

# Rebuke, Repent, and Forgive

by Anton Bosch

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*In Luke chapter 17, Jesus addresses the inevitability of stumbling blocks in the Christian journey, warning against causing others to stumble and emphasizing the severity of leading young believers astray. He instructs on the importance of rebuking and forgiving those who sin against us, highlighting the need for repentance and forgiveness in relationships. The disciples seek an increase in faith to navigate these challenges, and Jesus explains that even a small amount of faith can lead to miraculous changes, symbolized by uprooting a mulberry tree. The sermon emphasizes the necessity of trusting in God's power to transform our hearts and behaviors.*

**Scripture:** Luke 17:1, Luke 17:3, Luke 17:5, Luke 17:7

**Topics:** "Stumbling Blocks", "Faith and Forgiveness"

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## Description

In Luke chapter 17, Jesus addresses the inevitability of stumbling blocks in the Christian journey, warning against causing others to stumble and emphasizing the severity of leading young believers astray. He instructs on the importance of rebuking and forgiving those who sin against us, highlighting the need for repentance and forgiveness in relationships. The disciples seek an increase in faith to navigate these challenges, and Jesus explains that even a small amount of faith can lead to miraculous changes, symbolized by uprooting a mulberry tree. The sermon emphasizes the necessity of trusting in God's power to transform our hearts and behaviors.

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## Transcript

Luke chapter 17, Luke chapter 17 and we're moving into a new chapter of Luke this morning and I'm going to read verses 1 through 10. Luke chapter 17, reading 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. And 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 and tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, come at once and sit down to eat.

But he will not rather say to him, prepare something for my supper and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterwards you will eat and drink. Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded of him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all these things which are commanded, say, we are unprofitable servants.

We have done what is our duty to do. And so there are four statements here. They are interconnected, but they can also be lifted out of the context, because they are truisms.

They are always true, whether they're in that context or not in that context. So we're going to look at them in their context, but also look at them as general statements. So Jesus is now speaking to his disciples, and remember he's still on his way to Jerusalem to be crucified, and he says that it is impossible that no offenses should come.

Offenses will come. The word offense is stumbling blocks. They are things that trip people up, and clearly trip people up in their faith.

This has not got anything to do with anything outside of the faith. And so offenses will come. There are stumbling blocks along the Christian way, and they are always there.

And they are placed there. They don't just happen to be there. They are placed there by people, ultimately by the devil.

And remember the devil even uses Christians, and we say, well, no, that's impossible. Well, you remember what Peter was a stumbling block to Jesus. Jesus says, you're a stumbling block to me, because you're not looking for the things of God.

You're looking for the things of men. And yet Peter was one of the apostles, one of Jesus' disciples, and Jesus says to him, get behind me, Satan. So the devil will use Christians to put stumbling blocks before Christians, either to cause them to stumble in their faith, or to discourage or dissuade them from doing the will of God in their lives.

And so they will happen. They are part of the Christian life. So as far as those who encounter those stumbling blocks, when they happen, don't think it's a strange thing.

They're going to happen. They're going to be there. There's going to be things that are going to try and trip you up in one way or the other.

But the problem is those by whom the stumbling block comes, who puts the stumbling block there. And Jesus uses this very strong word, woe to him, woe to him. And I don't even know how to better translate that word.

But you're in serious trouble, in serious trouble. Jesus doesn't define what the woe is, but he defines how serious that woe is, how serious the trouble is. So he says stumbling blocks happen.

But those who cause the stumbling blocks are in trouble. And the trouble is such that it would be better that they be drowned in the sea than they experience the woe, that they experience the wrath of God. Because remember that when we cause someone to stumble, particularly when it is someone young in the face.

Notice that he says at the end of the verse that he should offend one of these little ones. Now we can, some of the other Gospels apply that to children. Here Luke is not applying it to children, but he is applying it to those who are young, and they may be young physically, so physical children, or those who are young in the face, young Christians, baby Christians.

And remember that as we get stronger, as we get older physically and spiritually, we become more resistant, we become stronger in our ability to deal with stumbling blocks. We don't so easily get ensnared, we don't so easily get tripped up, although it still happens. But young Christians and babies, spiritual and physical babies, are easily stumbled.

And it's easy for us to offend them. And so he says it would be better for such a person to have a millstone, and a millstone would be a massive rock, which would be used to grind the corn, to be hung around his neck, and to be thrown into the sea. Obviously he's going to drown, there is no way he would escape that.

But he says that's better, that's better than to fall in the hands of God. For God to punish or to deal with such an individual who put a stumbling block before Christians, young Christians. So just think about that.

Jesus says the stumbling blocks are going to happen. So there are people who are going to put stumbling blocks in people's way. And therefore God is going to deal with them.

I think there's an awful number of people who are in serious trouble when I look at the number of stumbling blocks that people put before young Christians and young people physically. I think of parents who set a bad example, and thereby caused their children to grow up despising the faith, because their parents have not lived the life that they claimed to live. That's a stumbling block, and it's a serious serious stumbling block.

I think of parents who don't discipline their children, and cause their children to grow up without discipline, without restraint. It's a stumbling block. Parents who don't love their children, who discourage their children by always being negative.

We need to find a balance between discipline and positive affirmation. But you can't always be disciplining. You can't always just be encouraging.

There has to be a balance between those two. If we don't find that balance, the child grows up perverted. And I'm not saying perverted in a sexual way, but their minds and their emotions are twisted.

They're either constantly afraid of the next thing of God judging them and punishing them, because that's all their parents did for them. Or on the other hand, they they grow up expecting God and everyone else to affirm them, even in their bad behavior. Those are stumbling blocks that we put before our children.

And the list goes on. We can spend a whole 45 minutes speaking about the ways in which parents cause their children to stumble. And folks, this is a very very serious thing.

We entrusted to us, particularly those who have young children, are the lives of those children. And what they become in this world and in the faith is largely dependent on what you do with them. And once they've grown up and once they've gone through puberty, it's too late.

You can't change. You have that opportunity now to imprint on them godly values and to encourage them to serve the Lord Jesus. I think of stumbling blocks that Christians put to the world and to unbelievers, particularly in recent years as Christians have become increasingly involved in unsavory aspects of politics, and thereby closed the door to genuine seekers of the faith.

But the reality is that there are millions and millions of young Christians who have turned away from the faith in America today because they say if that's how Christians act, we don't want to be part of it. And there are millions who will not come to Christ and will not listen to the gospel because Christians have lied to them with conspiracy theories and with all sorts of other nonsense. We have put stumbling blocks before little ones.

And folks, Jesus says, woe to them. We put stumbling blocks before our neighbors when we don't live the life that we ought to be living. And they look at us and they say, well, he says he's a Christian.

I want nothing to do with that because they're fake and they're hypocrites. And folks, the accusation against Christians in the church that we're all hypocrites, of course it's a generalization, but it has truth to it. Woe to them that put stumbling blocks before little ones.

We put stumbling blocks before other Christians when we act in an uncharitable and unchristian way towards other Christians. We put stumbling blocks before others when we live and walk in sin. And then I'm not even going to speak about preachers.

Or maybe I will for a minute or two. Who instead of opening, and remember Jesus speaks to the Pharisees and he says, instead of opening the way to the kingdom, you block the way to the kingdom. And folks, many Christians are not in church this morning and will never go back to church again because of what they've experienced at the hands of other Christians and at the hands of preachers.

Preachers who get into false doctrine. Preachers who get into immorality and all sorts of sin and cause the name of Christ to be blasphemed. Woe to those by whom the offenses come.

It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, then he should defend one of these little ones. Remember the principle is that what we have done to the least of the brethren, we have done it to Jesus. We have done it to Jesus.

If we bless one another, we're blessing him. When we do good to one another, we're doing good to him. And when we hurt one another, we're hurting him.

Because we are his body. Nothing that happens to the church, or is done to the church, it does not touch him. He is intimately touched by the things that happen to other Christians, because we are his body and he is the head of the church.

Now, verse 3, and here again we have these problems with the verses. You've heard me speak on this before. The verses I just put in, and remember again, they're not inspired, they're put in by men as a useful reference to find spaces or places in the scripture.

And sometimes the verse numbers are put in the wrong place. And here is another example. Take heed to yourselves.

Take heed to yourselves relates to the issue of putting a stumbling block before a little one. And so Jesus is speaking to the disciples and he says, don't cause a little one to stumble, take heed to yourselves. Folks, we need to watch ourselves.

The problem is that we so easily just get caught up in living the Christian life and doing the things that we do, and we rush from one thing to the other, and we don't pay attention, often to the disasters that we leave behind us, to the hurts that we cause others. And we just blindly carry on living our lives, but behind us is a trail of destruction sometimes. And all of us do it.

There is not one of us who is perfect in word. There's not one of us who doesn't say the wrong thing sometimes. But we need to take heed to ourselves.

We need to pay attention to what we say. We need to pay attention to how we live. We need to pay attention to our relationships to make sure that we are not causing an offense.

Now I guess if I stopped here this morning, you would easily go away and say, well, you know, we just have to love one another and, you know, just don't upset anyone else. But remember, it's in context. And Jesus immediately now says, don't cause offenses.

But now here's another situation. If your brother sins against you. Now here's the problem.

There are Christians who say, well, because I shouldn't offend, when my brother sins against me, I must just let it go. And there are verses that you can use to support that. But is that the responsible thing to do? If your brother is heading for a cliff and you see he's going straight down and he's going to go over the cliff, what is the responsible thing to do? Oh, I don't want to upset my brother.

He's making good speed right now. No, the responsible thing is to say, brother, you're heading in the wrong direction. Will he hear you? Probably not.

And that's based on my personal experience. I have no scripture for it. But my experience has been that people don't want to listen.

They don't want to hear. But we still need to do the right thing. And the right thing is if your brother sins against you, rebuke him.

Correct him. Now remember, we do this in love. We don't do it to get back at him.

You see, that's part of the other side of the coin. That's the other problem. Is we say, well, yeah, the Bible says I must rebuke him.

So let me beat him over the head and let me stomp all over him and, you know, and if necessary, even use violence, according to some Christians. No, I do it with love. I do it in a way that will make the message acceptable, that he may receive the message.

In fact, this is a hard thing to do. And that's why we so easily ignore it. There is nothing harder for me, as a Christian and as a shepherd, to have to rebuke someone.

I agonize over it sometimes for days, weeks, sometimes months. Not because I'm afraid of personal rejection, but because I'm afraid that maybe I say the wrong thing and he does not receive the message. So if your brother sins against you, rebuke him.

Correct him. The word rebuke is very strong here. And I don't want us to get the impression that Jesus is in any way condoning an unchristlike approach or a harsh approach or a approach of superiority.

Yeah, you know, I'm right, you're wrong. Remember that Matthew 18 gives us a mechanism by which we can resolve disputes and difficulties between brethren if we can't resolve them one-on-one. But if your brother sins against you, rebuke him.

Correct him. And if he repents, forgive him. Now, it's straightforward.

It's simple. It's not difficult. And yet this is one of the verses that I know that Christians just gloss over and they don't pay attention to.

So there's a responsibility on both parties. There's a responsibility, first of all, there's actually three steps. First of all, the one who causes the offense not to cause the offense.

But if he causes the offense, then there's a responsibility on the part of the offended one to bring correction. And the responsibility now goes back to the sinner. I'm just using that word, the one who's who's guilty, to repent.

To repent. And so this is where the problem comes. Because by nature we are defensive.

The moment someone says, brother, you are wrong, we have a thousand reasons why he's wrong. I just had a situation this week with a brother I've walked with for many years, a pastor. I mentioned it on Thursday, who's fallen, left his church and gone straight into a cult.

And when I try to correct him, he says, you don't, you're not loving. You're not loving. All sorts of accusations against me.

You see, because if he can prove that I am wrong, then it makes him right. The problem is that even if I'm wrong in the way that I approach it, he is still wrong. And he still needs to repent.

And so, folk, we need to learn to repent. It's not something that comes naturally. What comes naturally is to fight back.

To see it as an attack. And, folk, if we are in the community of faith of most Christians, we shouldn't be attacking one another. And I know I come across angry and stern and all those kinds of things.

It's just the way I was born. Angry young guy. But, folk, we're not here to destroy one another.

We are our brother's keeper. We are here to look out for one another. And when I bring correction to the church in general, or when I bring correction to you individually, it's not because I am angry with you or because I hate you, but because I love you.

As a father chastens his children, so the father chastens us who are his children. And we'll see this in the book of Hebrews when we finally get to verse 12, that if we are without chastening, we are not children, but we're illegitimate. There are people I don't bring correction to, because they are not children in that sense.

They're not in a relationship with me, and they're not in a relationship with God. That's one of the reasons why I don't correct unbelievers. It's not my job.

But we need to rebuke, and we need to learn to repent. We need to learn to accept correction. And folks, this is one of the hardest things for us as Christians, because the moment, in order to do that, it requires humility.

And that's a thing that we really struggle with. May God give us grace that when we are corrected by the Lord, by his word, by a brother or a sister, that we may humble ourselves and say, I am wrong. But it's not just saying that you're wrong, but notice that he doesn't say, if he says, in the next verse he'll say, if he says.

But here he says, if he repents. And remember what repentance is. I just was doing a brief survey of a New York bestseller book, and I'm not going to mention it.

In this whole book, which gives a plan for the Christian life, the word repentance appears twice only in the book. And on the one place he explains what he believes repentance means. He says it's a change of mind.

Repentance is not just a change of mind. Technically, the Greek word does mean a change of mind. But the way the Greek word is used in the New Testament, and the way the word is used in the Old Testament, it does not just mean a change of mind.

It means a change of mind that leads to a change of heart, that leads to a change of action. And if repentance does not result in a change of action, it is not repentance. You can change your mind a million times, and still not have repented.

It's only when my heart has been changed, and my actions change, when he changes. How's that for a contemporary word? If he changes, forgive him. And so here's the responsibility back on the offended party.

So in case you dozed off, the first guy caused the offense, he's in trouble. The second guy brings the correction. The first guy now must repent.

If he repents, it comes back on to the offended one to forgive. You see, and again, we can easily feel we have a responsibility to hold someone's nose to the grindstone. I don't know if you understand the picture.

Hold their feet to the fire. Yeah, well, you know, I'll forgive, but let him stew a little. No, we are to forgive the way the Father forgives us.

God doesn't let us stew. God does not hold our feet to the fire. If we genuinely repent, he forgives.

If we have sinned, he is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us. And so our forgiveness must be instant, and our forgiveness must be total. And we can spend another whole session on speaking about forgiveness, and we've covered this in many, many of the other sessions.

This thing of saying, well, I forgive, but I can't forget. Well, then you haven't forgiven. And you say, well, how can I, how can I do that? Jesus is going to address that in a, in a moment if we get, if we get that far this morning.

You must forgive. You don't have a choice. You don't have an option.

These are not things, and we, we see that there's a whole step, series of steps here. We don't have any options on any of these things. We are not to cause one another to stumble.

If someone causes an offense, he must be rebuked. If he is rebuked, he must repent. If he repents, he must be forgiven.

End of story. We can't make it up as we go and say, well, you know. No, there's, here's a sequence of events.

I remember way back when I was in business, initially in South Africa, we had no labor law. So you made it up as you went. You hired and fired and disciplined and did whatever you needed to do, dock people's pay if it was necessary and, and so on.

And then, and then they came with labor law. And now we have to learn that there's a procedure. You first have to do this.

Then you have to do that. Then you have to do that. You have to go by the book if you want to correct the situation.

And folk, here is God's relationship law. You have to do it by the book. You can't make it up the way you want to make it up.

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. So here's where he's dealing with this issue of saying, well, I've forgiven, but I haven't forgotten. We've spoken about this before in marriage.

You always do that. In other words, have a little book. You did it there, you did it there, you did it there, ten years ago, twenty years ago, five minutes ago, you haven't forgiven.

That's all there is to it, because you've kept tabs. You've kept tabs. And Jesus says, if it's seven times, then seven times.

Because every time you forgive, you start at number one again. Can you imagine what it would be like for us as Christians if God kept tabs on our sin? But when we confess his faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness, everything, and when we come to him in genuine repentance, he forgives us, and we start from square one again. We don't start with a negative five.

What are the things that parents use for their kids on the fridge? Demerits. God doesn't have a demerit system. You're either in trouble or you're not.

And if you've repented, you're not in trouble, it's been forgotten, it's been forgiven, and we continue, and he receives us, and he welcomes us, and there is no record. And that's the way we need to deal with one another. But we don't.

And so, forgive. So now, the Apostles say, increase our faith. You see the importance of context.

What Jesus is saying is very difficult. And what I've told you this morning is very difficult. I know you say, yeah, yeah, yeah, we agree.

But go home and practice it in your marriage or in your relationship with others, and you know it's not that easy. How do I forgive someone who seven times in the same day offends me? How can I do it? How can I repent when the brother or the sister comes to me and what I think is puts me down, straightens me up? How do I deal with that? Because in the natural, I just don't have the ability to admit I'm wrong. It's just built into the carnal human psyche.

We're always right. Everybody else is always wrong, just the way it is. How do we, how do we fix that? And that's what the disciples are saying.

They're saying, Lord, help us increase our faith. We need faith to do these things. We need faith not to offend one another.

We need to rebuke one another. We need faith to repent. We need faith to receive those who have repented.

And we need faith to continue to forgive when someone continues to offend. Because we can't do it in the flesh. We can't do it in the natural.

We need God's help. And that's what they're saying is, Lord, you better give us faith, because we can't do this. And now Jesus says, if you have faith as a mustard seed, small, small seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be pulled up by the roots, be planted in the sea, and it will obey you.

He uses a mulberry tree because it has a massive root system. Some trees, we see them in the storms, they blow over very easily. Mulberry trees don't blow over easily, because they have these, this huge ball of roots, and the roots that stretch out for a long, a long way.

Not so easy to uproot a mulberry tree. But Jesus says, you just need a little bit of faith, and this mulberry tree, you'll move it into the sea. Now, here's the problem.

The moment we come to this verse, the false teaching of the hyper-faith preachers immediately comes to mind. Oh, so you have a problem? Well, you need faith, and the problem will go away. That's not the context.

And obviously, clearly, Jesus is not speaking about a physical mulberry tree, because there is no record anywhere in the Old and the New Testament, or since then, that a Christian has ever taken a mulberry, or spoken to a mulberry tree, and moved it from here into the sea. So clearly, he's not speaking about a physical situation. Notice he says, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree.

Now, they say, Lord, give us faith. Why do we need faith? Because you're asking us to do the impossible. You're asking us to forgive.

You're asking us to repent. You're asking us to correct. You're asking us not to cause offense.

These are difficult things, and why are they difficult? Because these behaviors have massive root systems that are deeply entrenched in our lives. We've grown up with pride. We've grown up with unforgiveness.

We've grown up with an inability to receive a correction. We've grown up learning to harbor grudges, and it's like a mulberry tree that the roots have penetrated into the deep recesses of our psyche. You say, Lord, how do I change? Jesus says, by faith, and you just need a little bit of faith.

Now, let me speak about faith. It's not your faith that fixes the problem. It's not your faith that's going to uproot the mulberry tree of unforgiveness, or of pride, or of an inability to be corrected.

It's God who will do that. God alone can take that mulberry tree out of your life, but you need to trust him. And as long as you're trying to cut the roots off little by little, little by little, trying to somehow get this thing out of your life, you'll never succeed, because you need God's supernatural, powerful, miraculous power to do that in your life.

You need God's intervention, and for God to intervene in your life, and to change these deep-rooted behaviors, you need to put your trust in him, and come to him and say, Father, I can't do this. I can't forgive. I don't know how to repent.

I don't know how to humble myself before my brethren, or I can't stop saying the wrong things that offends everybody. God can change us. He does change us, but we need to come to him in faith, and say, Father, help me.

Help me to be who you want me to be. Help me to be the one who does not cause offense. Help me to be the one who can bring correction with a Christlike way, in a Christlike way.

Help me, Lord, to be the one who receives correction. Lord, help me to be the one who learns to forgive. And Jesus says, you don't need a massive amount of faith.

You just need a little bit, but you need to put that faith in the right place, and if you're putting that faith in your ability to change yourself, it's never going to work. If you put your faith in your face, it's not going to work. If you put your faith in psychology, it's not going to work.

If you put your faith in behavior modeling, it's not going to work. That seed needs to be deposited in the right place, and that's before the throne of grace. And when we put our faith in him, he brings about changes in our lives.

Now, here's the problem. Sometimes, most of the time, it doesn't happen just like that, because that's one of the problems of preaching in the last 40, 50 years, often called deliverance. And somehow, you know, we'll come to the altar and the preacher must pray for me, and he'll zap me, and the problem's instantly going to change.

It happens sometimes, but most of the time, God is going to change you little by little by putting you through situations that you don't like. But that's how we change. But in that process, you need to keep faith.

Why is everybody offending me suddenly? Why is everyone correcting me suddenly? Because God is teaching you. The Lord is trying to get, not the message, but the practice changed in your life, trying to uproot that tree of whatever it may be, that you might be like him, like the Lord Jesus. Father, we pray that you'd help our faith.

Lord, we, like the disciples, have little faith, and Lord, we struggle on our own. We try and fix things and change things, and Lord, we turn to the arm of flesh in our relationships, and Lord, it just doesn't work. But we thank you that you are the most powerful, almighty God, and Lord, you can change situations, you can change us.

Lord, I pray that you'd help us. Lord, there is not one of us this morning that have not been rebuked by your word, including myself. Lord, that have not been corrected in one area or the other, probably in all of these areas, because Lord, we all have problems in all of these areas.

And I pray, Lord, that our response can simply be the response of the disciples. Lord, help our faith. Give us faith, Lord.

Give us the ability to trust in you, to bring about the changes that need to happen in our lives. But Lord, help us to change. Help us, Lord, not to continue the way we are, but to become who you want us to be.

And so, Lord, I pray that you'd help us to understand. But Lord, I don't think there's a problem with understanding this morning. The problem is with doing.

And I pray that you'd help us to be doers of your word and not hearers only. And so, I pray that you'd go with us now, Lord. We pray that you'd keep us and protect us.

We continue to pray for Simon and his family, Lord, as they struggle with the isolation. And we pray, Lord, as they go for more tests today, that those tests may be negative, that they may be able to be restored to fellowship as well. And so, Lord, we commit ourselves to you now, and we pray that you'd go with us in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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