

## Teaching about Christian Service

### Luke 17:1-19

*Luke 17:1-2: Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! 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.*

### Background Notes

In Luke 16, our Lord gave instructions to His disciples about the proper view and proper use of money. Although this teaching was addressed to the disciples, the Pharisees, who loved money, were listening in on what the Lord had to say. So the Lord turned His attention to these self-righteous men and rebuked them for their hypocrisy and unbelief.

It was in this context that the Lord gave the account of the rich man and Lazarus, clearly denouncing and warning the self-righteous religious leaders who thought that they had it made with God, and thought that they were even blessed by God because they were rich. How wrong they were! Self-righteous and self-satisfied people today are denounced and warned in the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.

In Luke 17 the Lord turned His attention again to the disciples. He addressed several areas of attitude, lifestyle and behavior that should characterize servants of the Kingdom of God. Once again the Pharisees may have been listening in on what the Lord was teaching His disciples, because in verses 1-2 the Lord began talking about how serious it is to stumble, or hinder, the spiritual growth of little ones – meaning both "little" in age, and "little" in understanding of the things of God.

The Pharisees were certainly guilty of this sin. Remember back in Luke 11:52, the Lord denounced the scribes and Pharisees for not only refusing to enter the Kingdom themselves, but for hindering those who were entering in. Luke 11:52: *"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."*

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. Faithful Christian servants do not stumble little ones.**

*Verses 1-2: Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! 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.*

The Lord Jesus said that because of sin in this world, there will be "stumbling blocks." A stumbling block is something that hinders the spiritual growth of a little one. A "little one" can be a child, or anyone who is young or weak in the Christian faith.

Stumbling a little one is a serious sin. The Lord Jesus said that it would be better if a millstone were hung around that person's neck and he were thrown into the sea. A person would be better off dead than stumbling a little one – and if you have ever seen a 1st century millstone, there's no doubt here that the Lord meant "dead." And that would include believers. It would be better to die and go home to Heaven early than to stumble young believers.

You can stumble or hinder the spiritual growth of a little one by your lifestyle as well as by what you do and by what you say. Do you practice what you preach? What do you watch on TV? Where do you go and what do you do when you're on vacation? How do you talk about other Christians? Do you tell the truth at all times? Where do you draw the line on jokes you tell - or laugh at? Is everything you do with your money above reproach? Faithful Christian servants do not stumble little ones.

### **2. Faithful Christian servants are willing to forgive.**

*Verses 3-6: Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 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." 5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." 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.*

What should we Christians do if a fellow believer sins against us in some way - maybe even slanders us? The Scripture gives us the steps we should take. First of all, we should make sure that we have the facts straight. It's very easy to misjudge a person's motives. That's why the Lord said, "Judge not that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). So don't judge a person's motives.

And then don't "nit-pick." In Matthew 7:3-5, the Lord said we should be sure to remove the huge plank that's blocking the vision of our own eyes before we try to help remove the specks of sawdust from our fellow believers' eyes!

Further, before you rebuke a fellow-believer for sinning against you, the Lord gave another directive: Be willing to forgive - even if that person sins against you many times! (Luke 17:3). Some Christians never take this step. They would rather take revenge than forgive! We must be willing to forgive any sin if the offender repents.

Matthew 18 covers the further steps that we take if the one who sinned against us does not repent, or continues to sin against us, or is unwilling to accept our forgiveness. These steps involve the help of other believers as well as the discipline of the church. Matthew 18:15-17: *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."*

Being willing to forgive takes a lot of faith. No wonder the disciples said what we've all prayed many times, "Lord increase our faith!" (v5). The Lord's response, about the small mustard-seed-like faith and uprooting the deeply rooted mulberry tree, means essentially this: it's not the **amount** of faith that counts, but the **quality of the faith**. Even a small genuine faith will enable the believer to willingly forgive fellow believers. Faithful Christian servants are willing to forgive.

### 3. Faithful Christian servants do not serve for reward.

*Verses 7-10: 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'? **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'? **9** Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. **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.'"*

Why do you serve the Lord? If your answer is "For reward" - that's the wrong answer! In view of our Lord's teaching here, the right answer is that we serve because it's our **duty to serve** as faithful Christians. The Lord will reward us, even more than we deserve, and there are many Scriptures that back up this truth. But the point here is that the Lord is under no obligation to reward us for doing what is right. Service should be **normal** for us, including being willing to forgive fellow believers and not stumble little ones. That's just part of our duty as faithful servants. Faithful Christian servants do not serve for reward.

## Practical Application:

### Let's take a "Samaritan stance"!

By "stance" here, we're talking about the thankful stance, or attitude, of the cleansed Samaritan leper in verses 11-19: *Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13 And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. 17 So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18 Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."* We should have this stance, too!

The Jewish people considered Samaritans to be foreigners - outcasts and second-class citizens. Why did this cleansed Samaritan leper return to thank the Lord? Because, as a despised Samaritan, not one of God's favored covenant people, he more fully realized the grace and mercy that had been shown to him. All ten lepers showed faith, because they all obeyed the Lord and went to the priest as the Law commanded. And as they obeyed, they all were healed - but only the Samaritan returned to thank the Lord.

The Lord asked, "Where are the nine?" And the Lord is still asking, "Where are the others who were healed?" As believers, we've been saved by the incredibly costly and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Have we returned to thank Him appropriately for His amazing love for us, and for His grace and mercy to us? Let's take a "Samaritan stance"!