

§185. Jesus Teaches on Christian Duty (Luke 17:1–10)

Introduction

1. This is primarily addressed to Disciples
2. Luke 17:1-10 serves as an exhortation for Jesus' followers to distinguish their conduct and attitudes from those of the Pharisees.
3. Jesus uses point and counterpoint teaching method to address disciples and pharisees.
4. A primary goal of this teaching is to warn the disciples to avoid the hypocritical behaviors characteristic of the Pharisees.
5. The disciples require constant spiritual formation
6. The door remains open for the Pharisees to respond and repent.
7. While this passage may seem like a collection of unrelated sayings, it is actually a unified exhortation for the disciples to reject specific Pharisaisic behaviors.
8. Jesus contrasts kingdom living with the Pharisees' disregard for the vulnerable, their lack of faith, and their pursuit of social status.

Exposition

17:1. Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!"

1. The stumbling blocks can be the specific sins of the Pharisees highlighted in chapter 16.
2. The Nature of Offense: The "things that cause people to sin" (skandala) are defined as "traps" or anything that causes a spiritual fall, accompanied by a "woe" that signals severe divine judgment.

3. The Trap of Offense: The term skandala refers to the "bait-stick" of a trap; while obstacles to the spiritual life are unavoidable in this world, those who trigger these traps for others remain morally accountable.
4. By applying lessons from parables originally aimed at Pharisees (like the Rich Man and Lazarus) to his own followers, Jesus suggests that even disciples are capable of acting with indifference or hostility toward the marginalized.
5. Shared Temptations: Jesus warning that disciples are susceptible to the same sins as the Pharisees, such as the misuse of wealth and the leading of others astray.

17:2. 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.

1. Causing the little ones to stumble is interpreted as an act of injustice or inhospitality toward the poor and vulnerable, a sin so grave that a violent death is preferable to the resulting divine judgment.
2. "little ones" likely refers to new or socially insignificant believers rather than literal children, specifically those present in the immediate crowd.
3. Vulnerability of "Little Ones": The "little ones" are defined as those who are helpless without God's aid, referring either to new converts or to the entire community of believers who rely completely on divine support.
4. Severity of Judgment: Jesus uses a "woe" and the imagery of drowning to signify a judgment so severe that a violent, immediate death is actually preferable to facing it.

17:3. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

1. The Central Theme: The command "Be on your guard!" serves as the thematic core, warning disciples to avoid the same prideful and exclusionary behaviors seen in the Pharisees.

2. Dual Christian Duty: Believers have an equal responsibility to both confront (rebuke) a person in their sin and to offer forgiveness when that person repents.
3. Active Opposition to Sin: Followers of Jesus are called to confront sin through rebuke rather than being indifferent to evil, maintaining a balance between compassion and moral strength.

17:4. 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."

1. Forgiveness as a Daily Requirement: Constant forgiveness is not an extraordinary act of virtue but a basic, daily requirement for those whose lives are modeled after a merciful God.
2. Limitless Forgiveness: The command to forgive "seven times in a day" signifies that forgiveness must be a habitual, infinite practice rather than a mathematical limit.
3. Restoration Over Segregation: Unlike the "elder brother" archetype, disciples must actively seek the restoration of sinners through direct confrontation and immediate, unlimited forgiveness.
4. Boundless Generosity: The mention of forgiving "seven times" is not a literal limit but a symbolic representation of the need for an inexhaustible, generous spirit of forgiveness.
5. Reciprocal Grace: This radical commitment to forgiving others is presented as the only appropriate response for those who have already received God's forgiveness themselves.
6. Focus on Duty, Not Sincerity: While the world might doubt the genuineness of a repeat offender's repentance, the believer's primary responsibility is to offer forgiveness regardless of those doubts.
7. Avoidance of Grudges: The goal of rebuke is restoration; therefore, it must be paired with a readiness to forgive that precludes harboring long-term resentment.

17:5. And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

1. text

17:6. 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.

1. text

17:7. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’?

1. text

17:8. But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’?

1. text

17:9. Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.

1. text

17:10. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’ ”

1. text

Application

1. **Offender or Guardian?** Disciples are responsible for the spiritual safety of other (esp. young) believers. e.g. my use of media should not cause offence to others.

2. **Performer or Transformer?** Disciples are not immune to the sins of the Pharisees, specifically pride, love of money, and social separation; Check if I am performer or transformer. e.g. who are your little one?
3. **Extremism or Balance?** Jesus calls for a "rebuke" followed by "forgiveness" Extremes of harshness or tolerance is not biblical. Love does not mean ignoring sin, but it also does not mean holding a grudge. E.g. we should have the courage to confront privately and directly. However, the moment that person acknowledges the fault, the disciple must be equally quick to restore the relationship and refuse to bring the matter up again.
4. **Occasional or Habitual?** Doubt on a person's sincerity when they repeat a mistake. Our duty is to provide the opportunity for restoration; the sincerity of the other person's heart is God's business, not yours. E.g. marriage – sorry multiple times.