

OpenTheo

No Offense (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg delves into the meaning of the word "offend" in Luke chapter 17. He explains that being offended means being irritated or feeling resentful, and that it's natural to experience it from time to time. However, he emphasizes that choosing not to be offended is essential for maintaining relationships and showing love. Gregg also discusses the importance of addressing issues with others in a responsible and caring manner and the significance of forgiveness in Christianity.

Transcript

Let's turn to Luke chapter 17. In this class, we're going to be talking about the first ten verses of this chapter. And I'd like to begin by reading the verses.

Luke 17, verses 1 through 10. Then he said to the disciples, It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come. 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.

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 apostle said to the Lord, increase our faith. 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.

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. 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? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. 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. And of course the implication is we have done only what was our duty to do. Now, this passage I have taught on many times.

It happens to come up in our studies in the life of Christ today, of course, because we teach every passage in the Gospels. But it is also a passage that I have selected on occasions to speak topically about because of the importance of its content. And I personally feel that there is one topic that all of these verses have that ties them together.

Now, that wouldn't be obvious at first, perhaps. It looks like in verses 1 and 2 it just warns us not to offend or to stumble a brother. In verses 3 and 4 it seems to talk about repentance and forgiveness when people have done something to you wrong.

Then there seems to be a teaching about faith as a separate issue in verses 5 and 6. And then this interesting parable of a slave coming in and not feeling like his day is over just because he is coming from the field. He has to serve his master until the day is done. And he doesn't expect to be congratulated or thanked.

He does it because it is his duty. And once he has done everything he is supposed to do, he doesn't say, why haven't I gotten some thanks and appreciation for this? He just says, well, this is what I am expected to do. That is what slaves are for.

Now, it sounds almost as if there are four different topics in these ten verses. A few years ago, though, as I was studying them, it occurred to me that there are really four parts of one subject in these. And it has to do with the subject of offenses.

Now, I realize that if you have a modern translation, there is a very good chance that the word offenses does not occur in verse 1 and that the word offend does not occur in verse 2. The King James and the New King James do use these words. But most modern translations translate in verse 1 the word stumbling block. It is impossible that no stumbling block should come.

And in verse 2, at the very end, then, that he should stumble, one of these little ones. Or instead of stumble, some translations say cause to sin. All of these are different ways of rendering the same Greek words.

And those Greek words can have all of those meanings. I'd like to speak up in defense of the older translation. And I'd like to defend my choice in this respect by a word study of these words that are here.

And it's more than a little bit important. It's more than average importance that we gather and understand the meaning of these words. Because there's nothing more important in all of God's kingdom, in all of his economy, than our relationships.

He's made that very clear. To love your neighbors yourself is the chief commandment

that governs our relationships. And it is my understanding that relationships break down not because of lack of communication, not because of personality differences, not because of people forgetting each other's birthdays and things like that, but they break down because people take offense to what other people have done.

Now, I want to use this passage, the entire ten verses, and point out to you that Jesus is talking how to deal with offendedness. There is nothing that destroys relationships, as near as I can tell, but offendedness. Because even if someone sins against you, the choice of whether you're offended or not will determine whether the relationship breaks down or not.

At least from your side. And if neither party gives another an offense, and if neither party takes offense to anything the other party does, then there'll never be an interruption in the relationship. And therefore, offendedness is that which can be, I think you can trace every relationship breakdown, whether it's between husbands and wives, children and their parents, friends or former friends.

Any relationship that is broken down and deteriorated, I believe, is because of offendedness. And that's what we want to talk about, because I believe that's what this is about. However, I need to defend the proposition that that's what this is talking about, because, as I say, some translations don't even have the word offended, or offense, or offend in here.

What they do have, of course, in the Greek, is in verse one, the Greek word skandalon, if you want to write that down, you'd spell it S-K-A-N-D-A-L-O-N. S-K-A-N-D-A-L-O-N, skandalon. That is a noun.

And then in verse two, there is the word closely related to it, skandalizo, which is spelled the same way except for the last part. After the skandal part, it's I-Z-O. So it's S-K-A-N-D-A-L-I-Z-O.

And just as it looks, skandalizo, skandalon, this is the Greek root of our English word scandal, or scandalize. The word scandalize, I never heard until I heard preachers use it, so I don't think it's a very common word in English usage, but Christians know it because of this Greek word, because the Bible uses the word skandalizo in a number of passages, and it has therefore led to, at least among Christians, who are somewhat familiar with the Greek roots behind some of these words, the use of the, I guess we can say, the anglicized form of this Greek word is scandalize. So Jesus would be saying, if we wanted to transliterate, it's impossible that no scandals should come.

And at the end of verse two, it's better to be thrown in the sea than that one should scandalize one of these little ones. Now the question, of course, is what does this Greek word really mean? We have an idea of what the English word means, but the question that has to be asked, does it mean the same thing as the Greek word, and what is the

connection? Well, as I said, most modern translations, almost all of them, have substituted the older English word, offenses and offend, for the words stumbling blocks and stumble. Now the word skandalizo is the verb, and skandalon is the noun form of the same.

It really means, literally, skandalon in the Greek, actually originally meant the trigger on a snare or a trap to catch an animal. You know how you set a snare and the animal takes the bait, and when it does, it triggers something and then it gets caught. And the trigger on a trap, the Greek word skandalon, was originally the word for that little thing, that little trigger there on a snare.

Obviously then, to apply it to human relationships, is to take it metaphorically. Presumably it would have something to do with trapping someone. Now in Greek usage, it is believed widely, that it principally meant to snare somebody into sinning, or to stumble somebody, so that they fall into sin.

And it is used that way in the Bible. It's used that way in 1 Corinthians, it's used that way in Romans, and it's possibly used that way in a few other places. Maybe here also.

Obviously the new translations think it should be translated that way here too, because they say stumbling block and stumble, and a stumbling block is something that people stumble over, and when people stumble, they fall. So some translators, especially the paraphrasers say, whoever causes someone to sin, or causes someone to fall, or to stumble. Now, I don't have any objection to that translation, except that I'd like to suggest that there's more than one way that a person can fall or sin.

If it means nothing more than to make somebody sin, then the word could be essentially the same thing as temptation. It could be then said, it is impossible that no temptations should come, because when we stumble into sin, generically, it's a result of temptation, generic temptation. But I am of the opinion that this has a particular kind of sin in mind, and that is the sin of being unloving.

To do something that causes somebody to stumble into the sin of being unloving, is to stumble them. Now, presumably, if you do everything that pleases another party, they will have little difficulty loving you. Jesus said, if you only love those who love you, so what? Even the publicans do that.

If you do the thing that pleases people, they'll always love you. Or they may not, but they're more likely to. It's not hard, there's no challenge in love, in that relationship, if you always please people.

But if you do something that displeases them, then they are tempted to not love you. That doesn't mean they should not love you, it's just a temptation. It's a temptation to sin.

And this act of being unloving as a result of something you have done, is what we usually talk about as being offended. And I would like to suggest to you that the old English words offended and offense are good words to use in this passage to translate the Greek words. Let me, first of all, tell you what the English word means, offend.

I thought I'd look it up, because I've tried to think of how I would define our English term. We all know what it means to say I've been offended, or do we? What does it mean to be offended by somebody's actions? Offended by a remark. Well, the English dictionary I consulted, which I think was some college dictionary, it said offend means to irritate the mind or feelings, or to cause resentful displeasure.

That made pretty good sense, I thought it was a pretty good definition. To offend was to irritate the mind or the feelings, and to cause resentful displeasure. And a stumbling block or an offense would be that which causes that.

By the way, I looked up the word scandalize in English, in the English dictionary. I've looked them up in the Greek also, I just was curious to know how these words were understood in the English language too. The word scandalize in the English dictionary is to shock or horrify by something considered immoral or improper.

To shock somebody or to horrify them by doing something that they think to be immoral or improper. I've always been amazed at dictionaries, how they can take a word that everyone kind of instinctively knows what it means, but hardly anyone could say what it means, and it just said it just right. Dictionaries, it takes a special gifting.

I suppose besides theological books and the Bible, there's no greater book than the English dictionary, a good one. But I just love to resort to it, because if I use the word offend in this study, or scandalize, which is obviously a transliteration of the Greek word skandaliza, which is used in verse 2 here, the English meaning of scandalize is to shock or horrify by something that is considered to be immoral or improper. And the word offend, similarly, means to irritate the mind or feelings and cause resentful displeasure.

Now, when Jesus said, it's impossible that no offenses should come, I believe we can understand offenses to be that which irritates you, something that irritates your mind or your feelings, that somebody does. They look at you at a certain way, or they speak to you, make a catty remark, or you hear that they did something or said something about you, and that irritates you, that irritates your mind or your feelings, and tempts you to experience resentful displeasure. You're displeased, and there's an element of resentfulness in it.

To me, that's a very excellent definition. The question is, is that what the Greek word means? Of course, we're talking about the English word, but what does the Greek word mean? Well, I pointed out that skandalon means a trigger of a trap, but that's, again, we then have to say, well, but that's metaphorical, obviously. He's not talking about the

disciples going out and getting snared in rabbit traps.

He's talking about something in relationships. So what does the metaphor mean? What is a skandalon? It's something that traps you into doing something wrong, but what in particular? I think it traps you into being unloving. Now, as I said, you're not tempted to be unloving unless somebody irritates you, unless somebody causes displeasure to you.

And it is impossible to avoid such displeasure. Life is not just a pleasurable experience. Not everybody is going to do what you like.

There will be times when it's impossible that it should be otherwise. It's inevitable, Jesus is saying, that some people are going to irritate you. Some people's personalities, some people's behavior, they're just going to rub you the wrong way, and something they do may even shock you or horrify you and may be a stumbling block to you.

But that doesn't mean you have to stumble. That's another issue. You can't avoid irritating circumstances or irritating people.

The question of whether you become resentful about it is another question. We'll deal with that a little later in the passage. But I believe that this is what he's talking about.

Stumbling means stumbling into unloving attitude towards somebody, and that is done when somebody irritates you, does something to you that you take offense to, and that interrupts your love, and that is a sin for you to do. It's a sin to be offended, I believe. We'll clarify that a little more in a few moments.

But let me just show you that even though most modern translators have preferred to translate the word differently in this passage, yet the same modern translators have translated the same words as offend and offense in some other places. Not all other places, but some. Let me show you, for example, in Galatians 5.11. I'd like you to turn there, because I've done it.

I was curious about this, because I have felt for some time that Jesus is, in this passage, talking about the issue of being offended at people, or causing people to be offended at you. But, of course, since most translators nowadays want to make it stumble, and that's more obscure, and some even say just cause the sin, that's even more generic, I wondered, you know, is it right to think of this as offended? Well, I've looked up a fair number of... Well, I've looked up all the passages in the Bible that have this word. Galatians 5.11 is one of them.

And in Galatians 5.11 it says, And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. Offense is skandalon here. The cross scandalizes people.

Well, what does that mean? Does that mean it causes them to sin? Well, not exactly. The

cross doesn't cause anyone to sin, but it does offend people. Now, many translations do use the word stumbling block here.

The New American Standard does. The Revised Standard Version. The New English Bible.

In Galatians 5.11, many of these versions, the New American Standard, the RSV, and the New English, all translate this stumbling block. However, the NIV translates it the way the New King James and the King James do. The NIV translates it as offense.

And Jerusalem Bible, so chalk one up for the NIV, so the Jerusalem Bible uses the word scandal, the scandal of the cross, which sounds a little bit like offense. Not just that the cross causes people to sin, the cross causes people to be scandalized, horrified, shocked, irritated even. It causes displeasure.

So I think the word offense in this case is a good translation. In fact, the best possible translation for the word in this circumstance, and there are some modern translations, the NIV for example, that the translators have shown they agree with that particular choice of words. Another couple of cases are found in Matthew.

And I'd like you to look there because of the... I believe that they are such that they fairly require this translation, offense or offend, of these same words. In Matthew 17 and verse 27, Matthew 17.27, this is when Jesus told Peter to go out and catch a fish and get the coin from its mouth and pay the taxes. Now, Jesus just prior to this verse said that he's not required to pay taxes to the temple because he's a child of the king and the kings don't charge tribute of their sons, only of conquered foreigners.

But he says, nevertheless, Matthew 17.27, lest we offend them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take a fish, the first fish that comes up. Now, this is scandalizo, the word that is frequently translated stumble. Lest we stumble them.

However, it's quite clear in the context to most translators, at least, that what Jesus means is what we mean by our modern English word offend. We don't want to offend these people. We're just going to try not to offend them too much.

And so the word offend is here used not only in the version I'm looking at, but also the NIV and the Jerusalem Bible and the today's English version, which is the Good News Bible. And the New American Standard and the RSV they both have something equivalent to it, lest we give them offense. Same thing, lest we offend them or give them an offense.

And the New English Bible says, lest we cause offense. I don't think, I don't recall that I found any version. I've looked at about nine versions in each of these places to see how they go.

I don't think I found any version that uses the word stumble in this particular verse,

though it's scandalizo, the same one that's translated stumble in some other cases. So here we can see that the word can mean, and even modern translations use this word offend in the modern English sense of the word. Look at Matthew 15 also.

Matthew 15, 12, which is probably one page earlier from where you were looking already. Matthew 15, 12, Jesus, well it says, Then his disciples came and said to him, Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying? Something Jesus said offended the Pharisees. Shall we understand offended to mean he caused them to sin? As some people would understand the word scandalizo.

Did Jesus cause them to sin? No, he didn't cause them to sin. And no modern translation would say that he did. In this case, the word offended that's used here is also used in the New American Standard, the NIV, the RSV, and the Amplified version.

And some equivalent is used in almost all other translations. The New English Bible says that they have taken offense. The Jerusalem Bible says they were shocked.

The Pharisees were shocked by his statement. And the today's English version said they had their feelings hurt. That's a dynamic equivalent of scandalizo.

They hurt their feelings, you know. But in other words, if we understand the English word offended means to irritate the feelings or to irritate the mind or the feelings, that's quite correct. In other words, even though most modern translations in many passages do prefer to translate this word as stumble or stumbling block, in some cases they have not been able to get away from the old offend and offense because sometimes it clearly means that.

So I would like to suggest, just as a starting point for our dealing with Luke 17, that the word offenses and offend, as are used in the King James and the New King James, are the right translations here as well. And while it is the case, it is truly the case, that it could mean stumbling block or stumble in this case, it's not so clear in Luke 17 whether offend or offense is meant. I'd like to suggest to you that that is a good translation and it is, I think in this case, the right translation.

I'll tell you why as we go through, okay? Yeah, Matthew 15, what was the verse number? Twelve. Twelve, yeah, that's the word scandal, leaves also the verb. By the way, there's one other I didn't mention to you.

Actually, there's one other that I think fairly well would be understood in this way and that's John 6, 61. John 6, 61, if you even take the previous verse, verse 60, it says, therefore many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, this is a hard saying, who can understand it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples complained about this, he said to them, does this offend you? Again, it's scandal, leaves it. Now, some translations say, does this stumble you? I think the new American standard says, does this cause you

to stumble? But most other versions go along with this idea.

For instance, the NIV and the RSV both translate, does this offend you? The New English Bible says, does this shock you? And the Jerusalem Bible says, does this upset you? But in any case, you can see that there are these several passages. It's not so clear in all passages, but in some of these passages, the word scandalizo and scandalon can't really mean much else than what we mean in our modern English word offend. And therefore, I think it justifies the King James translators and the New King James for following them in using the word offend in many cases where this is the word that's found.

And I think so in Luke 17. Let's go into Luke 17 now. Have a look what it says.

Now, as I was saying before I went into this perhaps boring word study, not boring to me because I'm very fascinated with this particular word, but some may not find it as fascinating. As I was saying, I believe that what we call taking offense or giving offense is the only thing that interrupts our ability to easily love other people. Somebody's looks may offend you.

The way they dress may offend you. They may remind you if somebody don't like their personality, it may offend you. But if you don't take offense, you'll have no difficulty loving them.

Offendedness is what stumbles you, causes you to fall into an unloving attitude. And that is, I think, the right translation here. Now, it is extremely important.

And I think there's a teaching in this section of Luke that most Christians have never considered seriously. Now, you may have because you've been in this school a long time and you've probably heard me say some of these things already. But I'll tell you, of all the teachings that I give on things that might be regarded as controversial, I think there's been no subject that has caused more emotional negative reaction to my teaching than this one here, of all things.

I mean, my eschatology, whatever. I mean, a lot of people disagree with my eschatology. I've never seen people get as upset over what I have to say about eschatology as they get upset over what I say about being offended.

Now, they get offended. It's a funny thing because, it is funny, it's ironic, because I don't know if I told you, last time I was in Hawaii at their public meeting on Friday night, I was teaching there. And I taught on this very passage, I taught this very message that I'm going to share with you from this passage.

And Danny Lehman got up afterwards and he said, boy, I really needed to hear that and I think a lot of our people did. He later told Jim Soderberg, because he saw Jim Soderberg not too long after, that that teaching caused a furor in the Honolulu YWAM base for a whole week. It offended people because Danny said a lot of his immature staff felt that

they had a right to be offended by what some other people had done.

And my message, as you'll find out, says that you don't. And that you don't need to, you don't have to be offended, and you shouldn't be offended, it's a sin to be offended. Now, people just love their grudges.

People are so emotionally attached to their bitterness and their resentfulness toward people, that if you tell them it's a sin for you to be offended, you don't have to be offended, if you choose to be offended, you're making a sinful choice, that gets their hackles up. Not all people, but I mean, it's amazing how much reaction of that kind I get to this particular teaching, which is ironic, as I point out, because, I mean, what I'm telling them is they don't need to be offended, and they get offended by the teaching itself. Now, you be the judge of whether what I have to say about this is what Jesus is saying, and whether it's true or not, whether it's biblical or not.

First of all, this breaks into four parts. I mentioned at the beginning, it looks like there's almost four separate subjects in this ten-verse section, but I really think there's four parts discussing the same subject. The first is the topic sentence.

It is impossible that no offenses should come. Okay? In other words, he's warning his disciples, there's going to be a lot of irritants in your life. It's inevitable.

You're not going to get away from it. This life is not tailored to make you enjoy yourself. This life is going to be full of challenges.

I'm calling you to love one another, to love your neighbors yourself, to love your enemy, and that ain't going to be the easiest thing in the world to do, because your enemy does things that could tend to offend you. And even your friends, no doubt, at times will do things which you would have at least the possibility of being offended by. They put stumbling blocks.

They do things that irritate you. They are offenses to you. They are affronts and insults to you.

These things are inevitable. Don't think you're going to live a life without these irritants, without these stimuli that want to provoke in you an angry reaction or a resentful reaction. Those stimuli are inevitable.

You're going to have them. But, first thing he says in verses 1 and 2 is, Woe to the person who brings them. Woe to the person who unnecessarily is a stumbling block to another person and is an offensive person.

He said 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. Now, perhaps the language sounds too strong. Perhaps this is why most translations prefer to use the

word stumble or cause to sin.

Because offending people happens so often, and sometimes inadvertently, that it almost seems too strong for Jesus to say, Woe unto him who stumbles. I mean, better for you to have a millstone put around your neck and cast into the sea. A millstone is a huge stone they use for grinding grain.

It's like, you know, putting on a millstone collar and being thrown off a pier is the end. I mean, that's death. That's a terrible death.

He said, better to have a terrible death than to live to scandalize people. Now, since that's such a severe thing that Jesus says, I suppose most translators felt like, Well, just offending people can't be quite that bad, can it? It must be causing people to sin. It must be causing people to fall away from Christ.

That must be the thing. And no doubt, that is the final result of offending people in many cases. A person who is not loving will be often doing things that will offend other people.

And if the people that they are doing these things to are not sufficiently mature in love, then it'll interrupt their ability to obey God in loving you. To give people trouble in their obedience to God is a bad thing. And since God has commanded nothing so important as for them to love you, for you to make it harder for them to love you is to stumble.

It's to put a stumbling block before them. If you insult somebody, if you treat somebody wrongly, if you don't pay a debt that they expect you to pay, if you give them cause to expect something from you and you don't do it, then that's not just a sin on your own part. It is.

But it may incline them to sin in their attitude toward you. It may give them trouble loving you. And then you're not just hurting yourself, you're hurting them.

You're hurting them spiritually. And the Apostle Paul says, especially in a couple of places like Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10, that it's extremely urgent that we avoid offending people. Now, in Romans 14, verse 21, the new King James uses the word stumble, I believe, but it's the same word, skandalizo.

In Romans 14, verse 21, Paul said, It's good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Now notice, stumbles or is offended. Stumbles is from the word skandalizo, and offended, actually, I must confess, I don't know what the Greek word is behind offended here, but it's connected.

Notice it's a connected thought to skandalizo, very closely connected. So Paul is saying, listen, if your brother is going to get offended by you eating meat, or if he's going to be offended by something you drink, better not to do it at all. It's not a loving thing to do.

He says in the previous verse, Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. In other words, you may have the right to eat certain things, but if you offend your brother, it may destroy the work of God in his life. Offending someone is not a small thing.

Look over at 1 Corinthians chapter 10, 1 Corinthians chapter 10, and verse 32. Paul says, Give no offense. This is skandalon.

And he's talking about eating meat and sacrifice to idols in this context, and basically the same thing he was talking about in Romans 14, namely that you shouldn't eat that, even if you have liberty to, you shouldn't do it if it's going to stumble your brother or offend him, scandalize him. He says, Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the Church of God. Now, you probably have, some of you have translations that say, Give no stumbling block.

But that's obvious. It's skandalon. It can be translated offense or stumbling block.

But the point I'm making is that Paul agrees with Jesus that it's a very serious matter to stumble or to offend a brother. Now, let me just say this. Some people get offended very easily.

Some make a vocation of it. Some people, they seem to enjoy having an offended spirit. I don't know how someone's spirit can be so twisted that they enjoy being offended.

But there's clearly people who choose to get offended when there's not really much reason to. The slightest thing that anyone may say or do that may have more than one possible meaning, they always prefer to take it in the most offensive manner so that they can nurse a grudge and hold resentment and bitterness. They just love it.

There are some people who are just so out of whack in their spirit that they prefer to feel resentful and bitter than to have a clean spirit. I don't know why. It's hard to know why anyone would choose that.

But there are those people. And there are some people that you will never be able to avoid offending. There are times when you will not be guilty.

See, it will not be for you better if you'd had a millstone cast around your neck even though someone gets offended because you will have done all you can to be loving. You will have done all you can to do the right thing. Let something about you, anything about you, they may latch on to and choose to be offended.

But see, you haven't caused them to be offended. They've offended themselves in that case. If you sin against a person, that's what they would have, in a sense, a legitimate claim to be offended for.

If you lie, if you gossip, if you stole, if you committed adultery with their wife or their

husband, if you had any kind of sin against them, that is not only a sin on your record, but it possibly will incline them to sin in their attitude toward you. And that is something that needs to be dealt with. So when Jesus said it's better to be cast into the sea with a millstone around your neck than to offend someone, he means to offend by misconduct.

If you do something that is wrong, a sinful thing, and somebody is stumbled and offended by it, it's bad news. It's bad news, and you're going to have to do something to try to get it right again. But he is not condemning those who accidentally offend or who don't have any malice and don't actually do any sin against anyone, but like eating meat, you know, eating meat in front of somebody who doesn't think you should eat meat.

Well, that might offend them. Well, Paul says even then you should avoid it. You don't want to offend them, even though you're not sinning in that case.

But if you know that it will offend them, you shouldn't do it, because love doesn't want to give any offense, and love is what you're called to do. And love would be willing to sacrifice a meal of meat in order to avoid a stumbling block and offense to a brother or sister. So Jesus' first point he makes is that to give offense is a very bad thing if you give offense through misconduct on your part, and that often happens.

People do misbehave and people do sin, and when they sin against someone, they don't only have their own sin to account for, but possibly other sins that are like a domino effect in that person's attitude towards you because they resent you for your sinning against them. So the first point of the four that we're going to make on this subject of offenses is don't give them. Don't sin against people, giving them occasion to sin in their attitude towards you by being offended by what you did.

Okay, well, that's just another way of saying don't sin. And that's what we're supposed to be aiming at anyway. But then he goes on in verses 3 and 4, and he says in verse 3, take heed to yourselves.

Now, I think he's saying here, now, you need to watch your own spirit about getting offended too. Not only should you not give an offense, but you need to take heed to your own attitude and see whether you're getting offended unnecessarily. He says, if your brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him instead of being offended, forgive him, and release him.

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. Now, notice this is the flip side of what he said in verses 1 and 2. In verses 1 and 2, he said, don't sin against your brother in such a way as to give an offense to him. Now, he says, if your brother sins against you, don't you get offended.

Deal with it directly. Go to him, tell him what's the problem, and if he repents, forgive him. And don't get resentful, don't get offended, just get it cleared.

Just clear it up between you in a responsible manner. Now, of course, there is the possibility that your brother may sin against you and you go and rebuke him and he wouldn't repent. Jesus doesn't deal with what to do in that case here.

He just says, if he repents, forgive him. And if he does it seven times, he repents seven times, forgive him each time. He doesn't say in this passage what to do if you rebuke him, and he doesn't repent.

But we know, you're well familiar by now with Matthew 18, verses 15 through 17, which is where Jesus does say what to do in just that case. You go to your brother and rebuke him, and he doesn't repent, you go with two. If he still doesn't repent, you take him before the church.

If he still doesn't repent, put him out of the church, but don't be offended. Don't let your spirit get bent out of shape, just deal with it. You go to him first, hoping that he'll repent.

If he does, you've won your brother and you forgive him. It doesn't matter how many times he does it, you're not carrying any resentment. So if he comes back later in the same day, seven different times, it's not like you say, wait a minute, this is the third time today, the fourth time today, the fifth time today.

See, you're not carrying any resentment from the previous time, you forgave him the last time. You don't carry anything over for the next time, so it doesn't accumulate. It's just you treat it as a separate instance.

Now, we've talked about this before, of course, in other situations, but essentially, what I believe Jesus is saying is to get offended is as wrong as to give offense. And in any relationship, if there's going to be love, an unchallenged love, between parties, both parties have to be concerned about both these issues. Am I giving, am I sinning against someone in such a way as to give them an offense? And on the other hand, am I taking offense at anything they're doing, even if they sin against me? Now see, if they sin against me, they are putting a stumbling block before me, but I don't have to stumble, do I? Do I have to be unloving just because they've done an unloving thing to me? Do I have to respond in the same spirit? I should hope not.

If I do, then I'm saying I have to sin, and the Bible doesn't say that we have to sin. In fact, the Bible says the opposite. God doesn't ever give us a temptation that's greater than what we're able to endure.

We don't ever have to succumb to temptation. When somebody sins against you, that presents to your consciousness a temptation to sin in your attitude toward them, to get offended, and to hold it against them. But you don't have to hold it against them.

You can go to them, talk to them about it, elicit their repentance. Hopefully they repent easily, otherwise you go through the measures that Jesus told in Matthew 18, and you forgive them. And that's the end of it.

Now, I know that this has come up before because we've talked about Matthew 18 before, and you hit the subject of forgiveness a lot of times going through the life of Christ, so we've hit it before, and I've said some of these same things. But I want to make this clear. If somebody sins against you, you don't even necessarily always have to confront them before forgiving them.

The only time you need to confront them is if you have gotten offended, or if you can see that what they have done presents a serious, ongoing problem to your ability to love them. Because elsewhere, in Mark 11.25, Mark 11.25, Jesus said, He says, When you stand praying, forgive. If you have anything against anyone, just forgive them.

Now, He didn't say, go to them and rebuke them. He just said, if you're praying and you remember that you have something against someone, just forgive them. Mark 11.25. So it sounds like if you've got the grace from God in your heart to do it, just drop it.

Whatever they did, you don't have to get offended by it, just forgive them. Now, on the other hand, if you are wrestling with it more than that, if it is the kind of thing that you think, if I don't say anything to them about this, they're going to do it again and again, and not only to me, but other people too. This is something that needs to be corrected.

I just can't trust them until I know that they've repented. Well, in a case like that, then what they have done is interfering with your relationship with them. In which case, instead of just staying away from them and letting this thing remain an offense and a cause of resentment in you, you go to them and clear it up.

Because God does not want you to have anything in your heart against anyone. He doesn't want you to have an offended spirit. Now, there's much in the Bible that says this.

Although, what gets people upset is when I say, you can choose not to be offended. You can choose not to be offended. If somebody does something to you, you have a choice to make.

Will I be offended? Or will I forgive them? Now, that verse I gave you a moment ago, Mark 11, 25, when you stand praying and forgive, it sounds like Jesus is saying you should have grace in your heart to forgive people routinely. I mean, you should forgive them right on the spot as far as that goes. Although, there may be things about what they have done, like I say, that make it difficult to trust them in the future, in which case you ought to confront it and see if they repent, then you can trust them in the future.

You can love them without trusting them, but if you love them, you want to be able to

trust them. That's an important thing. I can love someone I don't trust.

I know somebody that I don't trust at all, but I love him. I mean, I wish him well. I don't wish him any harm, and I'd love to see him get saved, but I wouldn't trust him.

And I've confronted him. I still don't trust him. He hasn't repented, but he's not a Christian either.

But the thing is, to get the relationship right, you need to love them. And if you can't trust them also, you've got to go to them and talk to them about it so that you get them to repent, and then you can trust them again and the relationship is what it should be. And that's what God wants.

And you don't ever have to live offended. Now, where I need to clarify this is we do see Jesus getting angry. We know that.

He got angry at the Pharisees. And we've talked about anger as a separate issue, but offendedness is a function of anger. Somebody does something to you and you get offended and you're holding it against them, that's anger.

It's a low-grade kind of anger that you just kind of live with. It may never explode, but it's in there and it's festering and you're angry at somebody. And Jesus got angry and you can get angry, but angry at the same thing that he gets angry at, not something else.

If somebody sins against you or against anyone else and you know of it, there is a place for anger, but it's not... If somebody sins against me, I shouldn't be angry at them because they hurt my feelings. I should be gracious enough to say, well, I can forgive, but they've still got a problem between them and God until they repent. And that's an important point.

I can forgive them for what they did to me, but they're still in unrepentance and therefore they've got a problem before God. And if they make a habit of this and they're victimizing other people, it can really get at you. It can really... You can get angry not so much at what they did to you, but what they're doing to others and how many people they're hurting and stuff.

Jesus got angry when the Pharisees were misrepresenting God and hurting people's relationship with God. But He never, as far as we know, never got really angry at what they did to Him. He forgave them routinely without them repenting.

From the cross, He said, Father, forgive them. They know not what they do. So He didn't ever hold it against them what they did to Him, but what they did to others.

There is a place for very righteous wrath. God has it, and if He has it, it must be right at some time. But the problem is, that's not the same as being offended in the sense we

usually use that word.