**We are Unworthy Servants**

Luke 17:1-10

Key Verse 10

“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

**Introduction**

In this passage, Jesus gave His disciples a serious warning about causing someone to stumble. He also taught them how to deal with brothers and sisters sinning against us, how to forgive them unlimitedly, and what kind of attitude they should have after they forgive others. In the NIV Bible, today’s passage is under the heading “Sin, Faith, Duty.” May God help us to build up our love relationship and form unity by obeying our Lord’s words about these three important titles.

1. Read verse 1-3a. To whom was Jesus speaking? What are the things that cause people to stumble? What does Jesus say about those who cause others to stumble? (1) How serious is it for anyone to cause a little one to stumble? (2) What should we do to prevent this from happening? (3a)

1-1. Read verse 1-3a.

Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. **2** It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. **3** So watch yourselves.

1-2. To whom was Jesus speaking?

· Jesus’ teaching was directed toward a specific audience which was his disciples.

· Jesus’ disciples were the ones who would succeed His ministry, become spiritual leaders, and form the first church.

1-3. What are the things that cause people to stumble?

***Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come***

· Causing another person to stumble means to cause people to fail, make mistakes, get hurt, and commit sin.

· Things causing people to stumble: all kind of sins, wrong teachings, misbehaviors, bad influence, hurting people, hypocrisy, producing harmful things such as pornography and violent movies, drugs, and so on.

. Human beings are vulnerable to corruption, curiosity, and sins.

· Causing others to stumble is inevitable and natural because of man’s sinful nature and weakness.

. Living in this world, we experience temptations everyday of our lives.

. For instance even if we watch a television show, we still encounter commercials that tempt us to be materialistic and that want us to believe the lie that we need things to be happy.

. If we use the internet daily, it is bound to happen to see unwanted images. And many say, “What’s the big deal?”

1-4. What does Jesus say about those who cause others to stumble? (1)

***woe to anyone through whom they come***

· Those who cause others to stumble will face woe and judgment from God.

· We could make some excuses about causing someone to stumble such as our weakness or some character flaw, but we would still be held responsible for causing them to stumble.

· In most cases, our sin is the major cause of the stumbling. When we cause someone to stumble through our sin, God counts it and brings judgment.

· We could cause someone to stumble, but God takes it seriously.

1-5. How serious is it for anyone to cause a little one to stumble? (2)

***It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.***

\* This is a harsh warning. It literally means that it would be better to die by jumping into the ocean with a millstone tied around our neck rather than causing a little one to stumble.

· It shows how serious this sin is, to cause a little one to stumble.

· God will bring severe judgment to those who cause little ones to stumble. The sin deserves death.

· ‘Little ones’ refer to those who could stumble easily such as little children, young people, and young believers.

· ‘Little ones’ could be anyone who is under our care and influence.

· For the disciples, the little ones were the people whom they taught, cared for, and led.

· Jesus gave great warning to His disciples for they were in a position where many would come under their care and influence, and could stumble.

. We are in the ministry of raising up disciples in accordance with God’s world mission and campus mission. As Bible teachers and leaders, we need this warning on a regular basis.

. It’s quite possible for our children and Bible students to say, “Well, if that is how God’s representatives behave and speak, I suppose the whole thing’s a waste of time!”

. How can we avoid putting someone in that situation? The answer would is, “humility.”

We must curb our pride and rely on the Holy Spirit to not repeat our habitual sins.

1-6. What should we do to prevent this from happening? (3a)

***So watch yourselves***

· We should be very careful not to cause someone, especially little ones to stumble.

· We have to check carefully if we are causing someone to stumble.

· Whatever we do, it can give influence to someone. So we should be careful about what we say, how we behave, and how to live.



. The Maunsell Sea Forts based in England is still standing as of today. These are army Forts improvement were used in defensive tactics during World War II.

. Believe or not we are amidst fierce spiritual battles everyday. Armies should set watch all the time, in case the enemy tries something. Likewise we should watch ourselves, for we know that things that cause people to sin are bound to come.

. If you know they are coming, you get ready. Do not wait until the temptation is upon you to get ready. By then, it will be too late.

. One little mouse click is so easy, if you are not already ready to stand against the temptation.

· We should make every effort not to cause someone to stumble by dying to our natural sinful nature and crucifying our mortal bodies on Jesus’ cross moment by moment.

. In order for us not to cause someone to stumble, we must guard and watch ourselves first so that we may not fall or drift away. How?

· One of the ways to avoid causing someone to stumble is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, we can easily cause others to stumble because of our sinful nature and weakness.

· When we are filled with Holy Spirit, we can give good influence to other people.

Romans 8:5-8 reads,

“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. **6** The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. **7** The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. **8** Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.”

Exodus 20:20 reads,

“God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

. Another way to watch ourselves is to hold on to the word of God. In fact, it is only when we reject God’s word that we sin.

. Because we know that God’s word says not to do something, but we still want to do it.

. So we reject God’s word, and do it anyway. We chose to take God’s word out of our heart.

. What first lays hold of the heart in the morning is highly likely to occupy the place all the day.

. First impressions are the most durable, because there is not a multitude of ideas to drive them out, or prevent them from being deeply fixed in the moral feeling

. To hold on to the word of God or not, that is the real issue.

Psalm 119:11 reads,

“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

. Prayer is another strategy to watch ourselves through relying on the Lord humbly.

Matthews 6:13 reads,

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

. Also we must simply do what Jesus tells us to do.

. For example we cannot pray, “Lord, lead me not into temptation,” and then go to a party where we know we will be tempted. God may lead us away from temptation, but we have to choose to follow him.

. It is not sincere to pray one thing and then do something else. We do not put ourselves in the way of temptation, thinking we are strong enough – that is how one may fall into temptation.

2. Read versed 3b-4. What should we do if our brother or sister sins, but repents? (3b) How many times should we forgive those who repent? (4) Why must we repeatedly forgive those who sin against us? (Mt 18:21-22)

2-1. Read versed 3b-4.

“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. **4** Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

2-2. What should we do if our brother or sister sins, but repents? (3b)

***“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.***

· ‘Rebuke them’- When our brother or sister sins against us, first we should rebuke them so they would repent.

· We should not ignore their sin. Ignoring someone’s sin and taking no action for it is letting the person commit more sins and be judged by God. This is not true love for our brothers and sisters.

· We have to rebuke brothers or sisters who are sinning to stop sinning and come back to God. Again this is true love for our brothers and sisters.

· By rebuking, we can help someone to repent and receive forgiveness.

· But it is hard to rebuke someone in many ways. We might have concerns about being misunderstood or about the other person’s feeling being hurt in the process of our rebuking them. We also risk our relationship could be broken.

. We need great wisdom to rebuke others.

2 Timothy 4:2 reads,

“Correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.”

. In our society, it is almost a violation of civil rights to suggest that someone has done something wrong.

. Those who are rebuking must be prayerful but those who are rebuked must be even more careful to humbly accept the rebuke.

Proverbs 9:7-9 reads,

“Whoever corrects a mocker invites insults;

whoever rebukes the wicked incurs abuse.

**8** Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you;

rebuke the wise and they will love you.

**9** Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still;

teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.

· Rebuking could save our brothers and sisters and it is a higher level of love.

· We should pray a lot to make our rebuking effective and helpful.

· Rebuking is not our judgment but action of love. We have to rebuke not with a judgmental mind but with genuine love.

***If they repent, forgive them***

· We have to forgive once they repent. We can’t require any other thing to forgive.

· ‘Forgive them’(3), ‘You must forgive them’ (4)– These are the Lord Jesus’ commands. We should obey Him by any means. We cannot make any excuse.

· We might not feel like to forgiving someone because of the emotional and spiritual wounds that we received.

· But we should forgive others by obeying God’s absolute commands.

· ‘If they repent’ – Repentance is required.

Luke 11:4 reads,

“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”

Matthews 6:14-15 reads,

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Luke 24:47 also reads,

“...and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

In Luke 23:34, Jesus set a good example in this regard,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

2-3. How many times should we forgive those who repent? (4)

***“Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”***

· Forgiving seven times a day means unlimited forgiveness.

· There is no limitation for our forgiveness.

· Jesus knew that it would be hard for us to obey this command. So he said, “you **must** forgive them”

2-4. Why must we repeatedly forgive those who sin against us? (Mt 18:21-22)

**21** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” **22** Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

**32** “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘**I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’** (Mt. 18:32,33)

· We have to forgive because God forgave us our huge debts, which our the huge amount of sins that we’ve committed.

· God forgives us even seventy- seven times in a single day. We commit numerous sins in a day, both towards God and to our neighbors consciously and subconsciously. Each time when we ask forgiveness, God forgives us.

· We have to have the same mercy on our fellow brothers and sisters and forgive just as God forgives us.

· We cannot forgive others unlimitedly based on our human nature.

· Only when we know God’s forgiveness and his mercy for us, we can forgive others with God’s forgiveness and mercy.

· Our forgiveness is godly forgiveness, not a human level of forgiveness.

· Unlimited forgiveness comes from God.

. Someone says, “I forgive, but I won’t forget.” When you bring old issues back up and choose to think about them again, that is not forgiveness.

. You cannot control your memories, but you can control how you choose to think about those memories. Often husbands and wives remember and bring up past unpleasant memories about each other. May the Lord have mercy on us!

3. Read verses 5-6. How did the apostles respond to Jesus? (5) What was Jesus’ reply? (6) What kind of faith did Jesus require them to have? (6)

3-1. Read verses 5-6.

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”**6** He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.

3-2. How did the apostles respond to Jesus? (5)

***“Increase our faith”***

· The disciples thought they needed more faith to obey Jesus’ command.

· They thought that it was too much for them to obey His word.

· For them, even forgiving just one time was so hard. Forgiving seven times a day seemed too hard for them. It was overwhelming.

3-3. What was Jesus’ reply? (6)

***“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.***



. A Mulberry tree is a very fast growing shade tree with a large spreading head. They do very well under full sun and the dry desert heat.

. It is very hard to uproot it due to its roots.

. Sometimes forgiving others seems harder than uprooting and transplanting a tree.

. Sometimes a grudge or ill feeling feels deeply lodged in our mind or heart.

Jesus wants us to forgive others. Jesus wants us to obey his teaching without calculation and experience God’s power of deliverance and help.

3-4. What kind of faith did Jesus require them to have? (6)

***If you have faith as small as a mustard seed***

· Faith as small as mustard seed refers to genuine and real faith.

· The disciples asked for bigger faith, but Jesus emphasized the quality of faith.

· It was the matter of what kind rather than how much faith they had.

· A mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds on earth, but it grows to be a tall tree where even birds can stay.

· A mustard seed grows to be a big tree, because it is a real seed even though it is small.

· Genuine and real faith has power.

***You can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.***

· If we have genuine faith in God, we can forgive any kind sin unlimitedly.

· We have to believe God’s unlimited forgiveness for us, his great mercy, his love and goodness and his sovereignty.

· So when we have difficulty forgiving someone, we should remember God’s forgiveness and mercy and have genuine faith in God.

. You only have to take that small amount of faith that you have and put it into practice.

4. Read versed 7-10. What would a master say to the servant who comes in from the field after working hard? (7, 8) What should we say when we have done everything we were told to do? (9, 10)

4-1. Read versed 7-10.

**7** “Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? **8** Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? **9** Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? **10** So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

4-2. What would a master say to the servant who comes in from the field after working hard? (7, 8)

***‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’?***

· The master would tell the servant to prepare his supper.

· The servant had another duty to carry out in the master’s home. Still needs to do this work despite his additional hard work out in the field.

· The master would tell him to do this duty because that’s the servant’s job.

4-3. What should we say when we have done everything we were told to do? (9, 10)

***Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’”***

· The master would not thank the servant because the servant did what he was supposed to do. It was his basic duty.

. After working hard, we naturally like to be rewarded, recognized and thanked, even if we receive a paycheck.

· Sometimes when we obey one of Jesus’ commands, we feel pretty good and we are tempted to relax and take it easy. Or we are hoping to get some kind of immediate praise, reward, or blessing.

. But there is one problem with expecting reward, praise, or blessing. We become unthankful and proud. Then we get grumpy and self-righteous. We lose our joy and zeal to serve our Lord.

. This is not the right attitude of a servant of God. Rather, our attitude should be like those who say, ***‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’”***

. We don’t thank someone who does what he or she is supposed to do. Parents should take care of their children. People don’t praise parents who take care of their children as much as they might deserve. That is their duty.

· After we forgive our brothers and sister, we should say, “we have only done our duty.” Why? It is because we did it out of gratitude toward our God who forgave us.

· Forgiving is our duty that was commanded by God.

· We cannot be proud of ourselves after forgiving our brothers and sisters for this is simply our duty before God.

· ‘We are unworthy servants’ – We were forgiven of a huge amount of sins by God. When we think about how much we were forgiven, we cannot expect any praise from God or others after we forgive others.

· We should still be humble after forgiving others even unlimitedly.

· We have to forgive with thankful hearts remembering what God has done for us and should say, “I am an unworthy servant, I have only done my duty”

. We have a choice to make daily. Am I going to seek recognition from men or from God. Am I seeking to please God or men?

Romans 11:35-36 reads,

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 reads,

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle...But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

**Conclusion**

We must watch ourselves that we may not cause anyone to stumble, especially little ones. We should be able to rebuke our brothers and sisters who are sinning so they would repent and we must forgive them. We can forgive unlimitedly by genuine faith in God. We should become God’s humble servants even after forgiving others, remembering what God has done for us, for that is our duty as His forgiven sinners. We were not chosen because we are special, but because of God’s grace. We also know that God does not need anyone to do him a favor. Rather it is we who have been shown great favor by God. We don’t deserve the privilege to be called his servants. But in His mercy, He has called us to his service. God can do His own work better by himself, but has graciously given us a part in his redemptive work. It is a privilege to serve God’s work. So we, knowing how unqualified we are for the work given to us, can only say, “Thank you, God, for using us. We are but unworthy servants.” Eph 2:8-10 reads, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

**One word, “We have only done our duty”**