

Session 6

February 25, 2024

MATURING FAITH

Luke 17:1-10

Any parent knows the necessity of repetition. Even simple instructions must be “hammered in” if we want to insure raising responsible kids. This passage from Luke 17 serves as yet another reminder to the Lord’s disciples of some important lessons He had mentioned earlier in His ministry. The common theme is *application*. It’s not enough to know spiritual principles; they must be put into practice. Three related lessons are offered.

Forgiveness (vv. 1-4). When counseling folks, I often remind them that much of what happens to us we have no control over. Hence, it behooves us to actually take control of those things we *can* control. Jesus taught much the same thing here. “Offenses will certainly come,” He said. The word *offense* has several possible meanings. The word refers sometimes to a trap; other times to the bait used in a trap; and other times to “stumbling blocks.” But the general meaning is the same: there are certain temptations that might cause us to “stumble” into sin. Again, they will come. The devil is seeking to trap us (see Eph. 6:11); the world is certainly against us (see 1 John 2:15ff); and even our old sin nature is in warfare with God and our desired piety (see Rom. 8:7ff). Jesus said we cannot control the fact that traps and temptations come our way. But we can make sure that we are not the source of temptations to others! That can happen through unintentional hypocrisy, active irreverence, or downright deception. So offensive to God is His children tempting others to sin, that He says they would be better off drowned in the sea than to face God’s wrath because of it. Such is the angst of God! So what does one do when a brother slips up and sins, or perhaps sets a snare for another? The answer is to “rebuke him” (v. 3). If he repents, then “forgive him.” As offended as God is by sin, so merciful is He toward the repentant. And verse 4 makes the application: If God continues to forgive us when we sin against Him, then we are obligated to do the same to those who sin against us. For reflection: *Read Matt. 6:14-15. How does that passage inform our discussion here?*

Faith (vv. 5-6). The request of the apostles might appear misplaced, but actually makes perfect sense in light of what Jesus told them in the preceding verses. Suddenly confronted with their own weaknesses and the fear of being “stumbling blocks” to others, they saw the need to protect themselves from just that. The solution (in their mind) was increased faith. Yet, while Jesus addresses faith, He never really told them how to increase it. Rather, He emphasized the power of faith. Whether He was speaking of mustard-seed-sized faith moving mountains (as in Matt. 17:20) or mulberry trees (v. 6), the principle is not the amount of faith, but its potential. So what is the answer to deeper, more powerful faith? Perhaps it’s not the amount of faith, but the object of faith that matters. In other words, the power of faith lies not in *how much* we have, but *who we place it in*. For reflection: *Read Mark 9:20ff. How does that text apply here? Is there a contradiction? Why or why not?*

Faithfulness (vv. 7-10). At first glance, this third segment of the narrative seems even more misplaced than the second. But the key is understanding that Jesus is following the disciples’ train of thought. In the first segment, He warned them to guard themselves, stay away from dangerous temptations, and avoid becoming stumbling blocks to others. They reacted in fear in

the second segment, asking for an increased faith to help them “rise above” those pitfalls. But there must have been more to their reaction than simple fear. Apparently, they wanted spiritual maturity, and they wanted it now! The story of the servant and his master was His way of telling them to slow down and re-set their priorities. The time to reap their rewards was coming. But they still had obligations to fulfill for their Master. Verse 10 was a bit of a rebuke, as Jesus reminded them that even when they had done all that the Master commanded, their response was to be one of genuine humility. For reflection: *How would you describe “mature faith?” Why do you think that Jesus finished this segment with a reminder to stay humble? Is there a connection here?*