherwise. This is part of thinking the best and not being accusing.

But you know when you might start questioning the sincerity of people's repentance?

Look at **verse 7** for the answer...

Luke 17:4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

If someone sinned against me 7 times in the same day and 7 times said to me, "I repent," I would probably start doubting the sincerity of their repentance. But Jesus says even then we must still forgive them. And this brings us to lesson four...

Lesson Four: If he repents, forgive him an unlimited number of times.

The parallel account in Matthew's gospel, which is probably the one we are more familiar with, reads this way...

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Matthew 18:22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

It’s hard to tell if this is 77 or 70x7. We’ll say 70x7.

So first we read Luke’s gospel and get excited, because we think we only have to forgive 7 times. The eighth time people are out of luck.

But then we read Matthew’s gospel and Jesus says 7 times 70 times. We’re discouraged, but we tell ourselves, “*Okay, on the 491st time they are out of luck.*”

We probably know that’s not Jesus’s point.

Peter thought Jesus would be impressed with his suggestion to forgive seven times, because three was the accepted limit taught by many Jewish rabbis of that time. But Jesus meant that no matter how many times people sin against us, as long as they say they repent, we must continue forgiving them.

France said, “*The Rabbis discussed this question, and recommended not more than three times...Peter’s seven times is therefore generous, but Jesus’ reply does away with all limits and calculations.*”

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Now I know what you’re thinking...

“It sounds incredibly difficult to be this forgiving!”

You wouldn’t be the only ones to think that. The apostles did too...

Luke 17:5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

If you are anything like me, forgiveness is difficult for you. It is one of my struggles, and I am ashamed to say that, because I know the Lord has forgiven me for so much.

But with that said this verse is encouraging, because apparently forgiving people sounded difficult to the apostles as well.

Adam Clarke said, “*This work of pardoning every offence of every man...seemed so difficult, even to the disciples themselves, that they saw, without an extraordinary degree of faith, they should never be able to [obey].*”

They felt inadequate in the face of such a high standard, so they said give us more faith: “*Give us the faith to be able to do this. Help us be strong enough to forgive as You command.*”

But interestingly, look at Jesus’s response...

Luke 17:6 And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

As important as faith is, notice what Jesus did NOT do:

- He did not tell them He would increase their faith.
- He did not tell them how they could increase their faith. **Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”** Jesus didn’t tell them to read the Scriptures to have their faith increased.

Instead, He brushed aside their request and provided one of His most well-known hyperboles, or exaggerations, to make a point: if the disciples had enough faith they could tell a tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea.

In other words, even a little faith can do something great.

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And there is a similar account in Matthew's gospel, which I'd like to share because putting them together helps us understand what Jesus did and didn't mean by these statements.

Here's the context...

A man's son was demon possessed. He brought him to the disciples, but they were not able to help him. He brought him to Jesus who cast out the demon. The disciples asked Jesus why they had been unable to do so...

Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

The idea is NOT that if we have a little faith we can tell trees and mountains to move and they move.

Instead, if we have a little faith, if it is genuine, we can do the things the Lord wants us to do:

- In Matthew's gospel Jesus told the disciples if they had enough faith, they would be able to cast out demons.
- In Luke's gospel Jesus told the disciples if they had enough faith, they would be able to forgive people an unlimited amount of times.

Hendrickson said, "*No task assigned by the Lord, including even causing a mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea, would be impossible for you to accomplish, as long as you remain in trustful contact with God.*"

Stein, said, "*[Jesus's words are] perhaps best translated, 'If you have faith... you could.'*"

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It is not the amount of faith that matters, but the fact that God can powerfully work through our faith to help us obey.

The issue is what their faith is in. Think about ice-skating. It is far better to have a little faith on thick ice than great faith on thin ice.

And this brings us to lesson 4...

Lesson Five: Forgiveness is a matter of faith versus effort.

Let me share the way two commentaries explained this...

Poole said, "*No duty required of men and women more grates upon flesh and blood than this of forgiving injuries, nothing that people find harder to put in practice; so where there is no root of faith, this fruit [of forgiveness] will not be found.*"

The Pulpit Commentary explained it this way, "*[Jesus] says, 'If you have any real faith at all, you will be able to win the victory over yourselves necessary for a perpetual loving [forgiveness] of others.'*"

This is fascinating to me and hopefully to you as well because forgiving is something that seems hard to do. It seems to require so much human effort.

But this reveals that forgiveness is not a matter of human effort. Many of us have probably tried hard to forgive and been unable to do so...and that's probably why we failed: we tried in the flesh versus in the Spirit.

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I read that the roots of a mulberry tree are extraordinarily strong, and the tree could remain rooted for six hundred years.

Let's think about the implications for forgiveness and bitterness...

Maybe we have bitterness toward people and the roots are extraordinarily strong. Perhaps we feel like that bitterness could remain for 600 years. Jesus's point is that with faith there can be forgiveness and those roots can be ripped out.

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Now as we head toward our conclusion, I want to ask you a question. Sometimes when I ask you a question I tell you there are a few right answers. But with this question, there is primarily one right answer.

Why do we forgive others?

Because God forgave us.

And this brings us to our last lesson...

Lesson Six: If he repents, forgive him, because God forgave you.

Let me tell you why we don't forgive:

- We don't forgive because people deserve it
- We don't forgive because people have forgiven us

We don't forgive because people have done wonderful things for us and we should think about those things so we are moved to forgive them. Obviously, this wouldn't even work in many situations, because we might not be able to think of wonderful things people have done for us.

We don't forgive because it makes such a great witness...even though it does.

What looks more like Christ than forgiving? What could reveal Christ to people better than forgiving them? It is a way for people to see Christ through us. But even this is not WHY we forgive.

We don't forgive because it is good for us to do so, even though there is truth to this!

When we don't forgive others, we are hurting ourselves. Maybe you have heard before that unforgiveness is swallowing poison while hoping the other person dies. But even forgiving others for our benefit is not the primary reason we should forgive.

I would say that if you are helping someone forgive someone else you can mention this as a reason to forgive, but don't stop there. You must tell them the primary reason God says we should forgive, and that is because we have been forgiven:

- **Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, AS GOD IN CHRIST FORGAVE YOU.**
- **Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, FORGIVING EACH OTHER; AS THE LORD HAS FORGIVEN YOU, SO YOU ALSO MUST FORGIVE.**

We are clearly told to forgive others because God forgave us.

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Jesus taught an entire parable making this point. I suspect it's familiar to most of you. Let me go through it quickly...

A man owes a debt he can't repay. He, his wife, and his children, were going to be sold.

Matthew 18:26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'

I take this to be a picture of the man's repentance, because we receive forgiveness from God by repenting.

Matthew 18:27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

The master forgave him everything when he repented, like God forgives us everything when we repent.

Matthew 18:28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'

Notice something interesting...

This servant is a master too, because he has a servant. And his servant's actions toward him are identical to his actions toward his master. Because he repented and his master forgave him, so should his servant when he repented.

Instead...

Matthew 18:30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'ⁱⁱ

Notice something else interesting: the timing of the words **"You wicked servant!"**

The master never called the man **a wicked servant** earlier because of his debt. You'd think having so much sin debt would've made him wicked. But he wasn't wicked until he wouldn't forgive like he was forgiven.

Spurgeon said, *"We incur greater wrath by refusing to forgive than by all the rest of our indebtedness."*

The primary reason to forgive repentant people who sin against us is God forgave us for so much when we repented.

Let me conclude with this...

Christians should be the most forgiving people, because we are the most forgiven people.

If you have any questions about anything I've shared directly pray for you in any way I will be up front after service and it would be a privilege to speak with you. Let's pray.

ⁱ Done:

- EW
- Ellicot on BH
- Pulpit Commentary on BH
- Hendrickson
- JM

-
- Stein
 - France
 - [Since God withholds forgiveness, can we? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

ii Matthew 18:34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,[k] until he should pay all his debt.

So now the servant was shown the same unforgiveness and lack of compassion he'd shown to the man he grabbed. This is referring to the jailers who in ancient times were allowed to whip or torture debtors in order to get money from them. If they couldn't get them to pay themselves, the torture would hopefully stir up the compassion of friends and relatives to pay to have the person released. Considering the debt this man owed, he's going to be tortured for a LONG time. It sounds like this verse is saying he went to hell, and some commentators say that, but JM says the torturers are, "Not executioners. This pictures severe discipline, not final condemnation." One other note about this verse is I think it's fitting b/c in this life when people who won't forgive others, is a way for people to torture themselves.

35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."