Chapter 10 LEST WE OFFEND THEM

Romans 14:13 (HCSB)
13 Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister.

Simon Peter was approached by the official in charge of collecting the temple tax

Matthew 17:24-27 (HCSB)
24 When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the double-drachma tax approached Peter and said, “Doesn’t your Teacher pay the double-drachma tax?” 25 “Yes,” he said. When he went into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, “What do you think, Simon? Who do earthly kings collect tariffs or taxes from? From their sons or from strangers?” 26 “From strangers,” he said. “Then the sons are free,” Jesus told him. 27 “But, so we won’t offend them, go to the sea, cast in a fishhook, and take the first fish that you catch. When you open its mouth you’ll find a coin. Take it and give it to them for Me and you.”

• Jesus had just proven His liberty. But in order not to offend, He said to Peter, "Let's pay it!

• Jesus is Lord of the earth. He is the Son of God. The earth and everything in it are created by Him and are subject to Him. Therefore, He knew the money would be in that fish's mouth. He did not have to work for that money because He was the Son. And yet He still chose to pay the tax and not to offend.

Matthew 18:1-4 (HCSB)
1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2 Then He called a child to Him and had him stand among them. 3 “I assure you,” He said, “unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

• The key phrase here is "whoever humbles himself."
• Jesus owed no one anything. He was subject to no man. Yet He chose to use His liberty and freedom to serve.

LIBERATED TO SERVE

• We are exhorted in the New Testament as sons of God to imitate Jesus, to have the same attitude we see in Jesus.

Galatians 5:13 (HCSB)
For you were called to be free, brothers; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.

• We are not to use our liberty or privileges as children of the living God to serve ourselves. Liberty is to be used to serve others.
• A slave is one who has to serve, while a servant is one who lives to serve.

• Many Christians serve with a resentful attitude.
• They still live as slaves to a law from which they have been set free. They remain slaves in their hearts.
• They do not have the "spirit" in which Jesus gave His commands. They have not realized they were liberated to serve.

• Paul gives a vivid example of confronting this attitude in his letters to the Romans and the Corinthians.
• Paul said that there were some believers who were weak in their faith and still could not eat meat for fear of eating food that had been sacrificed to idols.

1 Corinthians 8:4,6-7 (HCSB)
4 About eating food offered to idols, then, we know that “an idol is nothing in the world,” and that “there is no God but one.” ... 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father. All things are from Him, and we [exist] for Him. And [there is] one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things are through Him, and we [exist] through Him. 7 However, not everyone has this knowledge. In fact,
some have been so used to idolatry up until now that when they eat food offered to an idol, their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

- In those churches Christians with stronger faith were eating meats of questionable origin in front of weaker saints. This was causing a problem. The stronger saints knew that an idol was nothing but they were more concerned with holding on to their rights as New Testament believers than they were with offending their brethren.
- They had placed a stumbling block in the path of their weaker brothers. This attitude is not present in the heart of a servant.

Romans 14:13,17 (HCSB)
Therefore, let us no longer criticize one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in your brother’s way… for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

- The stronger believers were not using their liberty to serve but as a platform for their "rights". They had knowledge of their New Testament freedom. But knowledge without love destroys.
- Jesus never wanted freedom to be a license to demand our rights and cause another to be offended and stumble.

1 Corinthians 8:11-12 (HCSB)
11 Then the weak person, the brother for whom Christ died, is ruined by your knowledge. 12 Now when you sin like this against the brothers and wound their weak conscience, you are sinning against Christ.

LAYING DOWN OUR RIGHTS

The importance of humility
Matthew 18:6-10 (HCSB)
6 “But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me—it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea! 7 Woe to the world because of offenses. For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes. 8 If your hand or your foot causes your downfall, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, rather than to have two eyes and be thrown into hellfire! 10 “See that you don’t look down on one of these little ones, because I tell you that in heaven their angels continually view the face of My Father in heaven.

- Jesus is clearly saying to get rid of whatever causes sin, even if it is one of your New Testament privileges
- Jesus offended some people as a result of obeying the Father and serving others. His offense did not come by demanding His own rights.

1 Corinthians 8:8-9 (HCSB)
8 Food will not make us acceptable to God. We are not inferior if we don’t eat, and we are not better if we do eat. 9 But be careful that this right of yours in no way becomes a stumbling block to the weak.

- Our liberty has been given to us for serving and laying down our lives.

THE EDIFICATION TEST

Romans 14:19 (HCSB)
So then, we must pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.

- What we do may even be permissible according to the Scriptures, but ask yourself: Does it seek the edification of another or myself?

1 Corinthians 10:23-24,31-33 (HCSB)
23 “Everything is permissible,” but not everything is helpful. “Everything is permissible,” but not everything builds up. 24 No one should seek his own [good], but [the good] of the other person… 31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory. 32 Give no offense to the Jews or the Greeks or the church of God, just as I also try to please all people in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, so that they may be saved.
• Use your liberty in Christ to set OTHERS free, not to assert your own rights.

2 Corinthians 6:3 (HCSB)
We give no opportunity for stumbling to anyone, so that the ministry will not be blamed.

DECLARATIONS

❖ I WILL not allow a judgmental attitude on my part to put a stumbling block, or a cause to fall, in my brother's or sister's way.
❖ I will continually use the power of the Holy Spirit in my life to cause me to humble myself as a little child in My Father's Kingdom.
❖ Father, make me like Your Son, Jesus, who chose to use His liberty and freedom: in You to serve others.
❖ There is freedom in serving but bondage in slavery Through the power of the Holy Spirit I choose the attitude of a servant, not that of a slave.
❖ Father, I declare that I will live in the benefits of my liberty in You, which are righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.
❖ Holy Spirit, through Your power I declare that I will never use my freedom in Christ as a license to demand my rights and cause another to be offended and to stumble.
❖ I choose to build up others and not destroy. I choose to lay down my life to serve others. I choose to obey my Father instead of pleasing myself.
❖ Before I act in my Christian liberty, I will remember to ask myself: Am I seeking my own edification or the edification of another?
❖ I declare that in every area of my life I will allow the Holy Spirit to challenge me to live as a servant of all.
❖ All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful to me or edifying to another. I will not seek my own well-being but the well-being of my brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Cor. 10:23-24).
❖ Through the power of the Holy Spirit I will not seek my own profit but the profit of others, that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:31-33).
❖ Father, I open my life to Your examination. Deal with the attitudes of my heart that need to change. Forgive me for my own self-seeking, and mold me into the character of Your Son, Jesus.
❖ Father, if some fault in me causes me to sin, cut it out of my life completely. It is better to be without a part of me than to be cast into the everlasting fire (Matt. 18:9).
❖ I declare that I will not cause one of my Father's "little ones" to sin. It would be better that I be drowned in the depth of the sea than to cause a weaker brother or sister to be offended and sin (Matt. 18:6-7).
❖ I will live my life in the knowledge of my spiritual freedom, but I will act only through the unconditional love of God in me.
CHAPTER 11 FORGIVENESS: YOU DON'T GIVE - YOU DON'T GET

Mark 11:24-26 (HCSB)
24 Therefore I tell you, all the things you pray and ask for—believe that you have received them, and you will have them.
25 And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing. [ 26 But if you don’t forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your wrongdoing.]

❖ Jesus meant what He said.
❖ We live in a culture where we don't always mean what we say. Consequently, we do not believe others mean what they say to us. It begins in childhood. The child learns to think that not everything authority figures say is true. By the time he becomes an adult he has accepted this as normal. His conversations now consist of promises and statements in which he says things he doesn't mean.

❖ Today most people don't mean a fourth of what they say. But when Jesus speaks, He wants us to take Him seriously. So when Jesus said, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses," He meant it.

❖ Many Christians wouldn’t want God to forgive them in the same way we have forgiven those who have offended us. Because
❖ unforgiveness is so rampant in our churches, we do not want to take these words of Jesus so seriously
❖ The way we forgive, release, and restore another person is the way we will be forgiven.

THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Matthew 18:21-24 (HCSB)
21 Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how many times could my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 “I tell you, not as many as seven,” Jesus said to him, “but 70 times seven. 23 For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began to settle accounts, one who owed 10,000 talents was brought before him.

❖ A talent was a unit of measure. It was used to measure gold, silver, and other metals.
❖ In this parable it represents a debt
❖ The common talent was equivalent to approximately seventy-five pounds.
❖ Ten thousand talents would be approximately 750,000 pounds or 375 tons.
❖ In today's market a talent of gold would be worth $1.4 million., ten thousand talents of gold is worth $14.5 billion
❖ Jesus was emphasizing here that this servant owed a debt he could never pay.

Matthew 18:25-27 (HCSB)
25 Since he had no way to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. 26 “At this, the slave fell facedown before him and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything!' 27 Then the master of that slave had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan.

❖ When an offense occurs, a debt is owed.
❖ The king represents God the Father, who forgave this servant a debt that was impossible for him to pay.
❖ The debt we were forgiven was unpayable.

Matthew 18:28 (HCSB)
“But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him 100 denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, ‘Pay what you owe!’

❖ A denarius was approximately equal to a laborer's daily wage.
❖ At today's wages, one hundred denarii would be worth about four thousand dollars.

Matthew 18:29-30 (HCSB)
29 “At this, his fellow slave fell down and began begging him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ 30 But he wasn’t willing. On the contrary, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed.

❖ The offenses we hold against each other compared to our offenses against God are like $4,000 compared to $14.5 billion. We may have been treated badly by someone else, but it does not compare with our transgressions against God.
A person who cannot forgive has forgotten the great debt for which they were forgiven.

There is nothing worse than eternity in a lake of fire.

That was our destination until God forgave us through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. If you have a hard time forgiving, think of the reality of hell and the love of God that saved you from it.

Matthew 18:31-33 (HCSB)

31 When the other slaves saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. 32 “Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’

Jesus was not referring to unbelievers in this parable. He was talking about servants of the king.

Matthew 18:34-35 (HCSB)

34 And his master got angry and handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. 35 So My heavenly Father will also do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart."

1. The unforgiving servant is turned over to torture.
   - Torture: "agony of body or mind" or "the infliction of intense pain to punish.
   - God gives the "torturers" permission to inflict pain and agony of body and mind at will even if we are believers.
   - Medical doctors and scientists have linked unforgiveness and bitterness with certain diseases, such as arthritis and cancer. Many cases of mental sickness are tied to bitter unforgiveness.
   - Forgiveness is usually denied to other people, but sometimes it is denied to oneself.

2. The unforgiving servant had to pay the original unpayable debt.
   - Some believers are so tormented by unforgiveness that they may hope death will bring relief. But this is not true. We must deal with unforgiveness now or be called upon to pay the unpayable.

3. God the Father will do this to any believer who refuses to forgive from the heart- no matter how great the hurt or offense.
   - Jesus also made it clear that if we would not forgive we would not be forgiven.
   - This is not often found in the church. Instead, excuses are given for harboring unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is considered to be a lesser sin than homosexuality, adultery, theft, drunkenness, and so on.
   - Some may think this is a hard message, but it as a message of mercy and warning, not of harsh judgment.
   - You can be convicted by the Holy Spirit now and experience genuine repentance and forgiveness? Or you can refuse to forgive and hear the Master say, "Depart," when you can no longer repent?

DECLARATIONS

Lord Jesus, when You speak to me, I will listen. I will always remember that You are faithful to me even when I am faithless. I will seriously consider every word You speak to me.

Father, I will never forget that the way by which I forgive others, release my offenses, or restore another person in relationship to me is the way You will forgive me.

I declare that through the power of the Holy Spirit I will never fall into the trap of unforgiveness.

Father, forgive me for holding unforgiveness against [add name]. Give me Your strength to forgive, and enable me to release this person from the unforgiveness in my heart. I forgive him [or her].

I declare that with the Holy Spirit’s help, I will forgive others as God forgives-without limitations.

Lord Jesus, You are the blameless lamb that was slain for me. I will never forget the great debt for which You forgave me. I will release others who have offended me unconditionally, just as you forgave and love me unconditionally.

I will never allow a spirit of unforgiveness in me to open the door for the enemy to inflict pain and agony upon my body or mind.

I will live in the spirit of forgiveness.

I declare that I will not deny the powerful healing of forgiveness in my life by failing to forgive myself. God has forgiven me; who am I to fail to forgive myself?

Holy Spirit, keep me from being deceived by thinking that I am right to withhold my love from someone who has wronged me. I will not live in deception by loving God but hating my brother (1 John 4:20).
Christ Jesus, I have been made alive by receiving You into my life; I will never depart from Your ways and be as one of the people Jude described as "twice dead" (Jude 12-13).

Holy Spirit, enable me through Your power to bring hope to others who are tormented by unforgiveness.

Father, keep me from justifying unforgiveness by considering it to be a "lesser sin" than something else. Your Word confirms to me that I will not inherit Your kingdom if I practice unforgiveness in my life.

Holy Spirit, convict me of any unforgiveness in my heart, and lead me into the experience of genuine repentance and forgiveness.

Lord Jesus, just as You paid a debt of sin for me that I could not pay, so too I will be moved with compassion and though Your love will release and forgive others who have wronged me.

Lord Jesus, I declare that the unconditional love and forgiveness I have received from You, through the gift of salvation, are more precious to me than all the gold or silver of earth.