Jesus Teaches on Sin, Forgiveness, and Duty
Luke 17:1-10

Luke continues to record Jesus' teachings given to His followers as the Religious Leaders stood near, sneering and finding fault. In this passage, He restates a teaching on sin, forgiveness _energized_ by faith, and the attitude toward the _duty_ a follower must have in their service to God.
Today, we will look at Jesus' last teaching recorded in a series of challenges found chronologically in the book of Luke. With the cross just weeks away, the days with His disciples are few, but also the crowds are great. Decisions and commitments need to be understood and made, along with readiness for Gospel ministry and disciple-making! Let's review some of these teaching topics. Our next event in Jesus' life will be one of the most developed and pivotal miracles leading to the cross: the raising of Lazarus.
Teachings of Jesus during this time period:

Teaching #1 – Entrance into the Kingdom (Luke 13:22-35) This lesson began after someone asked, "Are there few that be saved?" Jesus went on to teach that a personal relationship with Him was necessary, not just knowledge about Him, which many Jews at that time assumed was enough to gain heaven!
Teaching #2 – Truth about the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-24) This lesson took place in a Pharisee's home on the Sabbath. Jesus healed a man and then taught that the Sabbath was not about keeping rules and regulations but about godly living: mercy, humility, hospitality, love, and generosity.
Teaching #3 – Cost of Discipleship (Luke 14:25-35**)** A huge crowd of people were following Jesus, and we read in Luke 14:25 that he swung around in dramatic fashion and gave them a very direct message about what it meant to truly follow Him. They would need to be loyal only to Him; submit only to Him; and forsake everything for Him.
Teaching #4 – Realize your value and the Father's great love for you (Luke 15) After Jesus' direct message on what is demanded of His disciples, we read in verse 1 that it was the publicans and sinners who came in closer to hear more! Their attentiveness was rewarded with three of the most beautiful, sweet parables Jesus ever gave: the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the two lost sons.
Teaching #5 – Wealth is to be used for eternal treasure (Luke 16**)** Jesus taught two principles about wealth here: having riches **was not a** reflection of God's blessing and acceptance; and that money should be used to build up treasure in heaven.

I. Jesus Teaches on Sin It is interesting to note that Jesus had taught much of this lesson about a year earlier in Galilee, found in Matthew 18. His faithful followers needed to be reminded of this, as did everyone listening that day!

"Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offenses (Gk. - _stumbling block; snares; traps; temptations to sin; lures to draw into sin_ **) will come: but woe (Lit. -** _a pronouncement of doom ="judgment is coming"_ **) unto him, through whom they come! [2]It were better for him that a** _millstone_ (large grinding stone used to grind grain; moved by an animal) **were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, that he should offend one of these little ones (Lit. -** _immature believers; followers_ **)." Luke 17:1-2**

The Inevitability of Sin: Romans 3:23 declares, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God," here Jesus says, "It is impossible but that offenses will come." The Greek word used for offenses means "stumbling block," or anything that might cause one to stumble or be lured into sin!

The Severity of Causing or Instigating Sin: Jesus doesn't mince words here; He is very direct. He pronounces a "woe" or judgment on those who cause others to sin. He says that whoever leads someone into sin will be severely punished! But then Jesus goes on and also gives a dramatic alternative, not a punishment, but an alternative to leading one into sin! Don't misread this: Jesus said, "**It were better for him** that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, **that he should offend one** of these little ones." Wow, that's

pretty intense!! The phrase, "one of these little ones" speaks to exactly whom Jesus sought to protect from others' carelessness regarding sin! Bible teachers agree that He was speaking of immature believers; ones under the care of His appointed leaders. To the heart of God, someone luring a new believer to sin is very grave, and this would be true regardless of age or position, whether in the home, the church, or the workplace; God sees causing another to stumble into sin as terrible and will be punished!

A Message to the Listening: Let's talk about how this applied to the listeners.

- ➔ Publicans and Sinners – The listening publicans and sinners would definitely be counted as immature believers. But as they committed to Jesus and followed Him, they needed to be careful to set a good example and not lead others into sin. If they showed weakness in how they used wealth or had mixed loyalties, they could negatively affect Christ's cause in the future, leading others to sin as well! The publicans and sinners needed to understand that they would be held responsible for their actions as followers of Jesus and examples to other believers!

- ➔ Faithful Followers & Chosen Twelve – The listening disciples and followers of Jesus needed this lesson too. Actions, attitudes, and words that cause another believer to sin, especially those young in the faith, would be severely punished! These new followers were valuable to God, and He loved them dearly. Mismanaging and disregarding their sensitive souls was a grave abuse of an overseer's and disciple-maker's position! How easy it would be for those who had been with Jesus from the beginning to look down on former publicans, or anyone new to their group! In the book of Acts, this would be a challenge for the twelve when Gentiles were added to the church!

- ➔ Pharisees and Religious Leaders – The listening Pharisees and other religious leaders needed to also hear this teaching of Jesus. He had called them "blind guides" in Matthew 23:15-16, leading the people away from the truths of God. They needed to take special heed to Jesus' words! For they were in great danger of God's judgment!

Go to Believers' Application #1

Now Jesus transitions slightly to the believer's response "when" a brother sinned against them. He said it was inevitable, so what then? Please realize, Jesus has taught this multiple times before. Forgiveness toward others is pivotal in our relationship to God and others! This is a lesson His faithful followers needed to be reminded of, as well as everyone listening that day!

II. Jesus Teaches on Forgiveness

"Take heed to yourselves (Lit. _"pay attention to yourself;" "look out for yourself;" "watch over yourself"_): If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. [4]And if he trespass against thee seven times in a _day_, and seven times in a _day_ turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. [5]And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our _faith_." Luke 17:3-5

Jesus began this teaching with the phrase, "Pay close attention to this, look out, watch yourselves." These words warn of potential danger! There is certainly a potential danger in being sinned against and hurt: resentful bitterness! We must watch over our heart for this reason. As I write this, it's November; John and I are at our cabin in the north woods of Wisconsin enjoying some intense study and quiet time. But this cabin isn't quiet in

the summer when our entire family gathers for lakeside fun! One of our yearly traditions is an evening walk around the local state park to see the waterfalls and take lots of pictures. But soon after arriving, I find that for many of our group, especially my grandkids, the lovely walk turns into rock climbing, puddle jumping, stone throwing, **and a cliff**-peering event, and this grandma goes into watchdog mode! I am yelling out, "be careful there;" "whose watching him;' "stop throwing those" "stop getting so close;" "come this way;" "don't go that way;" "isn't anyone watching you?" "be careful not to fall" "don't get wet!" "your all wet!" I think you get the point! In this passage, Jesus uses the same intensity: "Take heed to yourselves"; the danger of sin and its consequences are real!

Here's the procedure God desires for believers to follow when other believers sin against them
"trespass" → "rebuke" → "repent" → "forgive" → REPEAT x 7+
Let's look carefully at each point in verse 3.
trespass – this word is used twice in these verses. It means sin or wrong. How many times a day does that happen to you? Well, if you are around people at all…or even if you are not…I'm sure you'll admit it happens many times a day! Jesus began this whole teaching with the fact that "it is impossible but that offenses will come" and now He is instructing on how to handle it! So…
rebuke – this is a gentle, humble conversation telling the person that they committed sin. It is a solemn warning of their wrong; a reproval of what they did and the need to stop; it's a correction to wrong behavior – please realize, Jesus is saying this is our duty!
repent – this is the desired outcome of the rebuke. It is turning away from their sin; a change of heart that results in changing their actions, words, or attitude; they feel sorry and say so! This is all part of repentance!
forgive – this is not a cheap collection of sympathetic words but a radical release of resentment, bitterness, and anger while restoring fellowship to them once again. Notice, Jesus is saying this is our duty!
So, with that list of actions comes the end of verse 3.

But then, as recorded in verse 4-5, Jesus goes on to instruct about **repeat offenses!** "And if he trespass against thee…" Now we might think He would say the word, "again"…"If he trespass against thee *again*," BUT actually, what He really does say is of such a greater level of intensity and even shocking…Let's read it: "If he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent;" Wow! Let's stop there! What would be your knee-jerk reaction to this? Being sinned against by the same person with the same offense, seven times a day, and then them coming again, again, again, again, again, again and again in repentance. How would you react, let's say, by about repentance number four? I think I know what I would say! But yet, Jesus had another amazing truth to share with His followers, and it comes in the form of a command: "thou shalt forgive him**." As this sinner sins habitually, we are told to forgive habitually!** Wow! Really, not just seven times, when Jesus taught this same principle to the disciples in Matthew 18: 22, He told them, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, until seventy times seven." Jesus was highlighting the innumerable number of times He expects His followers to forgive! **To live in the spirit and habit of forgiving!** To extend unending forgiveness! The believer who is a habitual sinner, and we all know one, needs habitual forgiveness!

And what was the heart cry of those listening that day, what poured from their soul?
"Lord, Increase our **Faith.**" – They didn't say, "increase" our love, or patience, or mercy, or power, or even forgiveness; they asked for faith! Why? How does that work? Well, the disciples understood that faith would be needed to obey this overwhelming command; they knew faith would be needed to trust God to take care of the consequences of sin they might find themselves in; they knew faith would be needed to handle misunderstanding, to soothe the hurts, to heal; they knew faith would be needed to trust God for the wisdom and strength to continue the never-ending cycle of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and then sin again! Faith was their greatest need, and they knew they needed more of it! This radical forgiveness required radical faith!

"And the Lord said, If ye _had_ faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." Luke 17:6
In Greek, **Jesus isn't talking about the disciples' lack of faith, but about using the faith they had**. Jesus' illustration is kind of ridiculous on so many levels! But if they had an itsy bit of living faith, the size of a small seed, it would give their spoken word the power to make a tree tear itself out of the ground, root and all, and go happily and successfully to the ocean and be planted there! Faith knows no impossibilities! In other words, they already possessed the faith to obey His command! They were to use it!

III. Jesus Teaches on Duty By using this little example from real life, Jesus is setting up another truth His disciples needed to know.

➔ Not Reality for Servants

"But which of you, having a servant _plowing_ or _feeding_ cattle, will say unto him by and by (Lit. - _immediately_), when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?" Luke 17:7
He's talking about a worker or slave doing the manual labor of a farm, whether in the field or with the animals. When the tired worker comes in after his outdoor work is done, no employer or landowner is going to invite him to sit down, put his feet up, take it easy, and eat up! There might even have been smirks or head shakes at the silliness of such a thought!

➔ Reality for Servants Here's the truth of the situation!

"And will not rather say unto him, _Make_ ready wherewith I may sup, and _gird_ thyself, and _serve_ me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? [9]Doth he _thank_ that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow (Lit - _think_) not." Luke 17:8-9
Two points of what would really happen!

1. **The farmer would tell the worker or slave to make and serve dinner to him first.** Wow, did you notice that this servant was a jack of all trades, and nothing seemed below him. During the day he fed the cows, or worked the field, and in the evening peeled potatoes and made the stew! He knew how to do it all and was expected to do it all! Well, after slaving all day, and when the farmer was full and satisfied, **then** he could eat!
2. **No special thanks or recognition should be expected** for the farm work done that day or the supper made and served that night!

➔ Reality for God's Servants

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done _all_ those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable (Lit. - _unworthy of special honor_) servants: we have done that which was our _duty_ to do." Luke 17:10

"done all things…commanded" → "we are unprofitable servants" → "done…our duty"
Here should be the attitude of a follower of Jesus when it comes to thanks and rewards: we are just doing our duty and don't need a pat on the back! I want to look back to the first word that introduced this last section of teaching in verse 7. The word "But." This word connects to the teachings we just covered; they all work together smoothly. So…As we follow Jesus commands, like rebuking and forgiving other believers, or using our money for eternal good, or forsaking the things of this life to follow Him, or carefully living humbly and generously toward others, we realize that all this, and so much more, is just our duty!

Believers' Application:

We must ask ourselves: how will we respond to these teachings? Let's consider how these truths apply to us.

1. Jesus' Teaching on Sin – Are you a stumbling block to others? Let's check a few ways that we can become a stumbling block and cause someone else to sin.

- Our wrong attitude:
  - complaining and grumbling - can cause others to view situations from the same perspective and cause them to sin too
  - bitterness – this can spread and cause others to become bitter as well (Heb. 12:15)
  - anger – when we react in anger and verbal hostility, it often causes the same reaction in others (Prov. 15:1)
  - haughty, prideful spirit – an attitude of superiority can hurt fellow believers; we must remember that we are equally loved and valued before God. Each one of us will stand before God in judgment and give an account of ourselves. (Phil. 2:3; Rom. 14:1-13)
- Your disobedience to God or others:
  - When we disregard the instructions of authority, others may be pulled into the same thing – civil rules, employer, parents (Rom. 13:1-2; Col. 3:20; Heb. 13:17)
  - When we disregard God's commands and principles, others may be pulled into the same thing (Matt. 5:19)

Let's remember the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 8:12, "But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." or later in 1 Cor. 10:31-32, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:" Let's be very careful not to cause others to sin! *To accomplish Gospel ministry and see spiritual growth happen in lives, believers must actively obey Jesus' command to live godly lives before others.*

2. Jesus' Teaching on Forgiveness – I want to remind us that Jesus was teaching the disciples and those following Him about sin and forgiveness **between believers**. In just a few short weeks, He would be gone, and they would be sent out to the world "teaching [others] to observe all things whatsoever" Jesus had commanded them. The Gospel was to be given to the world, and these new believers needed to grow! Though redeemed by Jesus' blood, their depravity and sinfulness would require regular, radical forgiveness toward one another when sin raised its ugly head, maybe seven times a day or more! *To accomplish Gospel ministry and see spiritual growth happen in lives, believers must actively obey Jesus' command of rebuke → repentance →forgive!*

Let's look at a few other passages from Paul's Epistles and see how he communicated the importance of forgiveness and living together in love.

Ephesians 4:14-15, 31-5:2 – Paul reminds the Ephesian church to grow in knowledge and faith in Christ. (v. 14-15) Then he goes on with specific areas a believer must set in accordance with godly living. Paul simply adds, "grieve not the holy Spirit of God," because that kind of godless living stiffens the Holy Spirit's power. (v.19-30) Paul finishes with the need for forgiveness between believers; to follow God, and to love as Jesus loved! *To accomplish Gospel ministry and see spiritual growth happen in lives, believers must actively obey Jesus' command of rebuke → repentance → loving forgiveness!*

Galatians 6:1-2 – These two verses remind us of Jesus' teaching in Luke 17 about rebuking those in sin. We are not to overlook habitual sin but rebuke as we seek to see others grow in their walk with God. *To accomplish Gospel ministry and see spiritual growth happen in lives, believers must actively obey Jesus' command of consistent rebuke → repentance → loving forgiveness!*

Colossians 3:12-15 – Here Paul tells how love must be the primary ingredient in the rebuke process! We must remember that repentance, restoration, and spiritual growth are our ultimate goal! So many times, a conversation about hurts, sinful words, or attitudes can quickly escalate into more of a struggle to prove who was right and who was wrong. Suddenly, more hurt happens instead of right! *To accomplish Gospel ministry and see spiritual growth happen in lives, believers must actively obey Jesus' command of loving rebuke → repentance → then loving forgiveness!*

Remember, much of the spread of the Gospel and the spiritual growth of saints depends on our relationships with one another. Let's remember: those saints we work the closest with are likely our spouses, children, parents, siblings, or church friends. These are the dearest ones in our lives! So, a gentle rebuke, sincere repentance, and authentic forgiveness must be part of our daily walk. Because the truth is, "It is impossible, but that offenses will come!"

3. Jesus' Teaching on Duty – The Pharisees, at the time of Jesus, did their service to God to be seen by men! Jesus talked very sternly to them about this attitude. But it is a privilege to obey and serve God! Yes, the Scriptures make it plain that there are rewards in heaven for being faithful, but here Jesus teaches that a disciple must be careful not to have unwarranted self-worth and spiritual pride! God owes us nothing, but we owe Him everything!

Our desire should be to do God's will from the heart! - Eph. 6:5-9 (In our daily work or employment)

Our desire should be to do God's will out of love! - John 14:15, 21, 23

As we are active in Gospel ministry and discipling others, we must realize it is our reasonable service, a service done out of love for God!