

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Luke 17:1-10

New International Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, May 1, 2016

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 1, 2016**, is from **Luke 17:1-10**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Luke 17:1-10

(Luke 17:1) Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come.

In this life, believers will be influenced to sin and sometimes sin. Sinners will sometimes try to influence or tempt us to sin. Whenever someone takes unjust advantage of us, we will be caused to stumble and are the victims of the one who sinned against us. We might make a wrong decision because someone lied to us, withheld information from us, or cheated us in some other way. Someone with control or power over us might mislead us or take sinful advantage of us to our own hurt. Jesus warned that those who influence others to sin and those who intentionally harm others will suffer just punishment.

(Luke 17:2) 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.

Jesus warned His disciples against influencing someone to disobey God and against doing anything that would cause anyone to harm themselves by making unwise choices or decisions against their best interests. If someone intentionally causes a child to do something wrong, harmful, or not in their best interests, God will punish that person.

“Little ones” can also mean followers of Jesus Christ or those with less physical, mental, or emotional abilities. A person “thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck” will die without hope, because no one but God could save them before they drown – but God can save them spiritually (and even physically, if wise) if they repent and turn to Him in faith. It would be better to be thrown into the sea and hopelessly drown rather than suffer the punishment of God for influencing someone to sin or causing someone to stumble and do wrong to themselves or others. If we have influenced someone to sin or caused someone to stumble, we need to repent and ask God to forgive us, and, if possible and wise, ask the person we have wronged to forgive us and make restitution, if possible. We must pray and follow the Holy Spirit in each individual case. God will forgive us for all our sins when we repent and put our faith in Jesus Christ.

(Luke 17:3) So watch yourselves. “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

It is possible for someone who has done what is described in Luke 17:1-2 to be saved, but they must be a “brother or sister;” that is, a follower of Jesus Christ and they must repent of their sins. God will forgive them, just as God expects us to forgive them if they sin against us and repent. Causing or influencing someone to sin or stumble is extremely serious. When a person takes sinning against others lightly or thinks it unimportant, that is a sign that their repentance may not be genuine and they intend to sin again. To rebuke someone is not easy, but that may be the only way some will repent. By explaining to them how they have sinned against us or others, they may see for the first time that what they did was a sin; they may try to make amends, make restitution, or repair the consequences of their mistakes. Or we may learn they intended to do the right thing, but made a serious error in judgment. If they repent, we need to tell them that we forgive them, but many times we need to repeatedly tell our hearts and minds that we have forgiven them – which is essential for our spiritual well-being and peace of mind.

(Luke 17:4) 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.”

In these verses, Jesus Christ is speaking about how Christians should treat other Christians. When some Christians commit the same sins repeatedly, we see how some sins keep believers in bondage (perhaps we know or have known bondage to sin personally), and we need to pray they will draw closer to Jesus Christ and be freed from this bondage by Him. We need to pray for them to trust daily in Jesus Christ to help them overcome temptations to sin moment-by-moment. Believers need to understand that bondage to sin may be the cause of some committing sins against them repeatedly; therefore, they may need to be especially forgiving and understanding of them as they pray for them and seek to help them (perhaps counseling them when reproving them).

The Bible does not teach that a believer must stay in an abusive relationship and repeatedly forgive insincere repentance (where a person is making what appears to be insincere and futile efforts to change their behavior), for this is not true repentance and we do need to protect ourselves and others from sinners and sinful behavior. Our repeated forgiveness of someone does not always, and should not always, lead to a continuing and trusting relationship with them (see also 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

(Luke 17:5) The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

The apostles (those Jesus sent forth to establish His church and lead others to faith in Him) knew the difficulty of doing what Jesus said. When they said, “Increase our faith,” they may have meant, “Help us believe that ‘good results’ will come from our doing what you have just told us to do, for it seems impossible.” In the next verses, Jesus will tell them (and us) how to increase their (our) faith.

(Luke 17:6) 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.

Few people want to cast trees into the sea by faith, but Jesus’ teaching indicates that it only takes a little faith to accomplish great things. It is a great thing to forgive a brother or sister in Christ repeatedly when they repeatedly sin against us, repent repeatedly, ask repeatedly for us to forgive them, and we see no apparent change in their behavior. But Jesus said that it does not take much faith to do that, only a little faith is needed. Then, Jesus told the apostles (and us) how to increase our faith and do even greater things.

(Luke 17:7) “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’?

The apostles did not have servants or employees, but they knew how servants were usually treated by their master or employer (and so do we). An employee works the hours and does the tasks their employer or boss assigns them to do. An employee usually does not have a choice in how or when they are to use their time in behalf of their employer, who expects assigned tasks to be done according to the employer’s timetable. All Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ and friends of Jesus Christ, and they are also servants of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Jesus is our Master and Lord. Just as we may not understand all of the reasons our employer wants us to do something, we may not always understand Jesus’ reasons for telling us to do something, but we are to obey Jesus as our Master in everything.

(Luke 17:8) 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'?

After an employee has done all of his assigned tasks according to the time set by the employer, then he has time for himself to do what is good for himself and others. If believers want to increase their faith, they must do whatever Jesus, their Master, tells them to do according to His perfect timing. Jesus does not give His followers the option to obey Him in some things and disobey Him in other things according to their desires. Obedience to God is not optional: decisions have consequences. If followers of Jesus want their faith in Jesus to increase, then they must obey and forgive as Jesus taught.

(Luke 17:9) Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?

There is a direct correlation between increasing our faith in Jesus and obeying Jesus in all things. If we are not obeying Jesus, our faith in Jesus will not increase. Jesus will not reward our disobedience by increasing our faith, and Jesus has given us enough faith to obey Him in all things. When we need more faith to obey Him, Jesus will give us that faith in advance. Only faith the size of a mustard seed is needed to obey Jesus, and by our prayerfully obeying Jesus our mustard seed faith will grow and bless many people. We should not expect Jesus to thank us every time we do what He has told us to do, but we can expect that our faith in Him will increase as we obey Him – we will see the good consequences that come from faithful obedience to Jesus the same as we would see a tree cast into the sea if it happened in front of us.

(Luke 17:10) 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.'"

If we do something especially hard for us when obeying Jesus; such as, forgiving a repentant brother or sister in Christ repeatedly, we should not expect to receive God's thanks. Rather, in humility we do whatever Jesus commanded. We need to understand that it is a matter of God's grace that we are forgiven for our sins: Jesus died so God could justly and mercifully forgive us for our sins – we are unworthy servants of the One who died and rose again for us. Whatever Jesus calls us to do is our duty to do, and we can find happiness in doing our duty and our faith will increase. Even then, we will never be worthy servants based on our efforts to be good and faithful servants of Jesus Christ. As Jesus' servants, Jesus repeatedly forgives us when we sin or fail to do our duty (and we may not even recognize that we sinned or failed to do our duty). Jesus sees into our hearts – He knows our struggles – He sees when we are sincere – He sees our sorrowful repentance – He hears our hearts call for God's forgiveness – He increases our faith – He helps us do our duty day-by-day and moment-by-moment.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What, if any, is the difference between “influencing someone to sin” and “causing someone to stumble”?
2. How serious is it in the eyes of God when someone defrauds another person of money by deceiving them in some way?
3. What are some of the possible benefits from rebuking someone?
4. What are some ways believers in Christ can increase their faith?
5. From your study of this Bible lesson, what new truths did you learn and how can you apply them in the days ahead?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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