

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.'"

Chapter 17:1-10 tells us how serious it is to cause people to sin. Jesus also teaches us what kind of attitude we must have in the cause of serving God or after serving God.

First, do not cause others to sin (1-2).

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.'" Jesus admits that the situation of the world is perverse and adulterous. The end of the 20th century is the post-Christian era in which secular humanism is rampant. The most tragic phenomenon is that most people have become pragmatic. In one sense, pragmatism is good for procuring instant benefit. But pragmatism makes people lose a sense of history and see one's lifespan as a whole. In this situation, in the name of human freedom, most people are permissive of promiscuity without circumspection of their own lives. What is worse, most people think of God relatively. God does not give immediate benefit. So they ignore that God is the sovereign Ruler of history and that God cares for each of us.

So, in this situation, it's not easy for anybody not to cause others to sin. God said in the Ten Commandments, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Ex 20:8). But one father said to his children, "We must keep the Sabbath holy, right! When we keep the Sabbath holy, God will bless our family and our descendants. But not to keep the Sabbath is not too bad. We cannot miss the final football game." This way of thinking seems to be quite reasonable and it's a small matter. It also seems exemplary in this generation. But his absence of absolute attitude makes the word of God seem relative. This way of thinking causes a serious result to his children. For example, Abraham's sheep Lot was relativistic toward the word of God, because he loved God, and at the same time, he loved

the world. As a result, his relativism caused his two sons-in-law to think of the word of God as a joke when they heard about the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:14). These ungodly men say, "...ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Pe 3:4). "You are kidding. The civilization of Sodom and Gomorrah is too great to destroy, even if it were by God's plan." In the course of raising two daughters in Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot revealed to his daughters that he loved God as much as he loved the world. His two daughters knew the double-mindedness of their father. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, his two daughters stayed in a cave and both of them committed incest by making their father get drunk until he lost consciousness.

The result of cause and effect is not a Biblical constant. However, causing others to sin has the most serious effect. How serious is it? Verse 2 says, "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." To cause others to sin is as serious as killing a person by beating him with a sledgehammer. But these days, most people cause others to sin just to enjoy sin. They are spiritual idiots.

Second, rebuke (3).

Look at verse 3b. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." This is our Lord's command. These days, many people say, "You do your work, I'll do mine. Don't bother me, and I won't bother you. Okay!" These days, this mentality has become the social consensus. Living in this cultural atmosphere, generally people don't bother others because they don't want to be sued. One prayerful minister encouraged a foxy woman not to fish many handsome men who were already married. But she did not listen to the pastor. So the pastor called a meeting of the elders of the church. The pastor invited her and earnestly pleaded with her not to live an immoral life. Then the woman sued the church and won the case. The church had to pay her \$200,000 for the violation of human rights. Many parents don't rebuke their children to live in the sight of God, partly because they do not like to rebuke and mainly because they have no spiritual authority to rebuke their children, due to their own corrupted lives.

Rebuking others' sin seems to be against the social consensus. Still, we must rebuke others' sins. Rebuking is the best love in the sight of God. It is like giving proper medicine to a sick person. Joseph in the Old Testament is a good

person whom God intended to raise as the most exemplary person so that the world might be filled with people like Joseph. We call Joseph a shadow of Jesus Christ. In character, he was too nice to rebuke others. But Joseph rebuked his brothers until they repented of their sin of plotting to kill their brother Joseph and selling him to an unknown foreign country. It was a heart-breaking period of time for him, but he accomplished his mission of helping his brothers repent of their sins so that they were fully qualified to be the twelve Patriarchs of Israel. Jesus said, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev 3:19a). If we love our brothers, we must rebuke them when they are not right before God.

Third, forgive (3-6).

Look at verse 3 again. In this verse, Jesus commands us to forgive our brother if he repents. When we study the Bible prayerfully, we learn how to forgive others' sins. Jesus urges his disciples to forgive others' sins seven times a day if they repent (4). Matthew 18:22 says to forgive seventy-seven times. We must forgive others' sins endlessly if they repent.

How did the disciples respond? They were startled by Jesus' teaching, because they were not ready to forgive others' sins. They were familiar with Moses' law, "a tooth for a tooth" (Ex 21:24). So they said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" They thought they needed a mountain-like faith to forgive others' sins. But Jesus answered that faith is not a matter of quantity but of quality. So he said, "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" (6). This verse indicates that faith the size of a mustard seed is enough to forgive others' sins. Forgiving others' sins is the most difficult thing to do. When we read "Plutarch's Lives," so many heroes who did many great things had no strength to forgive their adversaries. So they died of harboring grudges. They were known as conquerors. But they could not conquer themselves. Outwardly they were heroes. Yet inwardly they had the hearts of cockroaches. They were not mature enough to forgive others. But Jesus forgave all our sins. So Jesus says in Mark 11:25, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." On the cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a).

Fourth, the attitude of an unworthy servant (7-10).

The parable in verses 7-10 tells us that the servants worked all day long in

the field, perhaps from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., from sunrise to sunset, like the song in "Fiddler on the Roof," "Sunrise, Sunset, Sunrise, Sunset...." The servants came back home when the day of work was over. They must have expected to hear, "Well done, my faithful servant. You worked hard in the heat. Eat and get some rest." To our surprise, the master said, "Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink." It is common sense that to the servants who worked hard in the heat all day long it is fair and proper to be told, "Please go home and eat and rest well." But this parable tells us that the servants are supposed to serve the master's dinner table. After that they can eat and rest.

This part of the story tells us our basic attitude and divine duty between God and his children. As we experience, attitude is the expression of heart and spirit. Attitude is basic to our constitution. This basic attitude and divine duty can be seen only in Jesus. Jesus is truly great because he did not want to be served, but to serve. Serving makes man truly great. It was 1777 mid-winter. George Washington had to keep one of the fortresses, Valley Forge, with his soldiers. Because of transportation difficulties, supplies were not properly delivered. As a result, the soldiers had to suffer from cold weather and hunger. The soldiers under George Washington did not know if they were fighting with enemies or with cold weather and hunger. They were about to lose their spirit and morale. One day, George Washington saw one of his soldiers chewing diligently one part of his shoes. Wishing to hug him, he cried. Then he gave up his privilege as commander and began to visit his men to encourage them. His fatherly care and encouragement enhanced the spirit and morale of soldiers under his care. Soon the soldiers realized that they had to win the war for the unification of their country and the future happiness of their children.

As we know well, our father Abraham was old and well advanced in years. The Lord had blessed him in every way (Ge 24:1ff.) Since God gave him a one and only son, Abraham was very possessive and obsessive. But as always, all people have one or two nagging problems of life. Abraham had a marriage problem for his son Isaac. Abraham thought that he could not keep his son Isaac in his house anymore and enjoy him when Isaac was 40 years old. So he called his servant to go to his hometown where his relatives lived and get a bride for Isaac, so that Isaac would not marry a Canaanite woman. The servant wanted Isaac to go with him. Abraham said, "No, you go by yourself" (6). On the way, the servant prayed again and again. When he opened his eyes after prayer, there

was a girl named Rebekah. When the servant asked for some water to drink, she gave him a drink and was happy to say, "Let your animals drink, too" (19). So Abraham's servant was convinced that God gave him success. Rebekah let them go to her house and Rebekah's family members urged him to eat and rest. Abraham's servant said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say" (33). Then Abraham's servant told Rebekah's family members the story from beginning to end in detail. Rebekah's family members were all convinced and said, "This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other" (50). The family members said, "She is there," and they asked Rebekah whether she would stay ten days more. Then she said, "I will go" (58). Abraham's servant was old. But he did something impossible, because he had the basic attitude and divine duty.

Since David became a king, the first work to be done was to destroy the harassing enemies, the Philistines. King David had been victorious until most of the fortresses of the Philistines were conquered. When David was at the cave of Adullam, he wanted to drink some water from a well near Bethlehem. His loyal generals sensed that King David wanted some water from the well near Bethlehem. So the three mighty generals broke through the Philistine lines and drew water from the well and carried it back to David. The three mighty generals help us understand a little more the concept of unworthy servant. Here we must think more about the words "unworthy servant."

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 told his disciples this story to teach us to have a right attitude to be his heavenly children. The worldly servant works hard and complains enough to let out his frustration and anger. But the children of God must do whatever they do with great willingness and thanks and overflowing joy in their work places. We, the children of God, must do everything to please God. We, the children of God, must think that to do the work of God is divine privilege. We, the children of God, are not hirelings, looking at our watches every ten minutes waiting for the time to go home. But we, the children of God, must cry many tears, saying, "Who am I that God gave me the privilege of working for the glory of God?" Jesus' words remind us of King David. God appointed David king of Israel and ordained him by the prophet Samuel. A shepherd boy became a king all of a sudden. But he did not feel exalted. He thanked God. 2 Samuel 7:18 says, "Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: 'Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my

family, that you have brought me this far?" He was grateful to be used by God as a shepherd of God's flock. He thought that he was unworthy to shepherd God's flock. What David said to God sounds as if he were crying many tears. David's attitude is exactly Jesus' meaning of the unworthy servant.

Today we mainly learned the attitude of an unworthy servant. Today is the last day of this year. In 1995 we were happy when we had a right attitude of unworthy servants of God. We were not happy if our attitude in the sight of God was not right. May God give us the attitude of unworthy servants.