



“Pay Attention to Yourselves:
5 Responses to Sin”
Luke 17:1-6

Idea: God’s people must face offenses honestly, lovingly, and faithfully.

Intro: On September 28, 1789, just before leaving for recess, the first Federal Congress passed a resolution asking that the President of the United States recommend to the nation a day of thanksgiving. A few days later, President George Washington issued a proclamation naming Thursday, November 26, 1789, as a “Day of Publick Thanksgivin.” This was the first time Thanksgiving was celebrated as a holiday under the new Constitution. Subsequent presidents issued Thanksgiving Proclamations, but the dates and even months of the celebrations varied. It was not until President Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Proclamation that Thanksgiving was regularly commemorated each year on the last Thursday of November.

This national holiday, established out the outset of our nation, calls us to celebrate the Lord’s goodness. As we gathered in homes with family and friends this past Thursday for Thanksgiving, hopefully, each of us took some time to think about all the ways the Lord has been good to us this year and thank Him for His goodness. The beauty of Thanksgiving is that it forces us to examine our lives and identify God’s many blessings so that we might express our gratitude. There is biblical precedence for this in the Scriptures. King David routinely and intentionally set aside time to recount what God had done and give thanks for it. He sang to God in Psalm 9:1, *“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.”*

Recounting the deeds of the Lord requires an examination of one’s life. It demands a person to think through all the many scenarios and see the Lord’s hand in them. Self-examination is one of the key activities and spiritual disciplines of the Christian who wants to walk and resemble Christ.

The great Greek philosopher, Socrates, famously said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” How many of us routinely and intentionally sit down, open our Bibles, bow our heads, and pray, “Lord, remind me of your activity and show me where I am right and wrong”? This ought to be a common practice, as we shall see from the passage today. As God’s people, we must face offenses honestly, lovingly, and faithfully. Many times, the offenses are our own. They come as we choose to sin against God and others. Other times, they are the choices and actions of others against us. In both cases, we need to pay attention to ourselves and respond to sin in a righteous manner.

Read Luke 17:1-6.

Inquiry: As we look over these verses, keep in mind that Jesus is continuing His journey toward Jerusalem, where a cross awaits. As He makes His way, the Lord continues to teach His disciples and prepare them for

what He would suffer there. He is also preparing them for the ministry they would inherit after His departure. Luke 17 offers important lessons on forgiveness (vs. 1-6), faithfulness (vs. 7-10), thankfulness (vs. 11-19), and readiness (vs. 20-37). The disciples needed to hear and heed these lessons.

After Jesus warned the Pharisees about the sin of loving money (16:14-31), He then turned to His disciples to warn them about possible sins in their lives. It was important for them to recognize their propensity to engage in sinful behavior and experience the effects of the sin of others. For us today, we must see that the many opportunities to sin is a natural and dangerous part of living in a fallen world. The harm that comes from sin in someone else is also a natural and dangerous part of living in a fallen world. For this reason, Jesus calls us to self-examination and spiritual awareness. Let's look at this call to pay attention to ourselves. There are five responses to sin that we need to make.

1. Expect to be tempted by sin. (vs. 1)

“Temptations to sin are sure to come...”

To be tempted to sin is to live in a fallen world. The Apostle Paul said, *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man”* (1 Cor 10:13). Bruce Wideman magnified this truth when he said, *“To a greater or lesser degree, if you are alive you are tempted.”* Therefore, every living person does and will face this enticement. The temptations (σκάναλον) Jesus speaks of are best understood as stumbling blocks. They are ideas, promises, or material things that are thrown out in front of a person's pursuit of God for the purpose of tripping the individual up.

Temptations, then, are a fact of life. The sinful condition of humanity makes them inevitable. The destructiveness of sin is seen throughout the general culture. It is not relegated to subsets of culture. Instead, every aspect of every culture is filled with temptations. They are espoused by intellectuals, pleasure seekers, celebrities, and religious leaders. All these and more work together to cause people to fall into greater and greater sin. The goal of temptation is lead people away from God and toward self. It is to create a hatred for God.

Temptations are external influences, but they appeal to what is found within one's heart, and what is found in the heart is sinful desire. For believers, it is the portion of the heart that has yet to be sanctified or come under the Lordship of Christ. James, the half-brother of Jesus, said, *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire”* (James 1:14). Therefore, you should expect to be tempted by sin because you are not yet fully sanctified. There remains within all of us the propensity and desire to sin. Temptations, however, are not sin. Temptations are pulls, influences, and enticements to do what is wrong and evil. According to James, the decision made about a temptation determines whether sin will be produced (James 1:15).

As we seek to pay attention to ourselves, our first response is to expect to be tempted by sin.

2. Beware of being used by sin. (vs. 1-2)

Notice the *“woe”* in verse one. While it is not good to be tempted, being tempted by sin is a common fact of life in this fallen world. The worse thing is being part of the temptation in another person's life. When a person engages in leading an individual into a sinful decision that person is engaging in the business of Satan, the great tempter, and God will not go easy on such a person. In verse 2, He offers a warning of judgment. The woe issued by Jesus is not the threat of a millstone being hung around the person's neck and thrown into the sea. The woe is that this sort of punishment would be far better than what is coming. Experiencing such a horrific death would be merciful. Arguing from the lesser to the greater, the Lord illustrates how serious and inescapable the condemnation is on those who tempt people into sin.

For this reason, we ought to seek to put to death sin in our own lives, so that we cannot and will not be used by sin to lead others into our own sinful behavior. Sin always wants company. It is never satisfied, so it constantly wants more participants. Rather than feeding sin and death, believers ought to feed holiness and life. As we seek to pay attention to ourselves, our second response is to beware of being used by sin.

3. Call out sin when it is seen. (vs. 3)

The fact that sin is part of everyone's life experience in this fallen world leads Jesus to press the disciples toward self-examination saying, "*Pay attention to yourselves!*". In other words, He is saying that believers should be cognizant of how they live their lives. This is a personal call, but it is also a corporate call. In the very next sentence, Jesus says, "*If your brother sins, rebuke him...*". This command means that not only are we to watch over ourselves but also over one another. The church covenant we are bound by takes these words of our Lord seriously. We should see ourselves as our brother's keeper.

Perhaps, the first thing we might think about in reading verse 3 is how easy it is to overdo this command. While the command to rebuke sin can be mismanaged by people who simply want to harm and hurt those who have offended them, Jesus' words imply a deep love and care for the offender as seen in the second half of the verse. Anyone who enjoys rebuking others knows little about the grace of God. That fact that believers have experienced grace, often leads believers to be cautious when it comes to calling out sin. I believe the greater danger is to "lovingly" do nothing when a brother sins.

Appl: How much holier would our lives and church be if we took verse 3 seriously and obeyed it? You might agree with me but are wondering about the standard to follow. The standard is God's Word. We saw last week in the second half of Luke 16 a call to God and His Word. Following it is a matter of life and death. Take that seemingly obscure verse on divorce (16:18). How would our marriages be holier and more loving if brothers and sisters called out sin in the way we treated our spouses and demanded repentance?

Paul instructs believers in the church to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). There is no room for letting fellow brothers and sisters comfortably dwell in their sin. Instead, our duty is to rebuke it. We are to call sin out and demand repentance. Keep in mind that our aim should never be to embarrass or hurt the offender but to encourage repentance. If we do nothing, then we are culpable in our silence.

As we seek to pay attention to ourselves, our third response is to call out sin when it is seen.

4. Forgive sin when there is repentance. (vs. 3-4)

The duty to rebuke is attached to the responsibility to forgive. Jesus clarifies this connection because He knows the struggle people have when faced with such a situation. The temptation for believers when rebuking sin is necessary is to be silent and do nothing. Likewise, the temptation for believers when an offender has repented of his or her sin is to refuse to forgive. Both are wrong and antithetical to the gospel. Verses 3 and 4 give us balanced instruction on how to deal with sin within the church body. We are to rebuke it and forgive the offender when there is repentance.

Illust: Do you remember the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15? The son demanded his inheritance from his father. He then went and squandered it in reckless living. His sinful decisions took him to the lowest of lows, but when "*he came to himself*" he returned to his father and repented of his sin (15:21). How did his father respond? The young man's father quickly sent for a robe, a ring, a pair of shoes, and a fattened calf. That night he and his household celebrated the young man's repentance and return. The father forgave the son's sin.

Maybe you are saying, “Well that is nice and good, but what responsibility does the father have if the son leaves again?” That is a great question, and Jesus gives an answer in verse 4. If the son were to leave seven times and return seven times with repentance, then the father must forgive him each time. The command to forgive is an imperative, but the key point in forgiving is repentance.

In each and every case, there is to be a celebration. Many fattened calves are being offered up. As we seek to pay attention to ourselves, our fourth response is to forgive sin when there is repentance. Forgiveness is contingent upon repentance.

5. Ask for faith to forgive sin. (vs. 5-6)

Perhaps, on a human level, Jesus’ instruction to forgive the same person repeatedly sounds illogical and naïve. Like me, initially, your mind probably thinks about forgiving the same sin over and over. Well, the text does not mention the same sin being committed seven times followed with seven acts of repentance. It just mentions seven acts of sin followed by seven decisions to forgive the offenses. I believe it is also important to note that there is no command to entrust the forgiven offender with what he or she has misused. Wisdom would tell us that it is probably not the best practice to entrust a former offender with the same thing that was misused. For example, if a friend steals cash out of my wallet and later repents and returns what was stolen, I must forgive the offense. However, it is unwise for me to ask him to hold my wallet or join me in a business venture for a while.

Even so, it is necessary to forgive and move forward. We do so because that is how the Lord deals with our sin. In fact, forgiving others is so important that God will not forgive us unless we forgive others (Matt 6:13-15). So, how can we forgive grievous sins? Verse 5 gives the answer. We ask the Lord to “*increase our faith.*” It takes faith to forgive people who have hurt you.

Faith is powerful. According to verse 6, small faith is so powerful it can rip up a mulberry tree and cast it into the ocean. As far as I know, there has never been any time in history that such an act has taken place. Eastern languages are unusually vivid and visual, so Jesus is using this imagery to make a powerful point. So, we read this statement and contextually ought to think about how rooted unforgiveness is in our fleshly nature. We should recognize that we are quick-tempered and bent toward retribution. Forgiveness is not easily found in our hearts. Therefore, when we find it impossible to forgive, we need to pray, “Lord, increase my faith.” When we ask for the ability to forgive, He will change our hearts so that we can because God always that which is in accordance with His will. Through faith that the Lord supplies, we can forgive and forgive and forgive.

As we seek to pay attention to ourselves, our fifth response is to ask for faith to forgive sin.

Conclusion: Jesus said, “*Pay attention to yourselves!*” How well do you measure up to these five responses to sin? Do you expect to be tempted by sin? Are you aware of the danger of being used by sin to tempt others? Do you call out sin when it is seen in your own life and in others? Do you forgive sin when there is repentance? Are you trusting by faith in God’s power to enable you to forgive sin?