

Message #81

Luke 17:1-10

I had somewhat of a scary situation happen to me last week at Borgess Hospital. In the state of Michigan, you are not permitted to carry any concealed weapon into a hospital. Well I visited a couple of our people and I was heading to the south entrance to go to my car. As I approached the door out of the hospital, I noticed a very suspicious man standing just outside at the entrance. He was wearing a hood so you could not see his face well and something about him did not seem right to me. I needed to get to my car, so I went through the automatic door at a fast walking pace and just as I got through the door, the scary looking guy said do you have any money? I quickened my pace and said, "No sir" and made a beeline for my car. I thought, if only I could have had a concealed weapon, I would have felt much safer. But the moment I saw that guy, I knew something wasn't right and I was on guard. There was something wrong and I sensed it.

That is the way it should work for us, spiritually speaking. We should be able to spot a Pharisee instantly. We should be so sensitive that we are able to detect that is hypocrisy and that is wrong. We should be always armed with the weapon of God's word and we need to be on the lookout for any Phariseeism specifically in our own lives. Why? Because God hates it!

Jesus Christ detests religious hypocrites (16:15).

In chapter 15, He addressed the Pharisees.

In chapter 16, He addressed His own disciples(16:1), but the Pharisees were listening in and started mocking Him and His teaching, so Jesus addressed them again (16:14-15).

When we come to chapter 17, He specifically addresses His disciples again (17:1).

These Pharisees truly believed they could get into heaven by keeping the O.T. law and by their religious works. But as Christ just illustrated, that rich man who thought that was burning in hell. **The only way of entrance into heaven is faith in Jesus Christ. He is not a way, He is the only way.**

Jesus never wanted His disciples to be Pharisees. What He says to them is this:

MY PEOPLE NEED TO CAREFULLY GUARD THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAITH SO THAT THEY NEVER BECOME A RELIGIOUS PHARISEE/HYPOCRITE.

We need to be on the lookout for the dangerous hypocrisy of Phariseeism. Jesus Christ never wants His people to be classified as a religious Pharisee. It is damnable to have Jesus Christ classify anyone as a Pharisee. No believer ever wants this hash-tag. There are specific Pharisical topics that are addressed here:

PHARISAICAL TOPIC #1 – Guard yourself from ever being a stumbling block that keeps sinners from coming to Jesus Christ. **17:1-2**

Pharisees are far more interested in people joining their religion or denomination than they are people having a relationship with Jesus Christ.

To make the point, Jesus uses the concept of a “stumbling block.” A stumbling block is a snare or block that gets in the way of someone reaching their destination. It trips them up, so they don’t get there. A snare or stumbling block is subtle. It is not obvious. It lures the prey, trips the prey and traps the prey.

Now the specific warning Jesus gives here is one of causing little, innocent, naïve people from coming to the truth of God and from coming into a true relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Matthew specifically used this to point out that the faith of a child in Jesus Christ can save (Matthew 18:1-7).

The immediate context of this text in Luke would mean that one causes a person to not believe in Jesus Christ and ends up burning in hell (Luke 16:19-31). This person relied upon their success and religion and money and did not believe in Jesus Christ.

To trip up a person because of some Pharisaical motive and to keep one from believing in Jesus Christ is a very serious matter in the mind of God. Jesus says in **verse 1**, “woe” to that person who does this.

Jesus says there will be all kinds of religious stumbling blocks in the Pharisaical world that will prevent one from coming to faith in Jesus Christ, but “woe” to the person who was the cause of it. We need to carefully examine what it is we are telling people. **We need to make certain that the simplicity of the grace gospel is not getting lost in a maze of Pharisaical religious stuff.**

Jesus said it would be better for that person to suffer a brutal type of drowning execution than for one to lure people away from the truth about Jesus Christ and then face God.

It is inevitable that certain people will cause others to stumble, but you don’t want to be one of them. In fact, “woe” to the one who does such a thing. Pity on that person when he faces God. **We must be very careful to make sure that we never are the cause of someone moving away from Jesus Christ and the truth of God. We must be Christ and Grace promoters.**

Until Jesus Christ reigns in this world, there will always be those Pharisees who want limelight religion. They don’t care if they are pointing people to truth or not. In fact, they will promote their religion of works more than the grace of God found completely in Jesus Christ. Pharisees want you to follow them and their religious rules and codes. But “woe” to them on the day they get before Jesus Christ.

Do not overlook how **verse 1** begins because Jesus is addressing this to His disciples. Even those committed to Jesus Christ need to be on guard against Phariseism. We must guard against ever being a stumbling block for others in their relationship with the Lord.

Paul said we must even be careful in gray areas. Paul said in I Corinthians that we must not ever allow our liberty to become a stumbling block to the weak (I Cor. 8:9).

There is no question from the disciples' reaction in **verse 5**, that they recognized the solemnity of this challenge.

Our job is to honestly and accurately communicate God's word to people. Our job is not to communicate religious rules and traditions to people. Woe to those churches who care more about their traditions and rules and codes than they do truth. Woe to any leader who prevents people from understanding the pure truth and grace of God.

PHARISAICAL TOPIC #2 – Guard yourself in the way you rebuke and forgive sinners.
17:3-4

Pharisees love to judge others by their rules and codes. They love to judge others by their traditions. They are quick to judge, but they don't ever demonstrate grace forgiveness. Jesus wanted His disciples on guard against this.

The fact is we live in a world of sinners, and certainly those who are right with God must at times confront sin. They must confront sin in their own lives and at times in the lives of others. That is not Pharisaical, that is Biblical.

Pharisees taught that you condemn sinners and stay away from sinners. They never did see themselves as law-breaking sinners, but they sure saw others as such. God does not want His people living life that way. There is a right way to handle sin issues. If a brother sins, he is to be rebuked and if he repents, he is to be forgiven.

Now the first thing to see here is "if your brother sins." There are two observations we want to make here:

1) In Greek the "your brother" is emphatic. This is someone of which you are intimately connected in a family way. It is not my responsibility to go to some public place and see if I can point out the sins of everyone there. My responsibility is to deal with those of our family who are in sin.

2) The word "sin" means to miss the mark of the law and righteousness of God (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 23). In other words, the word "sin" means this is a specific violation of something in the word of God. This is not the same as missing some code in religion or some rule or tradition.

3) The word "rebuke" is one that means to mete out the due measure of warning, admonishment and rebuke (*Ibid.*, p. 176).

What Jesus says to his disciples is that there will be times when you will have to look someone in the eyes and point out their sin. There will be times when it must be addressed straight up and head on. The point is rebuke the brother of sin and if he repents, forgive him. What if he doesn't repent? Then there is no obligation to grant forgiveness.

Now Pharisees do not typically operate like this. What Pharisees do is talk to others about the sin problem. They don't typically rebuke the person who sins, they typically tell others about the sin.

But Jesus said those who are not Pharisees will go face-to-face, man-to-man with a brother in sin. He will confront it and if there is repentance, he will forgive it, case closed.

It is not easy or pleasant to rebuke a brother and it is not easy to forgive one who repents, but that is what grace does. That is what a true disciple of Jesus Christ does. **We do have a responsibility to admonish a sinner and we do have the responsibility to forgive the repentant sinner.**

Depending on the sin and the character of the one who sinned, establishing there has been true repentance may take time (Prov. 26:24-25). But once one has established that there has been true repentance, there is to be true forgiveness. Even if this happens seven times a day, we are to forgive him if he repents.

After all, isn't that what God does for us?

Again, let me point out that the forgiveness is demanded when there has been repentance. If there is no repentance, no disciple is under any obligation to forgive.

A true disciple first faces his own sin and repents of it and receives forgiveness. He understands that is what God does for him and he is willing to do the same thing for others.

PHARISAICAL TOPIC #3 – A disciple needs to ask God to develop his faith. 17:5-10

In order not to become a Pharisee, a disciple needs faith, which is a specific kind of faith. These disciples apparently thought they needed more faith and lacked this faith to become this kind of non-Pharisaical person.

This discussion was initially aimed at His "disciples," but we may observe that the greatest response to it came from the "Apostles." **All apostles were disciples, but not all disciples were apostles.**

When Christ spoke against Phariseeism, those who were closest to Christ, His Apostles, were deeply moved and challenged. That is the way it always works. Those who are most spiritual always are quick to come under conviction and want to apply the teaching to their own lives. Pharisees are not interested in change. They do not respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They stay committed to their old system of religion.

When the Apostles heard what Jesus said, they responded by saying, "Increase our faith."

In the context, they are asking Christ to make an addition to their faith that will enable them not to be a Pharisaical stumbling block and enable them to rebuke a brother in sin and forgive him if he repents.

It does take faith to stand for the truth of God. It does take faith to hold to grace forgiveness in a world of religious works. It does take faith to rebuke a brother in sin. It does take faith to forgive a brother who repents, so these apostles asked Christ to increase their faith to this level, so they could do what Christ just taught. When God's people are challenged with new truth that stretches them beyond their religious traditions and codes, it does take faith to implement it so they prayed increase our faith.

Jesus responded to their request by teaching His Apostles three important lessons about faith:

Lesson #1 - Faith is not a matter of quantity, it is a matter of quality. **17:6**

The amount of faith has nothing to do with whether or not one becomes a Pharisee. The amount of faith has nothing to do with not being a stumbling block or grace minister. What is needed is the right faith in the right person. A small faith can accomplish amazing things if it is the right kind of faith focused on the grace of God.

A mustard seed was one of the smallest seeds known at the time of Jesus Christ and the mulberry tree was a tree known for its deep roots. Christ tells the Apostles that just a little of the right kind of faith is all that is needed to do powerful things for God.

Now a critical key to understanding what He means is seen in the "mulberry tree" illustration. He says if they had a little faith they would say to this mulberry tree to be uprooted and put in the sea. Quantity of faith was not the issue, quality of faith was.

Now the question here is what in the world did Jesus mean? Does Jesus mean that God's people should go out to trees and believe they will jump out of the ground and relocate in the sea? Should God's people use their faith to try and get trees to uproot and go into the ocean?

What Jesus is doing is telling these Apostles that just a little of the right kind of faith in Him can produce significant, miraculous results and transformations. **Notice carefully the text says, "this mulberry tree," not "any mulberry tree."**

Those Apostles were traveling with Jesus Christ the God/Savior/Messiah/King. If they would have had just a little of the right kind of faith in Him, they could have literally seen Him restructure Israel's land. There will be tremendous topological and geological transformations of the Promised Land when Jesus Christ sets up His Kingdom and reigns. They did not need any more faith; they needed to implement the faith they already had in the One they were with.

In other words, their job was to point people to faith in Him as the God/Savior/Messiah/King who will one day rule the universe.

Lesson #2 - Faith is not a matter of quantity, it is a matter of obedience. **17:7-9**

Being an apostle and disciple is a tough calling. It is a call to plow the word of God into the lives of the people and a call to tend the sheep of God (Jer. 3:15). There is no immediate glamour to the calling.

The point of these verses is this; a disciple must be willing to take on the task of plowing and tending and must see it through to the end. If a disciple faithfully ministers and serves in his calling, he will receive great compensation.

These verses make it clear that disciples do not get the privilege of getting rewards until after they have completed the task.

Our responsibility is to obey the commands of God and faithfully serve God as a grace promoter and reflector until we see Christ. Our compensation will come when we have completed the assignment we have been called to complete.

Issues like teaching truth, rebuking a brother in sin, forgiving a brother who repents are not issues of more faith; they are issues of obedient service.

Every disciple must obey and serve if he is to receive compensation. Notice carefully **verse 7**, the disciples compensation is not “immediate,” it is “futuristic,” after one has finished the task.

Lesson #3 - Faith is not a matter of quantity, it is a matter of humility. **17:10**

When one understands this verse, one does have the right kind of faith that is non-Pharisaical. Pharisees see themselves as worthy giants of God, not as unworthy servants. They saw themselves as men who deserved to be in leadership (Luke 18:10-12).

Christ is teaching His apostles that a real key to greatness is to realize how unworthy we are to be a servant of God. This sense of unworthiness should be that which prompts obedience. God does not need us to serve Him; it is an honor to serve Him.

Most people see themselves as unworthy when they face their sin, but Christ is challenging a disciple to see himself as unworthy when they are in His service.

God not only keeps records of how we tend our sheep, but our attitudes in the tending of the sheep. One who faithfully obeys God’s word and maintains a humble spirit in doing so is a powerful disciple.

We do not need more faith; we need to ask ourselves some honest questions:

- 1) Do we do everything we can to promote and point people to the grace truth of Jesus Christ?
- 2) Do we hinder people from understanding truth because of our religion?
- 3) Are we willing to rebuke a brother who is in sin?
- 4) Are we willing to forgive a sinning brother who repents?
- 5) Do we faithfully obey God’s word when it is presented to us?
- 6) Do we maintain a humble attitude in our relationship to God and service for God?