

*Luke 17:1-10: Jesus said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! <sup>2</sup> It would be better for that person if a millstone would be hung around his neck and he would be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. <sup>3</sup> Watch yourselves.*

*"If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him. <sup>4</sup> Even if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times returns to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."*

*<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."*

*<sup>6</sup> The Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you could tell this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. <sup>7</sup> Which one of you who has a servant plowing or taking care of sheep will say to him when he comes in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at the table'? <sup>8</sup> Won't the master tell him instead, 'Prepare my supper, and after you are properly dressed, serve me while I eat and drink. After that you may eat and drink'? <sup>9</sup> He does not thank the servant because he did what he was commanded to do, does he? <sup>10</sup> So also you, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants. We have only done what we were supposed to do.'"*

### *The Obligations of a Dutiful Servant*

Have you ever applied for a job you really wanted to get, and as you prepared for the interview, you think – I could do this. I hope I get the job. It sounds like fun. But then you begin to learn about all that the job requires, all the duties that would be expected of you, and you think – I wish I'd never applied. I can't do all this.

In our text Jesus speaks about what is expected of His disciples, the duties of those who serve Him. In looking at these words we consider: **THE OBLIGATIONS OF A DUTIFUL SERVANT**. We'll note these two points: **1. That being followers of Jesus imposes some difficult obligations on us. 2. But by faith we fulfill them all.**

The words "dutiful" and "servant" have a negative ring, don't they? 'Duty' implies doing things we don't want to do, but have to do. Think of milking cows at 5:00 AM or cleaning the garage. And the word 'servant' isn't very popular either. We prefer to think of ourselves as free agents, self-governing people who can do only what we feel like doing.

Still, the Lord's words are clear: belonging to Him we are servants and we have certain duties laid on us. It's our obligation to do them.

The first obligation is this – that we don't lead another person, and especially a little child, into sin. Jesus says, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!" We all bear the old sinful nature inherited from our first parents. So we are easily tempted ourselves, and we are capable of misleading or enticing another person into sin. As redeemed people, children of the light, we are obligated not to do anything that would harm another person's faith.

That can happen as we become careless and forget the impact our words and actions can have on others. If a child or someone who is new to the faith confesses his faith in Jesus, and those responsible for him do or say things which discourage that faith, the child may become confused and led astray. If an adult sets a bad example by using foul language, and even using God's name in cursing or swearing falsely, the little one may be tempted to do the same.

This obligation to be careful comes with a frightening warning from the Lord: "It would be better for that person if a millstone would be hung around his neck, and he would be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. Watch yourselves."

It's our duty as Christians to carefully consider the faith of those around us. It's also our duty to deal in a loving way with those who have fallen into a sin. The Lord continues, "If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him."

Rebuking someone for their sins isn't so easy to do. We fear their response. They may tell us in so many words to mind our own business, or they may recall some similar sin we have ourselves committed. We may lose that person's companionship. Still, it's our duty to remind that person of the peril they are in by not repenting.

In doing this, we should as the Bible says, "Speak the truth in love." We won't want to present ourselves as morally superior to the other, as if their sin is one we could never fall into. But we should honestly expose the evil and warn them of God's punishment. If he accepts our rebuke and repents, then we are to forgive him at once and make known that we are only announcing something that the Lord has already announced. For God has forgiven us every sin for Jesus' sake, and He made that blessed truth known to the world by raising Jesus from the dead. Now we have His own authority to forgive the sins of others.

Jesus takes this matter further by describing what should be done when a sin is committed directly against us. "Even if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times returns to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." This too is a difficult duty, since our old sinful nature is more interested in vengeance than forgiveness. We might be persuaded to forgive someone once or twice, but seven times in a day?

That seems unreasonable, until we remember that God forgives us again and again every day of our lives. His grace is so deep and so strong that He gave His only Son Jesus to win endless remission for all our sins. It's His unmerited love for us in Jesus which compels us to forgive others. Even from His agony on the cross Jesus interceded for His killers, "Father, forgive them." It's His love and example which motivates us to forgive.

Are we dutiful servants? Have we always done what He commands and avoided what He forbids? Have we consistently considered the precious faith of those around us, thinking

of our example to them, and dealing in a loving way with those who have fallen? Have we met our obligations as servants of the Lord?

As Jesus' disciples listened to Him describe the obligations of a dutiful servant, they must have realized how far from fulfilling those obligations they were. They wanted to do what Jesus told them to do. But they weren't confident they could. While they believed in Him, they felt their faith was too small and too weak to meet their obligations. So they said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

Secondly we say, It's only faith which makes it possible for us to meet our obligations. As it says in Hebrews, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." And on another occasion Jesus said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing."

Now, in answering His disciples appeal to increase their faith, Jesus assured them that they had made a wise request. He told them, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you could tell this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Jesus teaches here that faith, even a small and weak faith, is a very powerful thing. Even a faith as tiny as a mustard seed can work something so amazing as directing a large tree to burst from the soil and then replant itself in the nearest ocean. How can that be? How can faith do something so seemingly impossible? For this reason – that faith is what connects us to the almighty God and His power.

All the money in the world, and all the impressive military might in the world, cannot accomplish what faith can accomplish. Paul wrote, "Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."

So, it's faith in Jesus which will cause us to guard against giving offense and harming others. It's by faith that we'll find the strength to forgive others endless times. We can do those things which seem so impossible, out of love for Jesus, as a fruit of our faith in Him.

Should we see ourselves as heroes for doing these things? Should we think we have put ourselves in line for a major award and gift and honor from God because we have been careful to avoid offending a child? Or because we have been willing to confront and forgive a transgressor?

Jesus answers this way: "Which one of you who has a servant plowing or taking care of sheep will say to him when he comes in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at the table?' Won't the master tell him instead, 'Prepare my supper...serve me while I eat and drink...He does not thank the servant because he did what he was commanded to do, does

he? So also you, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants. We have only done what we were supposed to do.'"

God has done everything needful. God has created us. He redeemed us from our sins. He provides for us daily. He brought us to faith and increases our faith. We belong to Him, and He has done and will do everything for us. So He has the right to tell us what to do, and we are obligated to Him. But even if we did everything perfectly and did nothing but good works, we could never say to God, 'Now You owe me.' He could rightly answer, 'You have only done what I commanded.'

While this sounds rather cold and harsh, it's really meant to be comforting. It reminds us that if we are to be saved, it's not our doing, but God's. He must give us His salvation as an undeserved gift. And He has surely done that through the merits and innocent death of Jesus on the cross. We had nothing to do with it, but God did everything.

When we rightly confess - "I am a sinner, unworthy of any gift from God, and His Son saved Me" - when we believe that we are forgiven all our sins because Jesus died for us, then we will gladly see ourselves as servants to Him and will want nothing more than to do what He wants.

May God increase our faith so that we appreciate all His gifts, and happily and dutifully fulfill our obligations to Him. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard and keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.*