



HOW TO FIGHT TO THE GLORY OF GOD

Part 69 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | 17:1-10 | April 03, 2011

Luke 17:1–10

¹ And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. 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.”

⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” 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.

⁷ “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? ⁸ Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? ⁹ Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

INTRODUCTION

I have been a mixed martial arts fan for a lot of years, and I was really excited recently when the UFC finally had their first event here in Seattle, so I went with Pastor Jamie. It was a birthday present for my assistant, Nate, and we had a buddy of ours go who is a trainer of fighters and was an Olympic silver medalist and a great guy. And so we rolled into the Seattle Center and what an interesting day it was.

The two simultaneous events were cage fighting and the Vegfest. The Vegfest was a vegetable fest. I like vegetables; I’m for them. But it doesn’t seem to me like they need their own event. It just seems like—because they don’t do a lot, right? Like, there’s a vegetable. Yes. Look at it. Okay. Anything else? No. Well, that’s the same thing the vegetables do at my house. I don’t know if we all need to get together for this.

And it was pretty fascinating walking in because you had two groups of people colliding, the UFC fans and the Vegfesters. And you could pretty much tell who was going to what event. The heavy guys who were drunk in Affliction t-shirts were not going to the Vegfest. The skinny guys in skinny jeans riding bicycles with hemp shoes were not going to the cage fight. It was pretty fantastic.

And sometimes what happens is that people misunderstand this particular sport. They don’t understand a few things that I want to share with you. Number one, there is respect among the fighters. They’ll come out and touch gloves. Sometimes they’ll hug, which is weird. Doesn’t seem like a hugging moment. Like, “I’m gonna put you in the hospital, dear friend.” It’s a weird moment. Oftentimes even during the fight, right, like if a guy gets kicked or punched or hit and it was a good hit, they’ll give each other a little fist bump like, “Hey, that was great. I don’t even remember my name. Good job, nice job.” And sometimes going into the third round—which, apart from a title fight, is the last round—if it’s close, they’ll start with a hug. And afterward, they’ll oftentimes hug. And yesterday, one guy was laying on the ground and the other guy just got down on his hands and knees and was talking to him, visiting with him, and they had a little Vegfest moment right there in the octagon. So there is respect.

Number two, there are rules. You may not know this. All right, there are rules. Like, I was thinking, “What would I do if I was in a fight?” And I thought, “I would bring a gun,” because I don’t know jujitsu, but it’s like rock, paper, scissors, gun beats jujitsu, right? Like, whatever you pull out, like kung-fu, karate, wrestling, gun, gun always wins. So I thought, “I would bring a gun.” But you can’t bring a gun because there are rules.

So there’s respect, there are rules, so that there can be resolution so that, eventually, the fight’s over, it’s done. They don’t fight in the dressing room, and then go to Denny’s because it’s the only thing open late and fight again, and then fight on the plane, and then show up at each other’s house and fight some more. It’s a resolution. It comes to an end. Somebody’s hand gets raised, somebody’s hand stays down, there’s resolution.

So there’s respect, there are rules, there’s resolution, and it’s all overseen by a referee, somebody who says, “This is acceptable, this is unacceptable behavior.”

YOU’RE GONNA FIGHT

Now what could this possibly have to do with Jesus? Everything, right? Today in Luke 17:1–10, we’re going to deal with the issue of how to fight to

the glory of God. Not necessarily a cage fight, though the principles could apply, but conflict, argument, disagreement.

Some of you are very religious. You say, "Oh, well, I'm a Christian. I don't have conflict." Yes, you do. You're annoying everyone. You just don't know it. And we tend to have conflict with people that we're closest to and we love the most, so you know who I live in closest proximity with? My wife, Grace. Do you think we ever have a fight? We do. Not like an octagon, in-the-clinch kind of fight, but we have arguments and we have disagreements.

And here's the big question. Number one, are you gonna fight? Number two, are you gonna fight to the glory of God? The question, will you fight, is a yes. Your friendships, your family, you're gonna fight. Your siblings, you're gonna fight. The second question is: Are you gonna fight to the glory of God? Are you gonna fight with respect? Are you gonna fight with rules? Are you gonna fight to resolution? Does Jesus get to be the referee? And today in Luke 17:1-10, Jesus shows up as the referee, he lays down the rules so that we can respectfully work toward resolution.

SIN

Here's what he has to say. Luke 17:1-4, how to fight to the glory of God. "And he," that is Jesus, "said to his disciples, 'Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves!'" All right, not just everybody else's business, look at yourself. "'If your brother sins, rebuke him.'" That's your fellow Christian. "'And if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.'"

So Jesus here is talking about two things that happen all the time in human relationships, sin and being sinned against. Someone's sinned and someone's sinned against. And how do we resolve that fight? What do we do? What are the rules? Jesus gives us three things to do in dealing with our sin. So when, not if, when you are the one who sins against someone else, all right, this is what you need to do.

Now, let me say this. Sin is word, it's deed, it's motive, it's commission where we do a bad thing, it's omission where we don't do the thing we were supposed to do. Sin shows up all the time. We're guilty of sinning, breaking God's laws overtly and/or in principle. That's the way that it is. And we sin against God and we sin against others. We just do.

So let me tell you, though, that sin is—it's not quirks. Sin is not quirks. Any of you married to someone with quirks? That's a bizarre question. If you are married, it's to someone with quirks, right? Quirks. Like, it's not a sin to be repented of. They're just quirky. That's their thing. They got a little eccentricity. Like, I was in a coffee shop the other day and I heard a woman cackle, like massive, loud, haunting, children-crying cackle. She was with her girlfriends. They all laugh, she thought she was laughing. She didn't laugh. She cackled. I ducked and was looking for a broom. It was scary. As a grown man, I was scared. And immediately, I prayed for her husband. Silently. I didn't stand up or anything. But I thought, "Lord, be with that man. How scary that must be, particularly at night." But it's not a sin. It's a cackle, all right? You don't repent of—you marry someone, you're friends with someone, you're roommates with someone, you're in community group with someone, they may have a quirk. That's not a sin. We don't repent of quirks, just sins.

And also too, I'll tell you that a sin is not a mistake or an imperfection, right? How many of you are klutzy? Don't raise your hand, you're gonna hurt somebody. You know? How many of you are klutzy? You're klutzy. You just are, right? Like, you trip over stuff, your car's got a lot of dents. You know, you're going to serve, you know, maybe you're married and you're bringing dinner to your spouse, "Ahh!" You're wearing spaghetti. You know, is that a sin? No. Is it annoying? Yep. But it's not a sin, it's a mistake, right?

Like with kids, like let's say you got a little kid and, I don't know, it's your fault, right? You didn't put a lid on the sippy cup, you gave 'em an open cup, right, which is—it's your fault, man. I mean, it's your fault. You give 'em an open cup, what are they gonna do? They're gonna spill it because, you know, they're gangly, they're still working on their motor skills. It's like, "What are you doing, Johnny? You spilled the milk." Johnny should say, "What are you doing, Dad? Where's the lid?" Right? He made a mistake. That's where I get frustrated with parents who discipline kids for mistakes. You're a kid. You're gonna trip. You're gonna wet yourself. You're gonna drop your milk. Hopefully you don't do it all at the same time, but even if you do, it's not a sin. It's exciting, but it's not a sin. It's a mistake and mistakes happen.

So we're not talking about quirks, we're not talking about mistakes, but we're talking about sins, offenses against God and other people. And we got to learn to deal with quirks and mistakes because we're all weird sinners and imperfect people and we're just gonna need to learn to endure with one another.

DEALING WITH OUR SIN

But when it comes to sin, Jesus says, "Here are three things to do when we are dealing with sin, or the potential to sin." Number one, do not give in to the temptation to sin. Jesus says, "Temptation will come." It's not if, it's when. You can live your whole life trying to reduce all of your external stimulation, temptation to sin. You should, that's good, but even within you, the Bible says, particular in the book of James, sin is not only out there, it's in here. It's not just in the world, it's in my what the Bible calls flesh. So temptation is going to be constant. You will always have to fight against temptation. But don't be discouraged, don't be dissuaded, and don't act defeated.

Temptation and sin are different. Jesus was tempted. Luke 4 and Matthew 4 say that Jesus was tempted. Hebrews 4 says Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin. So Jesus never sinned, but he was tempted. Similarly, Jesus says, "You surely will be tempted." But that doesn't mean we have to give in to temptation and sin. We can fight it, we can resist it, we can say no to it. And Satan will confuse some of you because you will

think, "I was tempted. I can't believe I was tempted. I feel so bad about being tempted." If you didn't give in to the temptation, rejoice. It was a victory, not a defeat. Be encouraged. It was a win for you, not a loss. So, number one, do not give in to temptation and sin.

Number two, do not tempt others to sin. Jesus here in Luke 17:1-4, he says, "Sin and temptation to sin will come to you, but woe to the one that sin comes not just to, but through." This means that we are tempting others to sin, maybe even tempting them to sin with us. And Jesus speaks particularly of those who are young, and the commentators here have a bit of disagreement as to what exactly he means.

Now, what he is clear about is that tempting someone to sin is a horrendous evil. A millstone in that day was an enormous, giant stone that would be used for the grinding of food. And Jesus gives the picture that if you're someone who likes to tempt others to sin, rather than a life jacket, God would put around you a millstone and throw you into the sea, not to save you, but to sink you. That's a strong statement from the loving Lord Jesus.

Some think that the reference here to tempting the young can be to those who tempt children, lead them into sin, get them into trouble. This is a strong word for us parents and grandparents and teachers and caretakers and Sunday school leaders with the example we set.

Others think that it may refer to those who are not young in age, but young in faith, that older Christians should not be confusing new Christians. Older Christians should not be tempting new Christians. Older Christians should not involve new, young Christians in such things as false teaching or getting into debates over secondary matters that don't really require their time right now. They need to get to know Jesus and the Bible and not get into all of your petty little controversies and issues. Not including them in gossip and backbiting and division. And this would mean, for those of you who are single, if you are a Christian and someone is a brand-new Christian, it means not tempting them to sin. They may not understand Christian relationships yet. They may not understand holiness and propriety and chastity, and you could confuse them or tempt them. Those kinds of things.

I think Jesus is perhaps even speaking to both groups, that those who are young should not be led into temptation by those who are older, and those who are newer in Christianity should not be led into temptation by those who are older in Christianity.

Here's my question to you. Number one, where are you being tempted? Number two, how are you leading others into temptation? This may even be, in light of the context of controversy and conflict, you compelling them toward raging, anger, escalation. You could do this through gossip, through antagonizing, through goading them on, leading them toward temptation. Now, they are responsible for their sin, but you are responsible for your participation in the temptation.

So, number one, when sin comes, fight it, say no to it, kill it. Number two, sin will come to you, sin should not come through you. Don't be an agent of the devil, leading others toward temptation to sin.

And number three, if you violate principles one and two, Jesus says—because we will. It doesn't mean it's okay, it doesn't mean we should sin or cause others to sin, but when we do, repent and seek forgiveness. That's exactly what he says. He uses the word "repent." It's a big word. The prophets use it a lot. The Bible uses it frequently. And it's not just that we're sick, but that we're sinful and we're guilty, that we're lawbreakers and rebels. And it's not popular to talk about this today, but it's important because the Bible says it is.

Repentance is absolutely connected to Christianity. When we give in to temptation and sin, we are to repent to God and the people we sinned against. Can't just tell God you're sorry and not deal with the people who have been implicated and affected. Furthermore, when we lead others into temptation, when we participate in the temptation of others, we have to also repent to God and them. "I'm sorry. I did wrong. What do I need to do to make this right? There's no excuse for me. I'm coming clean."

This is really important for a church like ours, where we practice community and we've got community groups. We want you to have friendships and do life together. You will annoy one another. You will frustrate one another. You will sin against one another. You will. You will. And so Jesus' words here are very important. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we need to repent.

WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

Now, let me say what repentance is not, because I believe it can be one of these words that are often used, but rarely understood. Grace and I just finished up recently a book on marriage and we got a whole chapter in there on fighting. All right, any good book on marriage has to deal with conflict resolution and sin, repentance, and forgiveness. It just has to. It just has to. If you're married for more than seventeen minutes, you know that you're married to someone who's sinful, and they know they're married to someone who's sinful. And, again, you need respect, rules, and a referee to get you towards some sort of resolution. So here's what my sweet wife and I put in the book.

Repentance is not getting caught, but coming clean. What do you need to tell them that you've not told them? Got very serious all of a sudden, didn't it?

Number two, repentance is not denying our sin. "I didn't do it. I don't know what you're talking about. I'm innocent." It's not denying it.

Number three, repentance is not diminishing our sin by downplaying or partially confessing it. "Well, it's not a big deal." Or, "You know, I did my best." Or, "Hey, nobody's perfect." Or, "It could have gone worse." Or, "I'll tell you part of what I did, but not the whole of what I did." That's not repentance.

Repentance is not managing our sin, trying to keep it under control. "Yeah, I have this addiction, compulsion, problem, proclivity, but it's okay. I'm not doing it all the time, just some of the time. I think I've got it managed." No. Because Jesus died for sin, we don't manage it, we put it to death. We kill it because he died for it. And he died for it so that we could kill it.

Additionally, repentance is not blame-shifting our sin, passing the responsibility to someone else. “Yeah, I did it, but you made me. I did it, but it’s because you neglected me. I got angry, but you made me angry. Yeah, I strayed, but it’s because you weren’t meeting my needs.” It’s not blaming someone else, even the devil, for your sin. It’s owning it.

Repentance is not excusing our sin. “There were circumstances. I was tired. My dad never hugged me. You know, I’ve got a reason that in my mind makes good sense.”

Repentance is not about someone else’s sin. It’s about my sin. Religious people are always aware of your sin, not their sin. Jesus is here talking about being aware of our sin. That’s exactly what he says. He says to keep an eye on yourself, “pay attention to yourselves.” Sometimes we’re so aware of all that they do that’s so bad and we overlook all of our own guilt and hypocrisy.

Additionally, repentance is not about manipulating God and/or people for blessing. “Well, if I tell God I’m sorry, he must bless me, right? I know I shouldn’t be dating this person, but if I confess it to Jesus, he’ll save them and make it all better, right? I know I shouldn’t do this, but maybe if I say I’m sorry, then that person will forgive me. Maybe I’ll get my job back or my spouse back or my friend back or my dignity back.” It’s not doing something so that you can get something. It’s just doing something because it’s right.

Additionally, repentance is not worldly sorrow, something Paul speaks of to the Corinthians, because worldly sorrow is just feeling bad, but not changing. Some of you feel bad, but you don’t change. That’s worldly sorrow, not true repentance.

Repentance is not merely grieving the consequences of your sin, but hating the evil of the sin itself. “Yes, this hurt people. Yes, this had implications. Yes, this caused complications. And I grieve all of that, but I grieve the sin the most, not just the consequences of the sin, the sin itself.” And friends, sin, again, it’s commission and omission. It’s doing the wrong thing; it’s not doing the right thing. And it’s grieving all of that.

And lastly, repentance is not merely confessing your sin and not just grieving your sin, but as I said, killing your sin. Right, the Bible says over and over and over these words: “Christ died for our sins.” That’s the gospel. That’s the centerpiece of the gospel. That’s the Bible. That’s the centerpiece of the Bible. Christ died for our sins. Our God became our substitute. He died for our sin. Our sin is put to death in Christ so we can put our sin to death because of Christ. Jesus rose from death, sent the Holy Spirit so that we can live a new life. And repentance is all of that. Come clean, kill the sin because of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit’s power, a new life patterned after Jesus, who himself was tempted, but never sinned. Right, that’s it.

Okay, for us, when we sin, not if, when we sin, not that we should sin, but that on this side of eternity we will. This is what we do. Those of us who are guilty of sin, when we are guilty of sin, we repent.

DEALING WITH OTHERS’ SIN

Now, what about those who have been sinned against, not the sinner, but the victim? What do they do? Well, Jesus uses this word repeatedly, “forgive” He actually says, “Forgive him,” or, “Forgive them.” Forgive. The sinner is to repent. The victim is to forgive. Okay?

And right now, the Holy Spirit’s gonna get you. He’s gonna bring to mind sin that you need to talk to God about and talk to someone about. And he’s also gonna bring to mind the faces, the names, the stories of people who have sinned against you. And I don’t want to make light of it in any way. Some of it is very damaging, very grievous, very horrific. Some of you have suffered real, horrendous evil. I don’t want to diminish it in any way. And God will bring to mind that person’s face, their name, the story, the history, the circumstance, and he’s gonna ask you to forgive them. He’s gonna ask you to forgive them. And Jesus speaks of dealing with others’ sin similarly in three ways.

He says, number one, do rebuke those who sin. That’s what he says. That’s exactly what he says. “If your brother sins, rebuke him.” Rebuke him. Don’t talk about them; talk to them. Right? Don’t gossip; confront. You can talk to God. “God, please open their heart. Open my heart. Give me the words to say. Give me the ears to hear.” You can talk to God about it. It may be okay to seek wise counsel from one person, saying, “Okay, I got to go talk to them. How do you think I should do this in a way that is holy and helpful? ‘Cause I don’t want to make it worse. If it gets worse, I want it not to be because I threw logs on the fire. I’m trying to throw water on the fire.” But ultimately, you got to go talk to them.

Don’t be a coward and send an e-mail. Don’t be a coward and send a text. Don’t be a coward and leave a voicemail. Don’t be a coward and write a letter. Get over your fear of man, deal with them. Look them in the eye. Do it privately, don’t do it publicly. Don’t have, you know, a huge audience. I mean, if you’ve had a criminal activity against you, bring a witness, that’s fine. But I’m talking about general, interpersonal conflict. You and a friend are going at it. You got a disagreement. Sit down, look each other in the eye, talk about it. Rebuke them. Say, “Here is how you sinned. This is your sin. This is your sin. I love you. Sin leads to death. If we don’t kill this, it’s going to kill our relationship. So let’s not let it kill our relationship. Let’s kill it by the grace of God because of the work of Jesus.” This is where every relationship has to have Jesus in it. He’s part of all of our relationships. It’s not just you two, he’s there too. Rebuke them.

This means you can’t be a coward. You can’t have fear of man issues. You can’t be the person who wants everyone to like you and life to be simple and it never to be complicated and nobody to get upset and you don’t want any conflict and you just don’t like it when everybody isn’t getting along. You got to repent of that because that’s a sin, because you’re not really loving them. If you really love someone, you need to rebuke them. God rebukes us and he loves us. He’s showing us our sin so that it can be dealt with and our relationship with him can be stronger as a result.

And parents, this starts when the kids are young. It starts when the kids are young. I had a situation this week with Alexie. She’s my seven-year-old, blonde-haired, blue-eyed daughter. She looks like her mom. They bought me a brand-new daddy chair, it’s super comfy. I was sitting in my daddy chair and Alexie comes up to me with big puppy dog eyes and a quivering lip and, you know, tears are sort of welling up in her eyes. And she looks at me,

"Papa Daddy?" My heart goes out, "What? What, sweetheart? What's going on?" "They won't let me play the Wii." This is a huge issue, all right? It's like call 9-1-1, right? It's a big issue. "Daddy, they won't let me play the Wii."

Okay, my first thought was, "I should probably get involved," you know? And then I thought, "No, she probably needs to get courageous." I said, "Okay sweetie pie, did you talk to them? Did you tell them that you're feeling excluded, like they're sinning against you? And that you feel left out and your feelings are hurt?" "Well, no, I was hoping you would tell them." Okay, all right. It starts early. "Okay, you need to be brave. You need to be brave, little Lexie, you got to be brave. Go in there. 'You sinned against me and my feelings are hurt and I want to talk about this.'" She says, "Oh, I'll just let it go." No, you can't let it go, because if you love them, you need to rebuke them so you can have a relationship with them.

Otherwise what happens is, kids do the same thing as adults, we just start avoiding each other. Married couples who will tell me, "We never fight," what that tells me is you're passive aggressive, you avoid one another, you really don't love one another, and you're not really doing life together. So the lack of fighting doesn't encourage me at all. In fact, it worries me. It means, "I live over here, they live over there. We don't fight at all 'cause we don't even know each other." I would rather have a little conflict that leads to resolution and intimacy than separate, cold, functional, parallel lives—in all the close relationships.

So I told her, "Little Lexie, be brave." I prayed for her. She mustered up her seven-year-old little girl courage. I know I don't look much like a seven-year-old girl, but use your imagination. And she marched in there and she talked to 'em and they worked it out. So here's what I need you to do this week, right? Put your Alexie face on, all right? Buck up, little camper, be brave.

Some of you have been sinned against for years, some of you have just overlooked and ignored it, some of you have let it go 'cause you love peace and comfort more than you love God and that person. You need to repent of that. Some of you really need to just sit down and say, "Okay, we're going to have to talk about this." Some of you have been bullied for years. And this person doesn't even know they're a bully. They just think that that's how the relationship works. And you know you're being pushed around. You need to rebuke them, okay? The Holy Spirit is going to tell you who that is, I don't know, how to do it, when to do it, where to do it. Pray for your heart that you do it in love, but rebuke them.

Number two, when you're dealing with someone else's sin, do forgive them. Jesus uses that language. He actually says, quote, "Forgive them." Now he says, "If they repent, forgive them." He doesn't tell you what to do in this particular section with those who don't repent. But I'm going to tell you the teaching of the Bible in totality is to forgive them. And it doesn't mean that they're forgiven forever, it means that you let go of your right to judgment and you leave it in the hands of God.

Because friends, we've only got two options: we forgive, or we become bitter. Those are the only options for those who are victims, having been sinned against. You forgive and leave it to the Lord or you hold on to it and you become bitter. If you do, you let them own you, control you, manipulate you every day for the rest of your life. And some of you will say, "I am bitter, but I have a good reason, here's what they did." And I would say, "You may have a good reason. Perhaps what they did was atrocious. I'm not saying it's okay. I'm just saying don't let it be your identity and determine your destiny. Forgive them." Forgive them. Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to forgive? And you need to let them know that you forgive them.

Number three, in dealing with others' sin, do keep rebuking and forgiving. And Jesus says, "Even if that's seven times a day," that's a lot, right? How many of you are parents and sometimes with a kid, seven times a day would be awesome if that's all that you had to tell them, the same thing over and over, right? "Do not do that." You turn around, come back, "What are you doing? You're doing it again. Do not do that. Do not do that. Do not do that. Do not—" that's what parenting is. You ever read Proverbs? Proverbs could be much shorter, right? But Proverbs is long because sometimes it says the same thing over and over and over and over and over. Why? Because that's how God teaches his kids. And we're all like kids, we do it over and over and over. And God's a Father, got to keep saying, "Oh, let's talk about this again. Here we go again. Here we go again. Here we go again," seven times a day.

So the question is: At what point in the fight do you tap out? You're like, "That's it. I'm not rebuking you anymore. I'm not forgiving you anymore. I'm done with you. I tapped out in round three, round four, round five, round six. By round seven, I'm done with you," in one day. That's a lot, right? Seven times you get sinned against by the same person in the same way on the same day. That's a lot. Jesus says, "Rebuke, forgive. Rebuke, forgive." If it takes seven times a day, and seven is in the Bible the number of perfection, so he's kind of just saying here, "Whatever it takes." You rebuke 'em, they repent, you forgive. That's how it should go.

Where's your number? At what number, with what person, did you just tap out and say, "That's it, I don't forgive 'em. I'm bitter. I'm jaded. I'm done. I'm not even going to try?" Jesus says, "Don't do that." Don't do that because if you love God and you love them, you're going to keep rebuking and working toward forgiveness.

Cyril of Alexandria, he was an early church father, he had an interesting statement on this principle. He said, "We need to deal with sinners the way that a doctor deals with those who are sick." All right, can you imagine going into your doctor saying, "I'm sick," he's like, "This is the sixth time. I'm done with you. I only treat people who are sick five times. After that, you're on your own." All right, what does a doctor do? A doctor says, "So long as you are sick, I will treat you and serve you and help you toward healing and wellness." That's what a doctor does. When we're dealing with people who have a condition called sin, we need to have the attitude of a doctor. "Any time you're sick, as long as you're sick, I'm going to rebuke you in love because that's the treatment plan that the Lord prescribes."

And you know what? We want this when we sin, right? We want people to lovingly pursue us, at least you should, and rebuke us and not give up on us,

but patiently endure with us. And so we need not be hypocrites, we need to extend to others the same grace that we would hope be given to us.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT

Now in saying this, let me tell you what forgiveness is not, because again, this is very important. Gracie and I put in the book, "Forgiveness is not denying, approving, or diminishing sin that is committed against us." "Oh, you didn't do anything wrong. It's no big deal. It's in the past. I forgot about it." It's saying, "You know, I appreciate you recognizing that. It really bothered me and it was a big deal to me." And sometimes people will feel awkward when they're repenting. "Ha-ha-ha," they'll try to make a joke of it. Say, "You know what? I really appreciate you bringing that up, but how about if we just take the awkward laughter out? This really was a problem." Make it more awkward, that's what I'm suggesting. Right?

Forgiveness is not naivety and ignoring sin. It's not saying, "I'm not going to look. I'm not going to ask. I'm just going to pretend that I don't even see it." No, that's not forgiveness. Forgiveness is eyes open, knowing the truth, and choosing to simply forgive it. That's forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not naively ignoring the sinful condition of people 'cause sometimes we'll say, "Well, yeah, you did a bad thing, but you're a good person," or, you know, "You're amazing and you just had a bad day," or, you know, "You have a good heart." No, you know what? Sin is down in the roots. Forgiving someone doesn't mean you need to pretend that everything's fine and they're really good and this was an aberration, that sin is a condition down in the roots.

Forgiveness is not enabling sin. It's not, "Well, I forgive you and I'll keep helping you," because that might be enabling. I'll give you an example that I see some occurrences of. A wife in the name of submission sometimes will just forgive her husband over and over and over and over and over and over and over for some sin, but he's not really repenting, he's not putting it to death. And she's just enabling him, okay.

And ladies, friends in general, but wives in particular, the Bible says, Genesis 2:18 I think it is, that a wife is to be a helper. She's supposed to be helpful. If she never rebukes, if she never points out the folly, if all she does is just forgive without actually calling him to repentance, she's not helping him, she's enabling him. She's mothering him and babying him.

And this can be true in all of our relationships. You can't forgive someone without first rebuking them. Now if they're dead or moved or gone, I understand that. There may be nothing you can do. But in as much as you're able, you have to rebuke them to really forgive them so that they see their sin, so that then they're welcomed to repent of their sin, so you're not enabling their sin.

Forgiveness is not waiting for someone to acknowledge their sin, apologize, or repent. See, a lot of times what happens is two people are looking at each other, "You go first." "No, you go first." "No, you go first." "You go first." "I'll forgive you as soon as you say you're sorry." "Well, if you love me and you were like Jesus, you would forgive me and then I would say I was sorry 'cause that's how Jesus does it." "I'm not Jesus." "Yeah, I know. That's why we have this problem, okay?" So it's not waiting for the other person to do their part because there's repentance and forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not always the second part. Sometimes forgiveness is the first part. You sin, here it is, I forgive you. When you're ready to apologize and you want to work this out, my hand is extended to you." It takes one person to repent, one person to forgive, two people to really reconcile. But you do your part. That's where Paul says, "In as much as it is possible with you, seek to live at peace with all men." If you need to repent, repent. If you need to forgive, forgive. Always try to do your part, whatever that part might be.

Forgiveness is not forgetting about the sin that is committed against us. Forgive and forget is foolishness. You can't forget. You can't forget. Some of you have had horrendous evil committed against you, it's not like, "I forgive them and I don't even remember." You do. When the Bible says that God remembers our sin no more, which it does in the Old Testament, one of the prophets, it doesn't mean God's in heaven going, "I don't know. I don't know what they did. I don't know where my car keys are. I'm very absent-minded," right? Instead, it means that he chooses not to interact with us based upon our sin, but his grace if we're believers in Jesus. It furthermore means that he does not establish our identity based on our transgression, but Jesus' salvation.

But it doesn't mean you forget. I mean, religious people just make up these stupid little bumper sticker-isms that are very discouraging. Now the Bible does say in 1 Corinthians 13 that love keeps no record of wrong. So you're not, you know, like an archaeologist trying to always dig up history. But it does mean you'll remember. That's what it means. But you choose not to interact on behalf of that person based upon the sin and transgression. It means that you want good for them, that you love them, that you pursue good for them. And even if it hurts emotionally, you're still willing to continue to seek good for them. But it doesn't mean you forget. It doesn't mean you forget.

I mean, I'll give you a few examples that come to mind throughout the course of this sermon. One is I could still remember early on in ministry an argument between two women. One was very religious and the other had a husband who committed adultery. And the religious woman said, "Well, you're supposed to forgive and forget." Adultery? You don't forget that. Now you could choose not to obsess over it every minute of every day. You can choose to forgive. You can choose to try and save the marriage. You can choose to do all kinds of things, but occasionally you're going to be reminded of it. It's not like the hard drive is erased.

Forgiveness is not no longer feeling the pain of the transgression by dying emotionally. Some people, they will forgive, but they still grieve. Or they may forgive and down the road, years later, some event or activity sort of triggers the emotional remembering of that horrific sin that was committed against them. Doesn't mean you won't feel it, but it means that you have forgiven it, all right? The Bible says that we'll be shedding tears until we see Jesus and he wipes them from our eyes. There will be seasons and reasons that, yeah, it hurts. And you're not to die emotionally. It's okay to feel the grief of that. But it doesn't mean you haven't forgiven someone. Now, you can't let that lead you toward bitterness, but sometimes you need to pass

through the grieving for sure.

Forgiveness is not a one-time event. It's like, "Well, I forgave them." Sometimes you got to forgive 'em over and over and over. Jesus says sometimes it's because they're going to commit the same sin over and over and over, so you got to keep forgiving them. And sometimes you forgive 'em and then a year or two later, it bothers you again and you got to choose to forgive 'em again. "God, I forgave 'em and I forgive 'em today. It bothered me then, it bothers me today. I need to forgive again." Doesn't have to be a one-time event.

Forgiveness is not full reconciliation of the relationship to its previous state. It's not like well, you know, you sinned and said you were sorry and I forgave you, so we pick up right where we left off. Now the truth is sometimes sin that's repented of and forgiven can really build trust and intimacy in a relationship. You're like, "We had a decent relationship and then something really bad went down, but we worked through it and now we're closer than ever." Sometimes that happens. And sometimes it is—trust is gained slowly, lost quickly. Furthermore, what they did was so damaging that, though I've forgiven them, we can't just, you know, assume we hit pause when we found out and hit play when we were done and move on, picking up where we left off.

I'll give you two painful examples. One was a woman and a man, a mother and father found out that one of the grandparents was abusing one of their children, okay? And the grandparent came clean and said, "Yeah, I did this. And yeah, I grieve that," and was, you know, repentant and they forgave him. But should Grandpa babysit? No. No. It's not back to the way it was 'cause that's dangerous for the kids. You need to forgive and be wise.

Another situation that I was involved in, two couples are very close friends. Like the wives are really good friends and the husbands are really good friends and they do dates together and celebrate holidays together and they're friends. These two couples are really close. Well, this husband starts pursuing that wife emotionally for an affair. And it starts escalating. And they get caught. They get caught. And they repent and their spouses forgive them, but should they go on double dates anymore? No. Should they do Christmas together? No. No. The relationship is probably, most likely, forever altered. Probably never going to be—and I would encourage them it's never going to be the same again, right? And you sort of religious do-gooders, you're like, "No, it could be great." It's dangerous and it's risky. And they can forgive, those who were sinned against, and they can repent, those who sinned, but the relationship is forever altered.

Lastly, forgiveness is not objecting to justice. It's not neglecting of justice. It's not like, "Well, they said they're sorry, so I'm not going to call the police." Did they commit a crime? Did they harm someone? You can forgive them and pursue justice, you can. This could be church discipline, this can be legal recourse. You can. Doesn't mean you have to, but it means you can.

I was dealing with a guy not long ago. He's a Christian. There's another guy who claims to be a Christian, but he hides it well. I'll just say that about this guy. He ripped off this other Christian guy for a whole lot of money and came to him and said, "I'm guilty. I ripped you off. I'm sorry. Please forgive me and forgive the debt," okay? So he did repent, sort of. Makes you wonder about his motive. The other guy said, "Well, I forgive you, but I'm not sure I can forgive the debt." Now, if he does forgive the debt, that's a very gracious and generous thing. But is he obligated to forgive the debt? No. It was tens of thousands of dollars. I mean, this is the difference between his family making it and losing their home and going into bankruptcy. What I told him was work toward mediation, arbitration. If that doesn't work and you have to pursue legal recourse, it's not what we want to do, but sometimes it's what we have to do. If this is the difference between your wife losing her home and your kids having to leave town and your whole life going upside down and your credit being destroyed 'cause a guy who says he's a Christian stole from you, he needs to make it right. And if he refuses to, well, you got to deal with it. So you can forgive someone personally and still pursue justice through church discipline or legal recourse.

WHAT IF I DON'T BELIEVE GOD'S WAY WORKS?

Now hearing this, here are the two big ideas. They're huge to Christianity. Sinners, repent. Victims, forgive. And some of you will have objections. Some of you are there. You're like, "That's it. I need to repent to those people and God." Others of you, you say, "I need to forgive those people. I need to tell them that I forgive them." Some of you, there's a little attorney that lives in you and he's raising objections. "Oh, I object. Here are the reasons." And Jesus, being the master teacher, he anticipates your objections. He anticipates two of them.

What if I don't believe God's way works? That's the first objection. Luke 17:5-6, "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' And the Lord said, 'If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed,'" that's a very little faith, "'you could say to this mulberry tree,'" a tree with deep roots, "'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,'" and it would obey you.'" So you know what? That's a miracle. That's what he's talking about. Faith is doing what God says even if it doesn't seem like it's going to work. That's faith. That's faith.

Some of you say, "But what if it doesn't work?" Here's the big idea. We need to redefine what we mean by working and not working. Working doesn't mean, "They repented, I forgave them. We hugged, got matching sweatshirts, a tandem bike. And now we're BFF," right? Working means I did what God asked me to do. When I sinned, I repented. When I was sinned against, I forgave. My hand is extended, working toward reconciliation. But it takes two of us. Working means I did my part.

And it's trusting God, saying, "God, if I do my part, I'm getting myself out of the way. You can work on their heart. You can change their heart. You can bring us together. There's hope." Because it's not how big our faith is, it's how big the God of our faith is. Some of you have been told, "You need more faith." No, you don't. You just need faith in the right God. It's not how big our faith is, it's how big our God is.

And I'm not guaranteeing you that all your relationships will be sewn tidy in this life. Jesus is going to have some unresolved relationships, one of them with a guy named Judas Iscariot, who never did repent. But do your part. Trust God that if you do your part, you're getting yourself out of the way and it's then between God and that person. And see what happens. Sometimes it's a miracle.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO DO WHAT JESUS SAYS?

Some of you still have objections. Your next objection may be this: "What if I don't want to do what Jesus says?" And that's true, right? Sometimes you say, "I know what Jesus says, and I vote pffft. That's what I vote. No." "Love your enemies." "Ha-ha, nope! Not doing that." "Pray for those who persecute you." "I'll pray for fire." I mean, there are times that we just don't want to obey what the Bible says, period.

Here's what Jesus says. Luke 17:7-10, "'Will any of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded to do, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.''"

Jesus doesn't start here, but he ends here. And that is chain of command. Most of us don't like words like "authority," "submission," "master," right? We don't like those words. They're very important. There is a chain of command. We are under authority. Jesus is the master. It's a synonym for the Lord. He is the highest authority. He is our creator. He is our king. He is our Savior. He is our truth teller. He is our master.

And when Jesus says, "If you belong to me, I'm commanding you to act like this," we cannot say no. We cannot say no. Like a master and a servant, a master gives an order to his servant, Jesus uses the parable to give us the analogy, the servant is to serve. The servant is to obey. Jesus is the master. Friends, in our life, we are not, you are not, I am not the master. There is a throne and it's not for us. Jesus is the master. Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is the highest authority. And when he tells us to do something, like a servant, we are supposed to obey. And if and when we do obey, it's not to be a big deal. That's just what a servant is to do.

Jesus reserves this point for those of us who are still not fighting for a relationship with God, we're fighting with our God. And some of you are there. You say, "I know what God says. I just refuse to obey." And Jesus says, "Let me pull out the organizational chart. You will notice that I'm at the top. And there is no way you will get a promotion to be alongside of or above me. So obey me."

Now let me close with this. Our master is also our servant. Our master came into human history. Our master served us. Do you think Jesus knows what it feels like to be sinned against, yes or no? Yeah. Nobody's been sinned against more than Jesus. Do you think Jesus feels the pain of being betrayed by people that he loved and trusted? Yeah. Do you think Jesus knows what it's like when you need your family and friends the most, they turn their back on you? Yes. Do you think Jesus knows what it's like to be lied about and mistreated and have your reputation destroyed? Yes. Do you think Jesus knows what it's like to be emotionally abused? Yes. Physically abused? Yes. Spiritually abused? Yes. Financially abused? Yes.

Who did that to Jesus? You did. And I did too. And he goes to the cross. And as our servant master, he suffers in our place for our sins. And as he's being crucified, what does he say? "Forgive them, forgive them, forgive them." And so Jesus forgives us in word and deed, he dies in our place for our sins as our substitute Savior. He pronounces forgiveness. He gives forgiveness. He dies, he rises, he ascends into heaven. He's the master servant. And he is asking us to first deal with our relationship with him. Repent of our sin to him, experience forgiveness from him, and then have that relationship teach us how to interact with others. That when we sin, we repent. When we're sinned against, we forgive. And that Jesus would be the center of our relationships, amen?

Father God, thank you so much for pursuing us, loving us. Lord Jesus, thank you so much for saying no to temptation and saying yes to our salvation. Lord Jesus, we confess that we've sinned against you. And so we repent of our sin. We thank you that repentance is possible because of your death in our place and your resurrection for our salvation. Furthermore Lord Jesus, we thank you that you forgive us and send the Holy Spirit so that we might be convicted of our sin and repent of our sin and forgive those who are convicted and repent of their sin. Jesus, may we always remember that your relationship with us is the pattern for all of our relationships, and may we enjoy the grace to enact that reality so that our relationships would not die, but the sin that would otherwise kill the relationship would be put to death. In Jesus' name, amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.