

“LESSONS ON CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP”

I. Introduction

- A. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be enrolled the school of Christ.
1. Those who sit at Christ’s feet are called to embrace a different way of life compared to the people of this world.
 2. As the apostle Paul puts it in Romans 12, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, rather than conformed to the pattern of this world.
 3. We need to adopt thought patterns and behaviors that are not natural to us.
 4. This is why it is such a grave mistake for a church to let its worship and ministry be shaped by the surrounding culture.
 5. As one writer explains, “A church that looks and talks and sounds just like the world has no reason to exist.” [Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 121]
- B. The passage we have just read from Luke 17 contains three lessons from our Lord about the life of Christian discipleship.
1. Jesus teaches us about dealing with sin, living by faith, and doing our duty.
 2. The text divides into three distinct sections, as you can see by the headings that are given for these sections in the ESV.
 3. Some interpreters contend that the teachings in these three sections are not really related to each other.
 4. But I think that as we work our way through this passage this morning, it will be clear that there is good reason to think that there

is a logical flow to the things that our Lord has to say here.

II. Dealing with Sin

- A. Our passage begins with Jesus pointing out that there are always going to be temptations to sin in this life.
 - 1. Of course, we should certainly try our best to avoid temptation.
 - 2. We should also pray that the Lord would not lead us into situations in which we will be tempted.
 - 3. Nevertheless, as long as we are living in this present evil age, we will never be entirely free from temptation.
 - 4. In God's sovereign wisdom, it is his will to leave his people exposed to temptations.
 - 5. He does this in order to exercise our faith and to separate us from the world.

- B. The next thing that Jesus has to say about dealing with sin is that we need to be careful not to make others stumble.
 - 1. This is especially important for those in positions of authority, such as church officers and parents, since their example exerts a significant influence on others.
 - 2. That being said, we should not lose sight of the fact that this teaching applies to each one of us.
 - 3. There are many ways in which our sins can be a source of stumbling for others.
 - 4. When we sin against others, we tempt them to sin in response.
 - 5. When we neglect or transgress God's law, we give others an excuse for their sins.

6. When we espouse falsehood, we lead others astray.
 7. Jesus's words here remind us that how we live our lives has an impact on the people around us.
 8. Whenever we see that our actions have exposed others to temptation, we need to humble ourselves before the Lord and repent.
- C. In the next part of this section, Jesus talks about how we should deal with those who sin against us.
1. Our Lord is clearly talking about cases involving a personal offense, situations where one person sins against another person.
 2. There is a distinction between personal offenses and general offenses.
 3. In situations involving a general offense against God and his church, the rebuke is typically brought by the church's elders.
 4. But when it is a personal offense, the person who has been sinned against has the responsibility of going to the other person and rebuking them.
 5. Now this does not mean that you have to rebuke people for every little thing they do that irritates you.
 6. Some of the offenses that people commit against us are things that we should just overlook.
 7. But when it is not possible for us to do that, we need to deal with the matter in the right way.
 8. We are not to gossip about it.
 9. We are not to stew over it and harbor bitterness in our hearts.

10. We need to confront those who offend us.
 11. And of course, as other passages make clear, we always need to do this in a spirit of gentleness and humility, and with a sincere desire to be reconciled to the person.
- D. Jesus says that if our brother responds to our rebuke by repenting and seeking our forgiveness, we are to forgive him.
1. Notice that there is a condition that needs to be met before forgiveness can be granted.
 2. The person who has offended us needs to repent of what they have done.
 3. We cannot fully forgive a person who is unrepentant.
 4. Now, this does not mean that we are ever free to harbor bitterness towards someone.
 5. The thing that we have to understand is that there are two aspects of forgiving those who offend us.
 6. The first aspect is having a forgiving attitude toward the person.
 7. This is something we always have to do, even when a person shows no remorse for what he has done to us.
 8. But the second aspect of forgiveness is being reconciled to the person.
 9. This is something that can only be done when the person repents of the sin that they have committed against us.
 10. Here is how John Calvin explains this: “there are two ways in which offenses are forgiven. If a man shall do me an injury, and I, laying aside the desire for revenge, do not cease to love him, but even repay kindness in place of injury, though I entertain an unfavorable opinion of him, as he deserves, still I am said to forgive

him. For when God commands us to wish well to our enemies, He does not therefore demand that we approve in them what He condemns, but only desires that our minds shall be purified from all hatred... A second kind of forgiving is, when we receive a brother into favour, so as to think favourably respecting him, and to be convinced that the remembrance of his offense is blotted out in the sight of God."

11. Calvin's point is that while we always need to wish well to those who offend us, we cannot receive them back into our favor until they repent.
- E. Jesus continues his teaching on this by saying, "if [your brother] sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.
1. The Jews thought that it was a mark of great piety to forgive a person three times.
 2. Jesus ups the ante considerably.
 3. And we should not take him to mean that once we have forgiven someone a seventh time we do not have to forgive that person if he sins against us an eighth time.
 4. Jesus's point is that we need to forgive as many times as the person sins and repents.
 5. Of course, Jesus's intention in saying this was not to encourage people to think that they can sin against others with impunity.
 6. A person who is truly repentant over his sin will show some measure of evidence that he is genuinely sorry for his sin.
 7. He will make a sincere effort not to do it again.
 8. The point that Jesus is stressing is that, as long as there is an expression of sincere repentance, we need to forgive.

III. Living by Faith

- A. This brings us to the second section in our text, where the focus is upon living by faith.
1. When the disciples heard Jesus's teachings about forgiveness, they responded by crying out, "Increase our faith!"
 2. They saw the difficulty in what Jesus was instructing them to do.
 3. It is not easy to forgive those who hurt us.
 4. It is especially hard to forgive those who sin against us repeatedly.
 5. As the disciples thought about what was being demanded of them, they asked the Lord to give them strength to do it.
 6. This is the proper way to respond to all of God's commands.
 7. We are not sufficient to do what God requires of us.
 8. The disciples were right to see that faith is needed in order to live as becomes the followers of Christ.
 9. The Christian life cannot be lived by virtue of any strength that we possess within ourselves.
 10. It can only be lived by constant reliance upon Christ.
 11. Christ is the source of the Christian life, and faith is the means by which we lay hold of Christ.
- B. Jesus responds to his disciples' request by saying, "If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."
1. This saying could be easily misinterpreted and misapplied.

2. It is the sort of text that those in the so-called “word of faith” movement cite to support their teachings.
3. But we need to understand that this is an illustration.
4. It is not meant to be taken literally.
5. Jesus is not saying that faith is a secret key that enables us to unlock God’s power so that we can do anything we want.
6. Faith is a matter of trusting God to do what he has promised.
7. God has not promised to give us the power to command trees to be replanted in the sea.
8. The point being made here is that even when the things that God’s Word instructs us to do seem impossibly difficult, we can trust that we will be given the power to do them when we look to God in faith.
9. And this is true even if our faith is weak and small.
10. After all, the thing that matters is not the strength of our faith, but the strength of the one in whom our faith resides.

IV. Doing Our Duty

- A. We turn now to the third section in our text, where the focus shifts to doing our duty.
 1. Here Jesus uses another illustration to make a third point about Christian discipleship.
 2. The illustration has to do with a master’s relationship with his servant.
 3. At mealtime, the master does not invite his servant to sit down and dine with him.

4. While that might seem like a noble thing to do in the eyes of our egalitarian culture, it turns the whole master-servant relationship on its head.
 5. The servant's place is not to be served alongside his master but to be the one doing the serving.
 6. That being the case, the master tells his servant to prepare the meal, to gird himself for service, and to wait upon his master.
 7. And when the servant faithfully performs his duties, the master is not obligated to thank him for doing his job.
 8. He was only doing what he was commanded.
- B. In using this illustration, Jesus is saying that our relationship with God is like a servant's relationship with his master.
1. If you are a Christian, your life is no longer your own.
 2. You belong to God.
 3. He has redeemed you for himself so that you might be zealous for the good works that he commands in his law.
 4. It is your duty to spend your whole life in his service.
- C. As we saw in the previous section, when we look to the Lord in faith, he grants us the power to do what he requires of us.
1. God makes our lives spiritually fruitful, even though we continue to sin and even though our good works are themselves tainted by sin.
 2. Here in this section, Jesus is cautioning us against taking pride in the works that we carry out by faith.

3. We should never think that we are putting God in our debt by the service that we render to him.
 4. The works that you do by faith are not to be looked upon as meriting special honor.
 5. How could they, since it is God himself who works in you to will and to work for his good pleasure?
 6. What do you have that you have not received?
 7. The only thing that we can merit from God is condemnation.
 8. The only reason why God accepts us is because Jesus had the millstone of our sin hung around his neck so that he could bear the punishment that we deserved.
- D. It is true that in heaven God will reward us for the good works that we do as Christians.
1. But that reward is given out of God's grace, not because he owes us anything.
 2. We could never put God in our debt.
 3. He has no need of our service.
 4. It is utterly amazing that he gives us the privilege of serving him.
 5. And it is even more amazing that through Christ he receives our service as holy and acceptable.
 6. That being the case, let us always make sure that we do not boast in anything except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.