

There is fundamental of Christianity.... which grates against a fundamental of American society. Today's passage deals with a matter that can so easily pass through one ear and out the other... to anyone who prioritizes this American ideal... over what Scripture so clearly teaches.

"What **I** do is my own business" and "What you do... so long as it does not infringe upon the rights of others... is your own business..." These are so deeply embroidered into the fabric of American society... that even Christians take it to heart and try to live their Christian life by it. ... It is an attitude we frequently have - the idea that we are not responsible to anyone else... and no one else has the right to make demand or claim upon us with regard to our behavior. ... It is basically the old question, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" to which many answer according to the American ideal of independence ... "*No, I'm not!*" ... But in our passage today... the Lord is awakening a sense of responsibility to others... that would have us answer a different way.

Let me give you the essence of the passage we will be looking at today... and then we will go back and see how Jesus presents this truth.

No one can be a Christian and ignore his brother. ... **[PAUSE]** ... No one can be a Christian and ignore his brother. ... No one can be a Christian and fail to recognize that his/her life has influence upon other lives around... and that influence governs and limits to some degree the activity of every Christian. What you do affects others around you... especially if you are known as a Christian. And it requires a quality of faith to be employed at all times. Putting our faith to work is essential. It takes an active faith to be involved in the lives of others... the way that the Lord requires of you.

Now... let's go to our passage and see all of this conveyed by Christ.

Luke 17:1-10

First... Jesus acknowledges the sinful atmosphere of life as it is today:

Verse one... "Temptations to sin are sure to come..." ..."It is impossible to avoid the luring and enticements... they will come" -- that's the way life is.

Temptations to sin are sure to come... we cannot avoid them. *"But,"* Christ says, *"don't let that be an excuse for becoming a channel of sin."* ... It is true that there is a sinful atmosphere in which we must live... but we must repudiate a fatalistic attitude that might say, *"Well... since this is the case... what's the use of trying to help someone stay on track... by watching my own behavior. If I give in to temptation and another person sees me and follows... they would have sinned on their own anyway... We're all going to be tempted anyhow."* Notice our Lord cuts right across that. *"Don't be the channel through which temptation comes to another..."*

The destructiveness of stumbling blocks is seen throughout general culture. Gang members and other criminal offenders regularly lead others headlong into sin. The icons of pop culture... through music... television... movies... and magazine articles... lure multitudes away from truth and life. College professors do the same. Even pastors and teachers who engage in spiritual compromise... lay huge stumbling blocks before "little ones"... people who are weak and vulnerable as they are being drawn to Christ.

False doctrine is the primary stumbling block of these religious leaders... through heresy... eccentric teaching... legalism... and doctrinal imbalance — all of which turn people away from simple faith in Jesus Christ. And...

nearly as bad as the stumbling block of false teaching... is scandalous living.

In this fallen world all these stumbling blocks **will** come. "But," says Jesus, "**woe** to that person through whom they come." But lets consider this woe very carefully. ... Jesus did not pronounce this woe upon the offender saying that he **will** have a millstone tied around his neck... and be tossed into the sea. ... Being cast into the sea is the way to **escape** the woe. ... The woe is far **worse**.

It would be better to die (even a horrible death) than to cause a little one to stumble... and ultimately incur the woe of which Jesus warns. ... Better for the disciple or leader or pastor to die... than to teach errant doctrine. ... Better to die than to have a lifestyle that trips others. ... Better to die ... (Listen to this) Better to die... than to have **attitudes** that drive others away from Christ.

The way this is worded in the Original language of the New Testament... the passive voice is used.... In the Greek... it can as well be read in what is called the middle voice... which indicates reflexive action. ... He is then saying, "*It is better for him to hang a millstone about his **own** neck and cast **himself** into the sea.*" ... It is better to commit **suicide** than to be an instrument of someone else's downfall.

Wow! That is a LOT different than what American culture says. American culture says you are not responsible for how other people choose... your influence really **doesn't** matter. These are very solemn words... spoken to this day... when so many are suggesting that it doesn't make any

difference what you lead another person to do... they still have their own personal choice. You don't need to be concerned about the example you set. A message of "Do as I say... not as I do..." is acceptable. ... But Jesus says quite the **opposite**. He says it would be better for you to take your own life... than to find yourself a deliberate channel by which someone else is introduced to such evil.... that they never give their life to Christ.

Christian... it really **does** matter what you do. Who is watching **you**...? Nieces...? nephews...? children...? grandchildren...? neighbors...? co-workers...? friends...? Others at church...? By watching **you**... are you showing them that Christ really isn't **that** big of a deal...? Christ does not make enough of a difference in your day-to-day living... that you don't look much different from a non-believer...? Can they see a difference in the way you handle your anger... even when you have been clearly wronged...? Do your actions and attitudes make them prone to think, "Why should I give my life to Christ...?"

I think there is going to be a terrible... and definite fulfillment of this curse... which Christ pronounces... someday. ... Our Lord does not say what the penalty **is**... He simply leaves it hanging there... content to contrast it with being drowned in the sea.

I must confess that I do not understand **what** woe will happen to a true believer who has scandalized others away from Jesus Christ. I am not sure what could make a horrible physical death **preferable**... but I believe what the Savior is saying, here. Maybe what will come is an official rebuke before others at the Judgment Seat of Christ. ... Such a believer would be

"saved... but only as one escaping through the flames" (as what 1 Cor. 3:15 speaks of). ... Whatever Jesus meant... death **now**... is better than the woe. ... And so Jesus warns, "Watch yourselves!"

At the beginning of verse 3 is where we find Christ's words - "Pay attention to yourselves!" ... How do you properly influence another person? How do you avoid leading someone into temptation? By taking heed to yourself! **That** is the place to start. ... Watch your teaching. ... Watch your lifestyle. ... Watch your attitudes.

No one can be a Christian and ignore his brother. Others are watching you... and you need to be observant of your brothers and sisters who are in Christ. ... You cannot turn a blind eye to a known sin in their life... that they refuse to repent from.

Luke 17:3-4

Closely linked with the responsibility of not causing others to stumble into sin... is the responsibility to help others understand when their actions might otherwise cause **us** to stumble... Whenever they offend us... rather than expressing an unrighteous anger... or bitterness... or gossiping about their behavior to **others**... we are to go to them directly and offer a firm but gentle rebuke. ... Very often... we tend to go the **other** way... however... by choosing to say nothing. We live in a seething... blameworthy silence. ... But we are liable... Jesus gives us... as His followers **no option**—"If your brother sins, rebuke him."

It is not an act of love to hide what bothers us. Bring it out. Do not seethe... do not gossip. There is no other way to get it settled than to bring it out.

"Rebuke him," says the Lord Jesus. That is as much your responsibility as the command to forgive. Tell him what is wrong. Do not "white lie" to him, but tell him. Then, if he repents, forgive him. And if he does it again, seven times in the same day, you must forgive him. The duty to rebuke is attached to the responsibility to forgive.

That represents another problem, does it not? ... We say, "*I forgave him... **twice**(!)... but the fellow is still doing it.*" Well, forgive him again, says the Lord, and again, and again. In another place Jesus tells them to forgive them 490 times... "seventy times seven"... which means... really... that you are never to quit.

C.S. Lewis has written: "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea... .. until they have something to forgive..."

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter's night. He said, "The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth's winter eventually we begin to drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness."

Christ has given us an alternative: to forgive each other for the pokes we receive. That allows us to stay together and stay warm.

But Christ's alternative isn't the choice we always make, is it? It's a lovely idea... except when I am called upon to do the forgiving.

When Beth Moore and her husband, Keith, spent time in war-torn Angola to draw attention to tens of thousands of malnourished people, they were changed forever. "I learned something in one of the rural villages that will mark my teaching and response to the Word of God," Beth says. "As we stood there, trying to absorb the sights and smells of living death, our new friend, Isak Pretorius, said, 'One of the most frustrating things is that in villages where they received seed, they often eat the seed rather than planting it and bringing forth the harvest.' I couldn't get the statement out of my mind and suddenly had an answer to the question I most often ask God: Why do some people see the results of the Word and others don't?"

Beth continues: "Why have many of us read books on forgiving people, known the teachings were true and right, cried over them, marked them up with highlighters, yet remain in our bitterness? Because we ate the seed instead of sowing it."

Christ's disciples knew that they needed to sow... and not to eat the seed. So they said to the Lord... verse 5... "Increase our faith!" Isn't that interesting...? They did not ask... "Increase our love!"... or "Increase our patience..." ... What does faith have to do with forgiveness...? ... The answer to that question will help you sow the seed of forgiveness rather than just eat the seed.

Faith has **everything** to do with forgiveness! If I am cheated out of some of my possessions... my faith in God... Who as my provider... never lets me down... allows me to take my eyes off the loss and forgive the cheater. If someone insults my character... my faith in God... in Whose life... mine is hidden... allows me to take my eyes off the untrue slur... and forgive the

slanderer. And my faith in God allows me to have Him be the protector of my reputation. ... What is there that anyone can do to me... that God cannot more than amply make up for...?

Our unforgiveness is a sign that we lack a proper faith in God. We withhold forgiveness sometimes because we don't think God will exact the right kind of justice that we want. ... That is a lack of faith in the God of perfect justice!

So here is something very practical you can do this week with this principle. As you leave here today... watch yourself... take heed whenever you sense yourself getting angry. Someone cuts you off in traffic... some right of yours gets violated... unfair criticism is lodged against you... Ask yourself... "what do I need to trust God for in this situation...?" Have I placed my faith too strongly in myself... in my rights... or in others...? ... If you do not align your faith in God... proper forgiveness probably is not going to happen.

The disciples of Christ **knew** this. That is why they asked the Lord to help them and increase their faith. They saw faith as the key to being able to forgive properly... and it makes sense... doesn't it?

OK... the disciples knew that the key to forgiveness is faith... but what they did **not** know... and what many of us **mistakenly** think... is that our need is for a greater **amount** of faith. ... I have sometimes prayed... and maybe you have too... *"Lord, please increase my faith... give me more of it... strengthen it... author some more of it inside me, Lord...!"* And our plea is urgent. It is felt by us that a larger amount is our greatest need.

But look at the answer Jesus gave to His disciples... when they asked Him to increase the supply of faith inside of them...

Luke 17:5-6

It used to be that when I would read this response of Jesus to His disciples request for more faith... I would think... "Well that just isn't cool! They ask for more faith and Jesus just taunts them... He appears to rub salt in their wounds through His cruel mocking. Yeah... you need more faith! Even if you had a little you would be able to do impossible things! Then He goes on about their need to be servants in the next three verses... and seems to ignore their request altogether...! He never appears to address what they asked for.

Men... we are not given a license here... to follow Christ's example... and ignore our wives sincere requests... Because Christ does indeed answer them!

The answer that Jesus gave in verse 6... **is**... that the size of your faith is **not** the issue. ... You have asked for an increase of size in your faith... but that is not where your concern should be. Even with the tiniest... little... miniscule faith... like the size of a mustard seed... you could do impossible things that are in the Lord's will. A mulberry tree without any legs could get up and plant itself in the ocean... where mulberry trees cannot grow!

But if the size of our faith is not the issue... what is...? The next three verses tell us. The issue is that we **use it**... that we apply whatever amount of it we have... even if it is a very small amount... and even if its application is to the most mundane of tasks for our Master!

How many believers sit on the sidelines praying for more faith... when Christ is asking them to start using what they already have...? *“Oh, Lord... if You would just increase my faith... then I would be doing so much for Your Kingdom glory... I’m waiting, God... Give me more faith. God... I’m still waiting... OK... I’ll just sit here and wait... and if you want me to do something for Your Kingdom, Lord... just give me the faith... Give me something BIG to do Lord... and with it... give me lots of faith... OK... I’m waiting...”*

The issue is not having the right **amount** of faith... It is to **apply** whatever amount we have... even to the most ordinary... dull... and routine Kingdom tasks!

Luke 17:7-10

These verses give the answer of how to have a great faith. Great faith comes from serving the Lord with the utmost humility... not even expecting a thank-you. Great faith comes from serving the Lord as a servant would serve his Master. Do you want to have great faith? – This is how!

Jesus said that we must watch ourselves... rebuke those who offend us... while at the same time be forgiving. Normal Christian living takes great faith... which comes from living as "unworthy servants." Such a life is our duty. This life (extraordinary as it may be) is ordinary Christianity. Oh, that we could be extraordinarily ordinary!