

THE ATTITUDE OF AN UNWORTHY SERVANT

Luke 17:1-10

Key Verse: 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.’”

In the last passage Jesus spoke clearly about heaven and hell. We talk a lot about heaven, not much about hell. But Jesus taught about hell clearly. Hell is a place of everlasting torment. Those who go to hell burn constantly in fire that never goes out. When the Twin Towers were ablaze after the terrorist attack, the top floors reached extreme temperatures. To escape, some people jumped out of windows over one hundred stories high. They knew they were jumping to their deaths, but the pain of the fire was unbearable. How terrible the punishment of hell is! The only way out is to listen to Moses and the Prophets, that is, to repent and believe the word of God. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (Jn 5:24).

There is a danger for our nation America to be like the rich man in the last passage who ignored the hungry beggar. This happens because we are spiritually blind. The word of God has the power to heal spiritual blindness. The word of God can change us from selfish people into shepherds. May God make America a shepherd nation through one-to-one Bible study. In our one-to-one Bible studies, we must teach the word of God as it is, including the truth about heaven and hell. One young missionary was in the sauna at Northwestern. A student came in. The missionary said, “It’s hot in here isn’t it?” The student said, “Yes.” Then he said, “You know, it is much hotter in hell.” The student looked puzzled. Then the missionary said, “How can we get out?” The student answered, “Through the door.” He responded, “Jesus Christ is the door.” In this way the student began Bible study. We must teach the word of God with an absolute attitude and depend on the work of the Holy Spirit.

In today’s passage Jesus teaches us what kind of attitude his disciples must have as spiritual leaders. We must have a right attitude toward sin. We must know how to rebuke and forgive. Most of all, we must learn the attitude of an unworthy servant. May God help us to grow as spiritual leaders through this study.

First, sin is serious—watch yourselves (1-3a).

Look at verse 1. “Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.’” Here we learn the mind of Christ toward sin. Jesus acknowledged that sin is in the world and that sin spreads. How wonderful it would be if there was no chance to sin! But the reality is: things that cause people to sin are bound to come.

Knowing this, some people become very fatalistic about the sin problem. They resign themselves to the tragedy of sin, saying, “Well, that’s the way it is.” However, according to Jesus’ words, how we respond to chances to sin is a matter of personal decision. Those who yield to sin are responsible for their decision. But Jesus’ main warning here is to those who cause others to sin. Jesus says, “...but woe to that person through whom they come.”

How can someone cause another to sin? The most direct way is to spread one’s own sinsickness to others. A person who smokes regularly for his own pleasure spreads “second-hand smoke” as a side effect. Thus, he causes those around him to smoke, even though they did not choose to do so. Likewise, anyone who enjoys sin for his own pleasure can easily spread his sinsickness to others. Some cause others to sin in order to make money. That is why greedy people spread internet pornography which ruins many young souls. We must know that the most hardened criminals began a life of sin through pornography. Some cause others to sin to soothe their own consciences. That is why some “push” drugs on others. Many began to use drugs, not to experience a “high,” but because they could not resist the pressure of their guilt-ridden peers. How many lives have been ruined by drugs!

However, causing others to sin is often more subtle. It can be accomplished by planting doubt. When Satan caused Eve to doubt the love of God, she became spiritually sick. Finally, she ate the forbidden fruit in disobedience to God’s word. Those who cause others to doubt God’s absolute word cause others to sin. In many high schools, “safe sex” is taught under the assumption that high school students are bound to have sex no matter what their parents say. This plants a relativistic attitude toward God’s truth. The word of God says, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex

20:14). Adultery is defined as any sexual relationship outside the bounds of marriage. Jesus said this includes thoughts of the heart also (Mt 5:28). Parents and teachers who do not teach the truth about this contribute to the ruin of their children. They are, in effect, causing others to sin. Some people claim that homosexuality is a genetic matter to justify that sinsickness. This deceptive teaching can push over the edge those young ones who might be struggling with that sin. Then, there are those who have personal grudges against servants of God who told them to repent. These people say evil things about God's servants or start complaining sessions that cause young ones to doubt and stumble in sin. Such people are instruments of the devil.

Then what happens to those who cause others to sin? Look at verse 2. "It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin." What a warning! Most of us have seen the movie "Titanic," or at least we know the story. Going to one's death by drowning is gruesome. But Jesus says it would be better to die in such a way than to cause others to sin. Causing others to sin carries eternal consequences; it results in eternal damnation of their souls. Jesus warns that God's harsh judgment awaits those who cause others to sin.

Finally Jesus said, "So watch yourselves." Jesus said this to his disciples. Jesus wants his disciples to examine their lives objectively on the basis of God's word. He wants us to evaluate our attitudes and conduct. Not only must we be right with God, we must also be right with God's children, especially little ones. If we cause even one person to stumble, it is a tragedy in God's sight that warrants severe punishment.

To a spiritual leader, laziness is a terrible sin. When King David was lazy one spring, it led him to commit the sin of adultery and then murder as he tried to cover it up. The consequences on his family and his people was fatal. To a spiritual leader, relativism toward God's word is intolerable. Once, while Moses was on the mountain, Aaron took the leadership of God's people. Aaron was so acquiescent that when a few troublemakers pressed him, he made a golden calf for them to worship. Then the people ran wild and became a laughingstock to their enemies. To restore order, Moses commanded the Levites to go through the camp killing brothers, friends and neighbors who were out of control. About three thousand people died that day.

We must take Jesus' warning to watch ourselves very seriously. When we do, God is ready to help us in many ways. When God redeemed the Israelites from slavery, he gave them the Ten Commandments, the Law of God. In doing so, God used thunder and lightning, fire and smoke. At that time, Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning" (Ex 20:20). The fear of God keeps us from sinning. Christian faith is not only grace; it includes the Law of God. We must honor the Ten Commandments with holy reverence before God. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Most of all, we must depend on Jesus who won eternal victory over the devil's temptation. Jesus taught us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Mt 6:13).

Second, rebuke and forgive (3b-6).

Sin is such a serious matter. Jesus expanded his scope from the personal level to the fellowship level. Look at verse 3b. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him." Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him." We cannot be too individualistic. We must be aware of our brother's spiritual condition. This is why we have fellowships. The fellowship of Jesus' people is not centered on human activity or friendship. It is centered in Christ. Jesus hates sin. We must be aware of sin that slips into the fellowship. We must confront it with a rebuke.

Here "rebuke" does not mean to condemn others arbitrarily out of self-righteousness. It means to give them the word of God to bring repentance and restoration. We can learn how from St. Paul in his instruction to Timothy. Timothy was rather timid in character and wanted to be nice to everybody. But he was appointed to be a pastor and Bible teacher for the early Christian church. St. Paul told him, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2Ti 4:2). This teaches how to rebuke others. We must do so based on God's word. We must do so to restore people to spiritual fellowship. We must do so with great patience and due care. We cannot avoid the spiritual duty to rebuke those who sin against God and the Christian fellowship. May God give us the courage to rebuke sin with the word of God.

After rebuking, what must we do? If our brother or sister repents, we must forgive them. Look at verse 4. "If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." Forgiving

those who have sinned against us is not easy for anyone. Many famous heroes who accomplished spectacular feats totally failed to forgive those who sinned against them. But Jesus commands his disciples to forgive those who repent, again and again, without limit. How can we do this? It is possible when we look at Jesus and remember his grace to sinners. On the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). Jesus forgave those who nailed him to the cross. Jesus forgave each of us our sins. When we remember Jesus' grace to forgive us, we find sufficient grace to forgive others. Forgiving is not an option. So Jesus taught us to pray daily, "Father...Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Lk 11:2,4).

Jesus' teaching is from above and not easy to practice. When the disciples heard Jesus' teaching, they cried out, "Increase our faith!" They must have struggled hard to forgive others. They realized it was a matter of faith. Natural men do not forgive others. Forgiving is an act of divine mercy. So Alexander Pope said, "To err is human; to forgive, divine." To forgive others we need faith in God.

Look at verse 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.'" The power of faith is great because it is faith in God Almighty. The power of faith is great because it is faith in Jesus Christ who died for the sin of the world and rose again from the dead. Jesus teaches the power of faith, not to encourage us to toss mulberry trees around, but to uproot the power of sin. Jesus can uproot the sins of young people and throw them into the sea. Jesus can raise young Americans as a royal priesthood for world mission.

Third, we are unworthy servants (7-10).

Those who know the grace of God through the forgiveness of sins can have the attitude of an unworthy servant. Look at verses 7-9. "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat?' Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?" It is unlikely that one of the disciples ever had a servant. But they were familiar with the master and servant relationship. The master was always the master and the servant was always the servant. The servant worked hard in the field all day long. When he came in, he could not rest on the sofa with a cold drink and watch television. He had to change out of his overalls, take a shower, put on a suit, and serve his master's supper. Only when his master was fully satisfied could the servant eat, drink and rest. Servants had to work hard. Servants had to be humble. Servants had to maintain the attitude of a servant always. Servants could not expect to be thanked.

Look at verse 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.'" Jesus teaches his disciples the attitude of an unworthy servant. First of all, they must do everything they are told to do. This is why we eat Daily Bread. We must listen to the word of God every morning and find out what to do. Then we must do it with all our hearts and strength to the end. After that, we must thank God for the privilege of serving him and render all glory and honor to God alone.

We see here that after working hard at our daily jobs, we must not go home to rest and relax. Instead, we must go to the campus to take care of God's sheep through one-to-one Bible study. Finally, we can go home late at night. Then, before seeking food and rest, we must serve our spouses and children. After that we can eat and rest. We must do this every day without expecting to be thanked. We must do this every day with joy and gratitude in our hearts toward God.

The best example in showing the attitude of an unworthy servant is our Lord Jesus Christ. Though Jesus is the holy God, he emptied himself and came into this world as a man. Though he is worthy of honor and praise from all creation, he did not exalt himself. He took the position of a servant before God the Father Almighty. He did not sleep in late. He got up early every morning and spent quiet hours in prayer. Then he worked hard all day, every day, until late at night, preaching the gospel and healing the sick. He even worked hard on the Sabbath, to the chagrin of the lazy Pharisees. Though Jesus worked so hard, he rarely heard the word "Thank you"—perhaps from one person in ten. Instead, he was despised and rejected by men. At last, betrayed by his own disciple, he went to the cross. There he was nailed hand and foot to the rugged wood. He was lifted up in disgrace like a common criminal. Shedding his holy blood, he died. God made him who had no sin to become sin for us, so that in him we might

become the righteousness of God (2Co 5:21). In this way, Jesus became the unworthy servant to save us from our sins. Thank you Jesus!

St. Paul knew the grace of Jesus. He lived with the attitude of an unworthy servant. He worked hard to carry out mission journeys, risking his life to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, he said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

May God help us to have the fear of God and a right attitude toward sin. May God help us to know the grace of forgiveness of sins. May God help us to have the attitude of an unworthy servant to carry out one-to-one Bible study with students this spring semester.