



Greenwood Baptist Church

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Don't Take The Bait

Proverbs 18:19

We're going to start with our history moment. Today, we are talking about the day in 1799 when George Washington died. One of the proofs of his leadership, of how we began our country, and of how it changed the way the world viewed leadership was the way countries reacted when he died. He changed the way people saw leadership. Even King George said that when he heard about Washington's intention to resign his commission to Congress if they won the war. It was not something the world was accustomed to.

The way the world worked at that time was that stronger countries conquered weaker countries all the time. Within a country, if you took over the military, you gained power and kept it. It started with Caesar. The story of Caesar crossing the Rubicon illustrates the point. A returning general would never cross the Rubicon—the river leading into Rome—with his army. Instead, he would surrender his authority. Caesar changed that. From then on, when someone gained power—when they gained control—they held on to it.

King George said that if Washington were able to defeat Britain, establish this country, and give up that power, he would be the greatest man in the world. And that's exactly what he did. Later, when he was convinced to run for president, he didn't campaign for it or seek it, but he became President of the United States—our first one, obviously. He was re-elected to a second term, but he had told people he would only serve two terms. When he finished that term, he went home to his farm.

It changed the way the world sees leadership. You see that now all over the world, but it began in America. This idea holds that power was not meant to be kept and used for an individual's or a country's advantage. When George Washington died, British ships around the world lowered their flags to half-mast to honor him. Napoleon held a ten-day celebration across France in honor of George Washington's death.

If anybody ever tells you—we hear it all the time—"America just took what they wanted and did whatever they wanted," whether that's colonizing or whatever else they want to say, I believe one proof of the Christian roots of our country is how we've dealt with power throughout the centuries, and that began with George Washington. Here is what I think is one of the greatest displays of a nation being a Christian nation, rather than one that tried to take whatever it could. At the end of World War II, what would have stopped us from just keeping Japan?

What would have stopped us from saying, "Germany is ours"? We were the only ones. We were the only nation in the world with the atomic bomb. We could have taken whatever we wanted. And who would have stopped us? Who would have said no? Throughout history, that's what countries have done. If they realized, "Hey, you know what? We've built a bigger navy than everybody else. Let's go take what we can with it." "Hey, we've built a bigger army than everybody else. Let's go take what we can with it."

Yet when the United States won World War II, had the ultimate weapon, and had the power to do whatever we wanted, what did we do? We went in and rebuilt Japan for them. We went in and paid to rebuild Germany, and we allowed them to be their own country. We rebuilt it for them and then gave it back to them. No other country in the world has ever done that. So if anybody tries to tell you that this isn't a Christian nation, tell them that it is one of the most Christian things we've ever done.

Now, we were attacked. Wars happen sometimes—they happened in the Old Testament—but in the end, we gave their countries back to them when we could have taken and kept them, and nobody could have stopped us. To me, one of the greatest discretionary uses of power that you will ever see in world history is what George Washington did—the way he set the tone for the United States of America—and what we still do today.

I'll never tell you to be proud of something because pride can be a trap, but whatever words are right below pride, I'm that for our country. I love our country. It isn't perfect, and there are things I'm concerned about, but I love the history of our nation. It isn't perfect either, but if you look through it, you can see a thread of biblical truth and Christianity running through our country's history. It's up to us to make sure it runs forward. That's up to us.

Turn in your Bibles to Proverbs 18. I'm going to read one verse from Proverbs and a couple from 1 Corinthians, but mainly, just turn to Proverbs 18:19. That's going to be the main focus.

"An offended friend is harder to win back than a fortified city. Arguments separate friends like a gate locked with bars."

1 Corinthians 13:4-5:

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged."

The title of today's message is "Don't Take the Bait." We are going to talk about being offended. One of the things in the very first verse I read from Proverbs—it's a verse I've known and read for a long time—"An offended friend is harder to win back than a fortified city." What I'd always taken from that—and I understand that this is part of the meaning—is to be careful not to offend people. It's better to be a little more careful about what we say. It's about not giving offense.

The fact is that as believers, we're going to give offense on occasion. Jesus said things that offended people. He spoke the truth. He gave people life-saving truth—the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible even says that "He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." That's

one of the names they called Jesus. His presence, the things He said, and the truth He spoke offended people. Not all of the people. Some of them saw it and recognized it, but many were offended.

There was a point when He made a hard statement, and most of the people who were following Him turned around and left. They were offended. Truth can be offensive. We, as believers, are going to offend people when we speak the truth. We just have to make sure we speak it in love. The other side of that is, what about when we're offended? I looked at that first verse and started thinking about it. Someone who is offended is now in a fortified city. I started thinking about how that applies to us. Sometimes we're the person who offends; sometimes we're the person who is offended.

Someone who is offended is now living in a fortified city. So what do you have to do there? This is what happens whenever you're offended by something someone says. Something happens to you. You find out you're not included in a group you thought you were part of. Someone says something that may hurt your feelings. You're online and read something that makes you mad and offended. What happens there?

The first thing that happens—and this is part of the danger when we take offense. I understand that there are times when someone sins against us. That's different. There are times when you can look in Scripture and say, "The Bible says this is wrong, this is a sin, and you've done that against me." But there are a lot of other times when people just say or do things that make us angry or hurt. So what is our inclination?

Here is the first danger: if you're going out to build a fortified city, the first thing you do is look for higher ground and build it there. You don't build a fortified city down in a valley where people can attack you from above. That's the first thing we do when we're offended—we claim the high moral ground. "I'm the offended person. You said this about me... You hurt my feelings. You did this to me." And we claim this higher ground. To build a fortification, you need help. So what do you do? You try to get people on your side.

You start talking to this person... "Hey, guess what so-and-so said to me? Guess what they did to me?" You want to get people on your side, so instead of talking to the person who wronged you, you start talking to all these other people. And then what do you do? You build barriers and take up weapons. When this person comes toward you, or whatever, you're on the high moral ground—you think, or at least claim, that. You've got protection where they can't reach you, and now you've got weapons. Not only that, but you've got people along with you.

So how do we stop ourselves from being in that position? The first thing I want to tell you is what to do when you really do have a legitimate reason. Somebody has sinned against you. They've stolen from you, or they've done this, or they've done that. The Bible does tell us what to do. The steps the Bible tells us to go through also give us an idea of what is a serious offense and what is not.

Matthew 18:15-17 gives Jesus' instructions to us when someone offends us or sins against us:

"If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense." So here's the deal: if you're offended, and the first people you talk to are not the people who offended you, you've already messed up. You've already gone outside of what God said to do, because it ought to be something that is just between the two of you. Particularly when somebody says something, 98% of the time, it's a misunderstanding or a miscommunication. But you go to that person.

"If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back." "You know what? I'm so sorry! That's not the way I meant it. You're right—I shouldn't have said that. I apologize. I'm sorry." Then it's over! What happens if that doesn't work? ***"But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses."***

Now, here is what I believe you do there. Someone has sinned against you. You went to them, and they're unrepentant. They're like, "I don't care what you say." Nothing is resolved. So you go and find three people. Now, let me tell you what you don't do: "I need my riding guys with me. We're going to war!" That's not the right way to go about it. Do you know who you pick? You pick godly people who love Jesus. And you pick godly people who love Jesus enough to tell you, "Dude, no..."

They might even tell you that you're wrong and that it's not worth pursuing this path. Or they might ask, "What did you say and do? How did it go?" Find people who are willing to tell you the truth, even if it's not something you want to hear. Don't choose people who will go along with you no matter what—whether they think you're wrong or not. Get two or three people and go back again. It says to confirm by two or three witnesses.

"If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church." Now, here's the deal: if you're going through this process, and what you want is not something that should be taken to the church, then don't do it at all. Let it go. But if it's a sin that is serious enough, and is something that you would take to the church, then go ahead and go through with it. That's the biblical way to do it.

"If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector."

You believe that their sin would result in—were it to become known and they were unrepentant—excommunication from the church. Now, just because they insulted your favorite coffee brand isn't going to get someone kicked out of church. Think about all the things we can be offended by. How many of them are worthy of church involvement, or something we would say the church needs to know about if they don't repent of it? If it's not something that meets that level, then guess what? You probably ought to let it go.

So, what are we to do? If someone legitimately sins against us, yes, those are the steps. On the other hand, here's what we need to do to maybe not be offended so much. We need to stay cool. Not like people wrote in your yearbook, "Hey, stay cool forever, man!" That's not what I'm

talking about. When something happens, and someone hurts your feelings, or you hear something, what happens? You immediately feel that little rush of heat to your head, right?

Here's the deal: make a choice at that moment not to let it turn your face red and your veins bulging. The whole thing. Stop it right there and go, "You know what? I'm not going to get upset about this, and I'm not going to let this offend me."

It says in Proverbs 19:11:

"Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs."

They earn respect by overlooking wrongs. When I think back on the people I have most respected, they are the ones who managed to keep their demeanor and their love for people the same, no matter what others said or did to them. Those are the people I admire most. Those are the people you will find very successful in life. They are the ones who, when someone insults them, go, "You know what? I'm not going to let them affect me. I'm not going to take offense at that. I'm going to move on with life." They earn respect by overlooking wrongs.

James 1:19-20:

"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires."

Now, are there things people say that offend or bother us? Yes! It's like this: there are plenty of other people in the world. At times, people you love, or those you are around, or even those you are forced to be around because of circumstances, will say things that bother you. Learn to demonstrate the love of Jesus by being slow to speak and slow to get angry. And recognize that human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

I'm not on social media very much. But I got on Facebook a few times over the last couple of weeks. Within a few minutes, I remembered why I stopped getting on Facebook, even for a few minutes, because I came across something that just made me mad. I started typing, no... then I started typing, no... then I finally said, "No, I'm just going to move on." Sometimes it's better not to say anything in the moment because those are the things you regret most. Am I right?

So sometimes, just take a minute. Instead of letting your anger take over right then, say, "You know what? I'm going to be slow to get angry. I'm going to move on for a while and see." Today, I have no desire at all to go back and address that. None! So we need to learn to be slow to speak and slow to get angry. And the other thing we need to do is be careful about trying to listen to or hear everything everyone is saying. You know, Facebook and some of those social media things are basically just technological eavesdropping, aren't they?

You're listening to conversations or to what people post, and you don't have to listen to them. Here's what Ecclesiastes 7:21-22 says: ***"Don't eavesdrop on others—you may hear your servant curse you. For you know how often you yourself have cursed others."*** So be careful about going into situations where you're listening to all these people who are contributing to the

conversation. Why eavesdrop? If you're just looking through—"I just love Facebook. I get to see all of my friends. I know what they're eating for lunch and what they're doing. "

Hey, fine! I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. But if you go on that thing and something gets you so mad that you're going to say something you'll regret, maybe it's time to take a break. Go read a book. Go walk your dog. Do something with your family. Get away from it for a little while, and just say, "You know what? I'm going to get out of it." Sometimes people get so caught up in that stuff that they feel like it's real.

Somebody came to me this past week, and they were like, "We're not sure what to do. This is what happened, and now there's a big Facebook thing, and it's a fight, and people are going back and forth." I said, "Well, what were people mad about?" They told me, and I said, "You know what? In and of itself, that's not a big deal. Don't let other people determine for you what a big deal is. If something is not a big deal, move on and don't get drawn into it. Just because everybody else says it's a big deal or they're making a big deal out of it doesn't mean you've got to see it as a big deal. See it for what it is. 'You know what? I don't really care. I'm moving on.'"

Don't feel like you've got to get involved in every single thing just because you hear it. On the flip side, as you go forth and talk about Christ, trying to do the right thing and to follow the things of God, there are people who will try to tell you, "Well, that doesn't matter." Don't let people tell you that things that really do matter don't, and don't let people try to tell you that things that don't matter do. You all write that down. Do you understand what I'm saying there? Because I had to really focus just to get that out!

Don't let other people determine for you what is important and what is not. Stop getting caught up in things that are not important. Don't be offended by them. Don't let them rule you. Don't build your fortress. Stay away from it. The second part of this is that sometimes, when people say something—if something hurts our feelings or bothers us—we want a little payback. We want a little revenge. Maybe it's by putting in something really snarky as a response, or saying something, or doing something to hurt them back. The Bible talks about that specifically:

Romans 12:17-19:

"Never pay back evil with more evil."

You know, if you have to justify what you did by going, "Yeah, but do you know what they did to me?" Then guess what? You're wrong. You're wrong. "That seems harsh. Why would you do that?" "Let me tell you what they did to me!" If you've got to justify something wrong you did by telling the actions of somebody else that caused you to do something wrong, you're still wrong. And you're wrong twice because you let what they did affect you to the point that it caused you to do something that isn't right. I'm getting a lot of those in there. I hope you are getting these straight.

"Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable." Be honorable! Being honorable sometimes means being silent and loving when

others aren't. ***"Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone."*** You aren't going to be able to live in peace with everyone. You're just not.

That's one of the reasons I'm glad we have a bigger church. Do you know what? If there's somebody here you just can't gee-haw with, fine. Go sit over there. Go to a different service. There are hundreds of people here. Find somebody else to hang out with. It's okay. We're supposed to love everybody. If something happens to them, be willing to help. But that doesn't mean you've got to like everybody. You may not like everybody. That's okay. But they don't have to be your enemy. They can still be your family.

"Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord."

Sometimes people really do sin against you. Do you know what the Bible says? "Well, here's what we want to do. We want to see..." But here's the thing: if they're a brother, they've sinned against God, and God will reprove and correct them for what has happened. Here's why we want to put that in His hands: His correction and His reproof are perfect. Sometimes we might be over the top, or we might be wrong. But God will always do what's best for them as well as what's best for us.

So leave that in His hands. Never take revenge. Leave that to God's righteous anger. And if something needs to happen—if they're a believer, that's reproof and correction. If they're not a believer, God will visit His wrath at the right time. But leave that in His hands because that's for Him to do, not us. Ultimately, their sin is against Him. If they've sinned against you, they've sinned against God. Let Him take care of it because He is always perfect, righteous, and just. ***"For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord."***

The first part was "stay cool." Here's the second part: stay out of it. What do I mean by that? We all play different parts in this. Sometimes we're the person who offends. Sometimes we're the one who is offended. And sometimes we're the ones our friends call to help build their fortress because they're offended. Stay out of it! Stay out of arguments you're not involved in. Stay out of things! Don't get caught up in, "That's my buddy. That's my girl. I'm going to be with them. If somebody did something to hurt them, I'm armed up. I'm ready to go!"

Don't take up someone else's offense. When someone comes and says, "Guess what so-and-so did to me?" the most loving and righteous thing you can say is: Have you talked to them? If they haven't gone and talked to the person who offended them, they're going outside what the Scripture says. They've already claimed the high ground and are now trying to gather their forces, because it's natural for us to want to get people on our side. And when they tell you about it, here's the deal:

We almost always tell things in a way that puts us in the best light. Am I right? We leave out a little part. Or maybe we yelled something. (*harshly*) "Hey, would you come here a minute?" Then we say, "I just told them, (*gently*) 'Hey, would you mind coming here for a second?'" That's

what we do! That's why Proverbs says, *"A man's cause seems just until another comes and examines him."*

We can make things sound like—people can do that to us. Don't get sucked into that. The most loving thing to say is, "Have you talked to them? Have you talked to them about it? Because that's what you need to do. Go and talk to them."

Proverbs 17:9:

"Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends."

When we, or someone we know, just dwells on an issue or a problem, it can separate friends. We all probably know people we've been friends with for years and years and years who got mad about something, and now we don't talk. Or you've seen that in someone else's life. I've heard of families separated over stuff that I'm like, "Really? Over that?" For years—maybe even forever. We don't want to be a part of that. We want to help restore relationships, not drive them farther apart. And saying, "I can't believe they did that to you! I'm ready to go..." isn't helping.

How many of you have ever just walked down the road and there is a big dog sitting out there, and you didn't know that dog or its owner? How many of you would be willing to go over there and just yank them by the ears and see what they do? How many of you would say that's dumb? All right, three of you. That's good. I'm a little worried about the rest of you all...

Proverbs 26:17:

"Interfering in someone else's argument is as foolish as yanking a dog's ears."

I know you're all going to remember that one! "What did the preacher preach about?" "Not yanking dog's ears..." Interfering in someone's arguments is just as foolish. Stay out of other people's arguments. Stay out of their offense. They might ask, "Well, are you loyal to me?" "Yes, I'm loyal to you. I'm loyal enough to tell you the truth. You need to go talk to them, and I'm not going to take sides. I love you, and I want you to fix this."

Another thing I've seen a lot is that the two original parties work it out and are ready to move on. But the friends are still mad about it, aren't they? That's why I tell newly married couples, "You know what? You all need to find a couple of godly people you can go to for advice, but be careful about going to your parents for advice about arguments you're having. Because you're going to make up and be ready to move on, and your mom is still mad about what your husband said. Or dad is still mad about how you treated his daughter."

They may have a harder time getting over it than you did, so be careful about including people. Go to someone who will give you godly counsel. And be that godly counsel when people come to you. Don't be the one who jumps in on the side. Not only can it hurt them, but it might also hurt your relationship with that other person. So be careful. Don't yank the dog's ears. Move on.

2 Timothy 2:23:

"Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights."

Just stay out of them. You see arguments going on all the time. Stay out of them.

Proverbs 26:20:

"Fire goes out without wood, and quarrels disappear when gossip stops."

One of the things that happens is that the original issue might be small. But now it gets spread, and spread, and spread, and it just gets bigger and bigger. And if we just stop... be the place where the fire stops. A fire goes out without wood. Quarrels disappear when gossip stops. So be the stop. Be the firebreak in your friends' lives when they come to you. "Did you talk to them? Because you need to go talk to them. You need to find out. You need to tell them what it was that offended you, and give them an opportunity."

One thing I've found is that when two people are mad about something somebody else said, 98% of the time it's just a misunderstanding. If they just deal with it, it gets fixed easily, and people move on. But if they don't do that and it keeps spreading, it can get to the point where you think it's too big to fix. Be a firebreak. And when it comes to you, say, "Nope. It's stopping right here. I'm not going to repeat it to anybody else. I'm going to tell you what the right thing to do is. I'm going to pray with you about it, but I'm done."

If someone wants to come tell you how the other friend got offended by someone, I say, "Nope. Did you tell them they need to go talk to that person? That's what they need to do. I'm not letting that fire get on me. I'm not yanking any dog ears today." A fire goes out without wood. Sometimes you will find people who are constantly offended and always gathering others to their side, with something always going on. You can call it drama or whatever.

Here's what the Bible says: "A quarrelsome person starts fights as easily as hot embers light charcoal or fire lights wood." You can call them dramatic or whatever. This is a red flag. If somebody comes to you and says, "Well, I'm just not into drama," that's a red flag, people! People who are into drama always say they're not into drama. Am I right? They're like, "I don't know why all these people are doing all these things..." Red flag! So beware of quarrelsome people. Here's what the Bible says:

Proverbs 22:24-25:

"Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul."

Stay away! Stay cool, stay out of it, and sometimes, stay away. It's just a cycle in their lives. There's always something stirred up and going on. Stay away from it, because guess what? It's going to endanger you. You're going to learn to be like them. Before you know it, you're going to start seeing drama come up in your life all the time. You're going to start seeing arguments come

up in your life because that's what happens when you hang out with people who do that all the time. So stay away. It really is just that simple.

Now, finally, here's the last thing. I'm going to go through them again: Stay cool, and don't let the fire spread. Say, "You know what? I'm going to choose not to be offended. I'm going to choose to let that go." When it comes to other things, stay out of it. "I'm not getting involved in that! I love you, and I'm sorry your feelings were hurt, or that you believe someone did something to you, but here's the right thing to do. I'm not going to get involved in some gossip, anger-stirring deal here. I'm not doing it." There are some people you just need to stay away from.

Here's the final thing:

Colossians 3:13: ***"Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you."***

You know, the most amazing thing to me is that we have this example. Jesus came to earth, and there were people who said things about Him, and He didn't respond to them. He did offend people because He told them the life-saving truth of the gospel, and sometimes people were offended by that. That's just a fact. But then they arrested Him, beat Him, spat upon Him, and while He was dying on the cross, there were people in the crowd yelling things like, "Hey, if you really were the Son of God, you'd come down from there."

They were taunting God in the flesh as He was dying, bleeding, His flesh ripped from His body by the whipping. This horrible, agonizing death. Is there anyone who would have said, "All right, just one little lightning bolt"? I totally get that. I understand that, but that's not what Jesus did. Not only did He not respond in kind, but He didn't even say, "I've seen your face. I know who you are, bud. I'm going to remember you!" Do you know what He said? "Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing."

He made allowance. He told them, but they didn't believe He was the Son of God. He said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." That's the example we are to follow in our dealings with people. So make allowance. Recognize that people are going to say things. Maybe they don't mean anything by them, or maybe they do. Maybe somebody hurt them, and now they're trying to hurt you. There can be many reasons, but make allowance for other people's faults, and remember that the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Ultimately, here is what we remember. We remember Jesus on the cross and all that God has forgiven us. You know what? In light of what God has forgiven me, that thing somebody else did that offended me is pretty small. So I'm going to forgive them and move on. Being offended is a powerful drug that wants to suck you in and set everything in motion. It always wants more. It always wants to stir up more anger. The way to stop it is to say no before it's in your system.

The best thing to do is to be unoffendable. Just decide, "I'm not going to be offended by what people say. I'm not going to be offended by what happens, what I see on social media, or anything else. I'm going to choose to live a life of love. I'm not going to keep a record of wrongs."

I'm going to make allowances for other people's faults. I'm going to forgive people who offend me, and I'm going to remember most of all that God forgave me."