**Only Doing Our Job**

Based on [Luke 17:1-10](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk17.1-10)

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Today’s gospel lesson is a string of teachings on discipleship. First Jesus teaches that, even for his disciples, there will be temptations to sin in this life. He teaches that a great punishment is merited by those who would lead others into temptation. To avoid being a tempter; Jesus gives his disciples two commands: (1) rebuke your brother’s sins and (2) forgive him for as many times as he repents. **He teaches that it doesn’t take great faith to do this; even small faith can do anything it is commanded by God.** And finally; when by faith you find yourself accomplishing these things; don’t give yourself credit; because doing what you’re commanded is its own reward.

First Jesus teaches that, even for his disciples, there will be temptations in this life to sin. **Don’t think that because you follow Jesus the Good Shepherd, and have been given the gift of faith that you will no longer be tempted.** Freedom from temptation and deliverance from evil--we pray for these things and God gives daily help--but we do not obtain them fully until heaven. God does not lead you into temptation; but he does not promise to free you from it until the last day, when Christ your king comes again, and the tempter is cast once and for all into lake of fire, along with all devils and false prophets.

Temptation to sin will come; don’t be surprised when they do, because Christ has assured you of it. And remember that God is faithful; **his allowing you to face temptation for this little while is not to destroy you (1 Cor 10:13).** Temptations are sure to come; but do not be afraid because Christ Jesus has already overcome your sin, carried it to the cross and made atonement before God for you. And Jesus, who has done all this is telling you temptations are normal; do not give into them, but do not allow them to shake your confidence in the power of His salvation either. Saved people will necessarily do good works; they will also face temptation and sin.

Dodging temptations is not your biggest concern, because they will always come. **You cannot escape the evil of this world, so don’t waste your time trying to become a monk, or a nun, or spurn your God-given vocation in order to construct a secure sin-proof environment.** It won’t work anyway. Struggle against sin, but don’t obsess over it. Christ paid for it. Rather, your greater concern is to avoid being a tempter, someone who causes others to sin. **It’s no fun being bullied; but it is much better to be bullied than to be the bully. It is much better to suffer wrong than to cause it. It is better to be tempted than be the tempter.**

So be more concerned about your neighbor and how you affect him; than you are about yourself and how he affects you. Has he struck you? Turn the other cheek; and thank God that you are not the one doing the striking. Love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you. They may be tempting you to sin, but theirs is the worse fate. Jesus says of a tempter, “**It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin**.”

These are sobering words. You are not without guidance. Here’s how you are to act so as to avoid being the tempter and prevent causing little ones to sin. Obey two commands. First, “**If your brother sins; rebuke him**.” Jesus commands it; and this is not a new teaching. Scripture teaches throughout that you are in fact your brother’s keeper. If your brother sins or stumbles; and you don’t warn him it’s just as if you caused him to stumble and you share in his guilt (Ezekiel 3:18, 33:6). **And so the proper response to a brother’s sin is not forgiveness, it is rebuke.** Again, the response Jesus himself orders you to have to a brother’s sin is **to rebuke it**. Rebuke it…gently, patiently, lovingly…but make no mistake rebuke it. Because if you respond to your brother’s sin with forgiveness, you have failed to warn him. You have tempted him to complacency in his sin, and as a result become responsible for it.

This is why open communion—**inviting openly unrepentant people to the altar to receive Christ’s body and blood for the forgiveness of sins**—goes against Christ’s plain words. There is nothing that gives Satan more of a foothold than to respond to visible sin with blind forgiveness. Not only has Jesus not given us authority to do that; if we do we are causing that little one to stumble…sharing in his sin and using the very body of Christ to deceive him into thinking that he is forgiven apart from repentance.

Even so you are called to forgive your brother, but on another basis. “**If your brother *repents*, forgive him**.” Repentance, that is—a confession of sin and a desire to do better--that and only that is what we are called to forgive.

**And not only are we *allowed* to forgive it, but we are *commanded* to. So understand the other side of the issue as well. If your brother repents and you continue rebuke him rather than forgive, you are worthy of a millstone necklace.** It does not matter if he repents for exactly the same sin a thousand times and you doubt his sincerity. If he says “I repent” you must forgive him…on Jesus’ orders and on pain of a millstone necklace.

To the apostles who hear this, it sounds to them very difficult to do, impossible even. They are commanded to rebuke sin, and forgive repentance and they don’t think they are strong enough. **So they ask Jesus to increase their faith, to help them accomplish such magnificent feats.** In a word…they *pray* to Jesus. Jesus is God, and they bring their concerns to him and ask for his help. They *pray* to Jesus, “**Increase our faith**.”

Prayer is always good. You are to pray without ceasing. But the apostles here are praying for the wrong thing. **They don’t need “more faith” because t**he power of faith is not in its size. F**aith is simply what holds in your heart the word of God, and size doesn’t matter.** You could have the greatest faith in the world, but if that faith is based on a lie, you will be ruined. **Faith is only as strong as what it believes in.** And so faith can uproot a mulberry tree, and plant it in the sea…its true, so long as it has a command from God to do so.

Consider what faith truly is. Faith is not an extraordinary trust in God that once you have it, it gives you superpowers. Faith is entirely dependent on the Words, Commands and Promises of God…both for its existence and for its accomplishments. **So if you have great faith the size of an elephant that God is going to cause you to win the lottery, that faith will accomplish nothing regardless of its size, because it doesn’t have a word or promise from God to make it happen.** But if you have faith the size of a mustard seed that you can uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea--***and the word of God commands you to do so***--you will make it happen, not by the power of your faith, but on the absolute authority and infallibility of God’s Commands.

The apostles say, “**Lord we need more faith to rebuke and forgive**.” Jesus answers, “**No you don’t. What you need in order to do it is God’s command…and I just gave it to you. I said, ‘If your brother sins rebuke him’, what more do you need? I said, ‘If he repents, forgive him.’ This isn’t rocket science.** You don’t need a PhD in “Rebuktology” or “Forgiviology.” **You have been given authority to rebuke and forgive.**

Now I didn’t say it would feel good to rebuke your brother, or that he would thank you for it. I commanded you to forgive; I didn’t say you would always want to. **But I did say to do it, and that’s all you need. That’s all faith needs**.” Jesus commands you to forgive repentant hearts, those who confess their sins when confronted with them. This is not complicated. If somebody says, “**I was wrong and I’m sorry**.” Say “**I forgive you**”, and mean it.

And if you can’t suffer to forgive your sorrowful brother, then you need to hear the good news. Jesus says, “Remember how much I have forgiven of you. **I have declared you forgiven, that my atoning blood poured out on the cross has spared you an eternity of death and hellfire, not because you’ve been such a good disciple, but because I have compassion for you.** I have spared you from death and an eternity in hell; how can you not have compassion spare your brother condemnation for his faults? I have declared it. You don’t need big faith in the forgiveness of sins, just faith because my word is what accomplishes all things through it anyway.”

How often do you pray to God for strength of faith, but fail to pick up the bible and search for his commands and promises? You don’t need your faith increased; you need it fed with God’s word. Your faith increases and matures when it is fed God’s Word, His commands, His promises.

These are simple commands: “rebuke” and “forgive.” What’s so hard is that you don’t always feel like doing it. But that’s how it always is with work. Know that Jesus has given you the authority to do this work, and if you doubt, go back to his words. “**If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents forgive him.**” It’s a job, your job, and Jesus is your master, your boss, your Lord.

How do you think your boss at work would react if--when he told you to do something you--went and did the opposite? Or bosses, what would you think if you told your employee to do something and they just decided not to, that it was above their pay grade, or else beneath their dignity. You ask them why they disobeyed your clear instructions and they say, “**Well, I really didn’t think your instructions were the right way to go about it**.” You would fire that worker, and rightly so. You didn’t hire them so they can decide for themselves what they should and shouldn’t be doing.

So too, Christ has invited you into his inheritance of eternal life; and in his house he has made you servants of one another. He has equipped you with forgiveness, by forgiving your own sins, freeing you to forgive others freely. That is your job, and because you have been commissioned and commanded by God’s word, your job does not depend on any special ability or skill set on your part. Rebuking and forgiving, this is truly unskilled labour; it doesn’t require talent, only obedience.

There is no special aptitude, but there is training. You need to know what sin is; you need to know God’s Law so that you don’t capriciously rebuke the wrong thing. Christ has equipped you to recognize sin by his Word and rebuke it; and to recognize repentant hearts by his Word and forgive them. “**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work**” (2 Tim 3:17). His word equips you to deal confidently, patiently, lovingly in sin and grace.

And when by faith you find yourself accomplishing these things; don’t give yourself credit or expect acclaim; because doing what you’re commanded is its own reward. So Jesus commands you to think thusly about this holy vocation, “**So also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty**.’”

Let’s review today’s teachings: (1) Temptations will come; but woe to those through whom they come. (2) Brothers become tempters of one another when they fail to rebuke each other’s sins; and to forgive one another freely when they repent. (3) **There is no excuse for such failure, because it’s not by virtue of your faith that you are able to accomplish these things, but it is the authority of God’s word that does them. He commands you to rebuke, he commands you to forgive. If your boss tells you to do something, you do it.** And you need not be anxious, because the boss is the one responsible for what you do. And (4) at the end of the day, your rebuking and your forgiving does not deserve special recognition. A painter paints; a fireman fights fire; a cashier cashiers, a plumber runs pipe and stops leak…and a Christian rebukes sin and forgives repentant hearts. Don’t expect special praise for this; it’s only your job. And it’s so simple **you can’t mess it up**; you can only fail to show up for work, or goof around on the job. And, Lord have mercy if your negligence causes your coworker’s death.

But even your negligence is forgivable through Christ. When you acknowledge before God “**I have failed to warn my brother of his sin, help me to do better**.” “**I have harboured resentment and unforgiveness against someone who wronged me. They apologized and yet my heart thinks they should suffer a bit more for the damage they’ve done. For this I repent and wish to do better.”** These sins and more you bear on your conscience. Don’t justify your negligence; bring it to God’s table today, and by the blood of the lamb who was slain for sinners like you, trust that for Christ’s sake it is forgiven. He said so; You have his word. And that’s all faith needs to hear.