

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

Chapter 17- Luke 17:1-10

279- The Chaos of Humility- Part 2

May 24, 2015

Luke 17:1-10

1 He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!

2 "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

6 And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you.

7 "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'?

8 "But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'?

9 "He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?

10 "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.'"

To the Glory of God

Now in **Ezra 7**- we see that King Artaxerxes of Persia made a decree to send Ezra back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile was over. And verses 9&10 says:

9 ... the good hand of his God *was* upon him.

10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.

But in **Ezra 8:22**- we see that Ezra had butterflies about making the trip back without government protection and he said:

For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.

You see, Ezra understood a very important principle about God:

Isaiah 2:11-21

11 The proud look of man will be abased And the loftiness of man will be humbled, And the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

12 For the Lord of hosts will have a day *of reckoning* Against everyone who is proud and lofty And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased.

13 And *it will be* against all the cedars of Lebanon that are lofty and lifted up, Against all the oaks of Bashan,

14 Against all the lofty mountains, Against all the hills that are lifted up,

15 Against every high tower, Against every fortified wall,

16 Against all the ships of Tarshish And against all the beautiful craft.

17 The pride of man will be humbled And the loftiness of men will be abased; And the Lord alone will be exalted in that day,

18 But the idols will completely vanish.

19 *Men* will go into caves of the rocks And into holes of the ground Before the terror of the Lord And the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble.

20 In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats Their idols of silver and their idols of gold, Which they made for themselves to worship,

21 In order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs Before the terror of the Lord and the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble.

This is "the chaos of humility"- the chaos or the disruption that is caused in the community or in the nation or in the family or in the Church when the people of God are convicted by God the Holy Spirit that they have been arrogant, and they are then empowered to come before God in a broken and trembling way.

You see, Ezra understood what we should understand- that God is opposed to the proud man or the proud nation that would rise up and have the audacity to try to live a good and peaceful life on this earth without knowing and loving and enjoying God. And Ezra also understood that God also gives Grace to the humble, and that God will look to the Man who is humble and of a contrite spirit and one who trembles at God's Word. And so Ezra did what he knew to do in order to break the staff of his own arrogance and self- righteousness before God:

Ezra 8:21, 23&31

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.

23 So we fasted and sought our God concerning this *matter*, and He listened to our entreaty.

31 ... and the hand of our God was over us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the ambushes by the way.

So Ezra sets an example for us. He takes the Promise of **2 Chronicles 7:14** and applies it to his situation and trusts God. The Promise said:

and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

God makes His forgiving, healing, and protecting Work *contingent* upon us humbling ourselves, and it is contingent upon us turning away from our sin, and seeking Him in prayer. So Ezra and his troops

humbled themselves (8:21) and sought God earnestly (8:23), and God heard.

So I conclude that if we want God to work mightily among us this Summer- we, too, must humble ourselves and seek His Face very earnestly. We must get down on our knees and bow like little children and cry out for spiritual power. We must get alone in our homes, or in the woods, or during recess at school or at the office, and pour out our yearnings for God.

But there is something else I learned from **Ezra 8:21**:

... I proclaimed a fast... that we might humble ourselves before our God...

Note the connection. The Bible teaches that fasting is one of the *means* to our humbling. Which is why I am teaching about "What the Bible Teaches about Fasting" on Sunday evenings. So just *how* is fasting a means to our humbling? One way to present ourselves before God humbly is to demonstrate to him by fasting that we acknowledge our overwhelming love for physical pleasure. Fasting says to God, *"I know that I do not deserve my daily bread. My sin only deserves to be punished with starvation. I am sorry for my sins and I acknowledge with my fast how grievous they are. I long for you, O God, vastly more than I long for food. Fill me, O Christ! Fill me with 'the bread that comes down from heaven'!"* Which is why David said,

Psalm 63:3

... Your lovingkindness is better than life ...

So can a saved person become broken and humble *without* fasting? Maybe. But what we *know* to be true is that God has graciously provided the "means of fasting" as a way to godly humility. But aren't there dangers associated with fasting? Yes, and I will teach about some of them this evening after lunch. In fact- because we are fallen creatures- we have an enormous capacity to take almost anything that is spiritual and turn it into something ugly and hideous, and fasting is no exception to this. So yes, fasting can actually become a source of pride- if it is carried out with a wrong motive- which is the reason that many people in the modern Church give as to why they have never

once- in all their Christian experience- obeyed the Lord Jesus and fasted.

But the very same thing could also be said about Prayer and Bible Study and even Preaching. All of these “means” could also be used by a wicked heart to do the very opposite of what they were designed to do- and allow those who engage in them to become proud- and yet most people do not shy away from these things.

So am I promoting fasting? Yes. But fasting in and of itself is worthless- which is why many people in the world who are not saved and will never be saved fast all the time. So the goal is not for us to simply fast- but for us to be broken and to be humble and to be contrite of spirit and to tremble at God's Word. *That* is the goal- not simply fasting.

And yet we see here in **Luke 17**- that one of the main hindrances to being that kind of broken and trembling people is false and man-made teaching that distorts or hides or outright changes the Divine Truth of Scripture. Because all false religions exalt the works and the labors and the deeds of Man while minimizing or outright eliminating the Work of God in Christ. And, therefore, it is true to say that it is categorically impossible for anyone who is deceived by false teaching to actually be humble.

Now they can be soft spoken and they can be somewhat reserved in their demeanor and they can manifest some *trappings* of humility- and some people will assign the label of “humility” to them and they will be praised for their great humility- but because they do not know and love the Truth- they do not truly fear God, and, therefore, they are *not* truly humble.

We have to understand that the only religion in the world that gets it right is Biblical Christianity. All other religions and human philosophies are all wrong. All of them. And, therefore- because that is true- the only religion in the history of the world that teaches and explains and empowers people to actually obtain true genuine humility is Biblical Christianity. And the only people on earth who are actually humble are Christians- those who have been born from above and are faithfully following Jesus Christ wherever He goes.

Now contrast that with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the public face of religiosity in Israel in the 1st Century. Everybody looked to them as being experts of the Truth of Scripture- which at that time

was the Old Testament. These men studied the Scriptures twelve hours every day from the time they were twelve years old until they retired at age 50 or died. Most of the upper echelons of Pharisaical Judaism could recite the entire Old Testament from memory. They established Synagogues throughout Israel so they could teach the people what God had said. They were so fastidious about keeping the Law- that they tithed their seeds. And yet they didn't recognize God Incarnate when He stood before them.

The Pharisees are the only group of people in the entire Bible that Jesus never said anything good about. These religious people were so deceived that they rejected the only Way to Heaven. They despised the only Messiah Who could forgive their sins. They turned away from the only Truth that God Himself gave. And, therefore- they were the epitome of arrogance, self-righteousness, and pride. That is what false teaching does to everybody who embraces it.

The Pharisees loved the chief seats that were reserved for people who had done great things. They loved to take the high place in the synagogue. They loved to be at the main table at the banquets. They loved to be called names of dignity and honor in the market place. They loved to be seen as exalting themselves above the people. Everything they did, whether it was their praying, or their fasting, or their giving, any kind of behavior, even the way they moved around, even the clothing that they wore all manifested this self-exaltation, this pride- the stench of human virtue.

They considered themselves to have achieved spiritual knowledge- and they were proud of it. They thought they had a special relationship with God- and they were proud of it. They saw themselves as having merited their religiosity and their self-righteousness acceptance with God- and they were happy about that. And yet these self-deluded unsaved men were the paragons of religion. So the single most unqualified group in Israel were the guardians of that which was Divine in the 1st Century, and were the ones who had the authority to teach the Scriptures. But they were *not* humble.

And so here in **Luke 17**- the Gentile Dr. Luke quoted the Incarnate God in the first ten verses to give us at least four aspects of true and genuine Biblical Humility that we should see and believe and apply to our daily lives:

1. Humble people do not wish to offend others unnecessarily (**Luke 17:1&2**)
2. Humble people forgive (**Luke 17:3&4**)
3. Humble people confess their own weakness and need for God (**Luke 17:5&6**)
4. Humble people seek no recognition for their Service to God (**Luke 17:7-10**)

Now last week- we began to explore the fact that the Apostle Paul taught that the very *essence* of Humility- the actual *substance* of this great godly fruit called "humility" is not found *anywhere* inside the human vessel- but is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ-as Paul said in **Philippians 2:6-8&13**:

6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.

8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Therefore- we see that Humility is *not* some "human virtue" that lies deep within us that needs to be "worked up" or "released" through human effort as so many on the Hay, Wood, and Stubble Television Network teach today. But we see that Humility is part of the very Character of Jesus Christ- it is Who He is. And, therefore, Humility is a *gift* that must be *given* to us by a merciful God.

Therefore, the Pharisees were completely wrong about this, and we cannot labor to "become" humble any more than we can labor to obtain Righteousness. The Righteousness that allows redeemed sinners to go to Heaven forever is imputed to us by faith alone. So God declares us to be Righteous, and so we must seek God for Him to grant us this gift of Humility.

So let's go over these four aspects of true genuine Humility that Luke gives us here in **Luke 17**.

1. Humble people do not wish to offend others unnecessarily

Luke 17:1& 2

1 He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!"

2 "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

Now **Matthew 18** is the sister Passage to **Luke 17**, and there we find a little more clarification about just who these “**little ones**” that Jesus is talking about here- are. **Matthew 18:6** says:

but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Now Jesus says here that it would be better- which means it would be *to his advantage*- for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea- than it is to cause one of the people who believe in Jesus to stumble.

So woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks for it is *inevitable* that stumbling blocks come, but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes." And then in **Matthew 18:10** He says,

See that you do not despise one of these little ones...

In other words- see to it that you do not show disdain for one of these little ones who believe in Me. People who believe in Jesus are so precious to Him- that he is like a Shepherd to them. And when this Savior has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray- *this* Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine on the mountain and Jesus Himself goes and searches for the one that is straying. And when He finds His straying sheep- Jesus rejoices over it more than the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So we can see that it is *not* the Will of our Father Who is in Heaven that any of these little ones who believes in Jesus be devastated. So how we treat other believers is a very important thing to God. And this is why the Apostle John said in **1 John 2:9-11**:

9 The one who says he is in the Light and *yet* hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

So it is not enough to simply love God. Salvation is that all those who truly love God will also love those who *also* love God. And so if you do not truly love the brethren- the Bible says that you are deceived and you only *think* you are in the Light.

So here's a warning, and it's a warning to a life of humility that begins with never doing anything to cause another believer to stumble. So let's look at it in a little more detail, **Luke 17:1a:**

It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come...

Now that's a very interesting expression. And it is only found right here in the entire New Testament. The original Greek says,

"It cannot but be..."

... which means that there's no other way. So it is *inevitable*- it is this way and it *has* to be this way and it *can't* be any *other* way. It is *inevitable* that stumbling blocks come.

And the word "**stumbling blocks**" comes from the Greek word where we get our English word "scandal" from. And originally it meant *a bait stick in a trap*. So you set a trap and you pull the lid of the trap up and you connect the stick and you put the bait on the stick. And when the animal grabs the bait- the stick is released and the trap is closed and the animal is caught. That's this word- stumbling blocks- it means a trap.

And we know that we live in a fallen and sinful world of traps. We live in a world where people are going to be offended. And believers are no exception. God's children, genuine believers, are going to be offended- Jesus said it is inevitable. And so believers will get offended,

they will become trapped, and they will be harmed- some terribly- and Jesus said they will be hindered.

That's what Jesus is talking about. The world is full of stumbling blocks. And they're all over the place- to seduce us directly into error or to trap us into heresy and false understanding of the Scriptures and a false understanding of God and Christ, and to seduce us into a false understanding of how we are to live our Christian lives.

And there are scandalous temptations laid out there to directly or indirectly drive us toward sin. There are all kinds of bad examples and there are all kinds of things that lead us away from true Righteousness and Holiness. The world is filled with these offenses and we, of all generations, are exposed to them in a way that prior generations have not been.

There was a time, you know, in the world when you had to see the sinner do the sin to know about it. But now we have access to all sorts of sin at home that is pumped into our houses through TV or the Internet. And you can read all the ugly details of the sinner and his sin in a book or a magazine or a paper or other media exposure. I mean I went to the store to buy milk and I saw a magazine at the checkout counter that said that some politician had sex with an alien. And I don't even drink milk. But there was a time when you had to actually physically see the sinner sin to know that a sin had actually occurred. So it's a different world now and there are all kinds of seductions to evil. And Jesus said it's inevitable that they come.

And because this is so common, you might be tempted to say, *"Well, this is the world we live in, it's the way things are- so what am I supposed to do about it?"* Look, Jesus said, "It's inevitable that they come", but now finish verse 1:

... but woe to him through whom they come.

So even though offenses are inevitable- that doesn't change culpability- that doesn't change guilt. The one who sets the offense in motion is the one who is guilty before God. So this is a very serious thing and God considers it to be a real big deal. And then Jesus said this in **Luke 17:2**:

It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

So from this we see that the one who offends- and that doesn't matter if he's in the world or in the church- and it doesn't matter whether he's a non-believer or a believer- Jesus said it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.

So by that we need to know that it's better to stop a person like that now- even by execution- than to simply let him keep doing this because if he is a non-believer, he is only going to incur greater damnation, a hotter hell. And if he's a believer, he is only inviting greater chastening and forfeiture of eternal reward. So better that he be dead. Better that he die a horrific death now than to continue to offend and therefore accumulate ongoing damnation.

Now we just got finished studying a little about hell, and it wasn't a comprehensive study about hell and so I left some things out, and one of the things I left out about hell is that when you read the Bible- you get the sense that there are degrees of punishment. So even though everybody who is lost is in hell- there seems to be a greater degree of torment for some than for others.

And it also seems to be true about Heaven. Even though all the redeemed go to Heaven- there seems to be varying degrees of eternal joy and various degrees of eternal bliss. And so in the case of a believer- you don't want to be incurring greater and greater discipline from God and the loss of your eternal rewards.

Now why is Jesus saying this? We need to remember who is standing there. Jesus is talking here about the kind of example that's being set by these Pharisees because they are the primary offenders here. Back in **Luke 12:1**- the good doctor said,

Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

So it's the Pharisees that are the target of all these "beware"- the religious hypocrites who were peddling their false religion to the people. They are the ones who persecute the preachers of the Truth. So all those uses of "beware" are basically set against the Pharisees. So we are to beware of anybody who teaches lies and who lives deceptive hypocritical lives.

Now when we talk about stumbling here- causing a little one to stumble- we need to go back to **Luke 7**- turn there- where Jesus responds to a question by some of the disciples of John Baptist. As you remember- John was in prison and things were not working out according to John's eschatology.

Now Eschatology is the study of or the science of "last things". And John Baptist- like many today in the modern Church- had a made up version of eschatology where Jesus was going to be this warrior King- Who would violently and physically annihilate the pagan Romans and give the Promised Land back to the Jew. And in John's eschatology- after Jesus destroyed all the pagans- He was going to ride a white stallion up Main Street and walk into the Temple and sit down on the throne of King David and rule the world with a rod of iron.

And so John took Old Testament prophecies and he misread them and he misinterpreted them- as so many do- and he formulated an eschatology based on what he *thought* they said- so he wasn't trying to be wrong- and yet he was flat out wrong.

And you will remember when we were going through this I told you that it is much easier to look backward and understand what the Bible is saying than it is to try to look forward and piece things together. And there have been very sincere people all through Church history who were right about a lot of things, and these people were tremendously gifted and had tremendous insight into great theological issues of Scripture, and yet they were just plain goofy when it came to eschatology and yet they all thought they were being scriptural about it.

But part of John Baptist's eschatology was that Jesus was going to storm the prison where John was being held and John would be set free. And so John had been in prison now for some time and Jesus had not even visited the prison a single time, and John was getting worried because his eschatology wasn't working out, and so look what it says in **Luke 7:20-23**,

20 When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'"

21 At that very time He cured many *people* of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many *who were* blind.

22 And He answered and said to them, "**Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.**

23 **"Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."**

So this was a big stumbling point. But *why* were these men and even John Baptist stumbling over Jesus? Because John had been taught wrongly his entire life and so he believed wrongly about how the Messiah was supposed to act when He got here. John was right about Who Jesus was- but he was wrong about what the Messiah was supposed to do when He got here.

You see, John Baptist- like almost everybody else who lived and who genuinely believed in the 1st Century had no knowledge whatsoever that the Messiah was going to come twice. They read and they were taught the Old Testament Scriptures about the Messiah coming- but these people saw all this through the lens of how they were taught and who was teaching them. And that is true about everybody- including us. And so John saw the Messiah coming only once and yet he was wrong, and his wrong eschatology caused him to become offended when Jesus didn't do what John thought He was supposed to do.

And this happens all the time in our day as well. People are taught wrongly and they make assumptions that Jesus never said and that God the Holy Spirit never put into Scripture, and yet these people formulate doctrines based on faulty information and wrong conclusions. And the result is that when their theology doesn't work out- they get offended at God rather than get offended at *themselves* for believing wrong things and being deceived.

For example- it is common in our day to hear people say that they allow God the Holy Spirit to teach them Truth directly. And that sounds so spiritual and so great- except it just isn't true. First of all- God the Holy Spirit doesn't teach Divine Truth *directly* to the individual. He always uses *intermediaries*- but God doesn't reveal Truth directly to you. Turn with me to read **1Timothy 2:5&6:**

5 For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,

6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.

So we see here that as it pertains to Salvation- there is only *one* Mediator between us and God- Jesus Christ. But nevertheless- Jesus is a Mediator. And so we *cannot* go directly to God the Father- but we must go through a Mediator. And so Protestantism believes in a Mediator as it pertains to Salvation. We just don't believe that Salvation requires *more* than Jesus. So lost sinners may go directly to God through Jesus Christ and receive forgiveness and Salvation. But as it pertains to understanding Divine Truth *after* we are saved- God has *several* Mediators- or intermediaries.

First of all- God the Spirit uses the intermediary of the product that He directly produced- which is Scripture. Nobody knows or understands Divine Truth apart from Scripture. So as it pertains to understanding Truth after Salvation- we now have several mediators or several intermediaries. And if you will notice- Scripture wasn't written directly by God the Holy Spirit either. God the Spirit moved upon people like wind blows a sailboat across the water, and these 40 men wrote true and infallible words.

But it wasn't like them taking dictation. And it wasn't that God took their hand and forced them to write the words they wrote. That is *not* how Divine Inspiration works. Inspiration is a mysterious process because we really don't know how it works. But the men who wrote the Bible used their own language and their own manner of speech and their own logic and their own syntax and their own reasoning, and somehow- God the Holy Spirit superintended what they wrote to assure that the Scriptures were true.

And so aside from the Old Testament Prophets and the New Testament Apostles- the men who wrote the Bible are the only people in the history of the world who had direct Revelation given to them by God. Everybody else- including me and you- have to go through somebody else. We have to go through intermediaries.

And so as insulting as this may seem- everybody on earth right now is the student of somebody else. *Nobody* is self-taught, and *nobody* is self-taught about the Bible. The very same Holy Spirit that inspired

the Scriptures is the same Holy Spirit who set up Teachers in the Church. And Teachers are another intermediary that God ordained.

Those of us who are saved right now- today- are the recipient of 2,000 years of New Testament Teachers, and so we need to listen to what God's ordained Teachers teach- which is why I am trying so hard to get you to read some of them.

And so for anybody to try to by-pass the gift of Teachers and go directly to God to understand Divine Truth is to try to by-pass God's Will. And so if you are teaching yourself- while *thinking* that God the Holy Spirit is teaching you directly- you aren't really doing anything but elevating yourself in your own mind. But you are also cutting yourself off from all the *many* Teachers that God placed in the Church over the Centuries for your benefit.

And we also need to remember that it is impossible for anybody to rise above their Teachers, and so you need to be very careful who is teaching you and you need to take heed what you are being taught. And once again- to teach yourself- while thinking that God the Holy Spirit is teaching you directly is to also assume that you possess all Wisdom and all Truth by yourself, and that is a tragic mistake.

And the Pharisees were real bad teachers. And so it wasn't just that the Pharisees set bad examples of personal sinfulness, and it wasn't just that they failed to live for God in Righteousness and Holiness. It was also that they had complete contempt for the Truth and because they were teaching false doctrine.

So it's in the context of false religion that all this is said in **Luke 17**. These religious charlatans were putting hindrances in front of people and making them stumble over Jesus. Everywhere Jesus would go, these guys showed up. They were in every crowd- spreading their lies through the crowd. *"He's not the Messiah. He's not one of us."* And they were plotting to destroy Jesus and spreading the word that Jesus did what He did by the power of Satan.

So the Pharisees weren't just causing people who believed in Jesus or who were *desiring* of believing in Him to fall into patterns of sin like they were- they were also causing them to reject the Truth concerning Christ. And this is the primary issue in this text. These men had a completely different religious system than what God gave in the Old Testament. They had a system of works-righteousness, of legalism and ceremony- trying to earn Favor with God by their merit. And anybody

who wasn't in agreement with them- they treated with total contempt. They wouldn't even teach them the Law.

Now in **Matthew 23**- Jesus lays this all out in great detail. The Lord told the Pharisees that they were producing sons of hell by their religion, worse sons of hell than they were...causing people to turn from Christ to stumble at the point of Jesus Christ. So Jesus says, *"Blessed is the one who doesn't stumble over Me."*

Well the Pharisees were just heaping up stumbling blocks in front of everybody they could who was even moving in the direction of Christ. And you don't ever want to do that. You don't ever want to hinder people's spiritual progress in the Gospel. It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than that you should cause one of these little ones to stumble. So Jesus said that we are better off dead than to cause one single person to be hindered in their spiritual progress towards the Lord.

Now the word **"Woe"** is an Old Testament word for curse, damnation, and destruction. So anyone who puts any hindrance in someone's spiritual progress who belongs to God will receive severe Divine Judgment. And that is why it would be better for them to die a horrible tortuous death by drowning. The language here is very vivid. The phrase "It would be better" means that it would be beneficial, it would be to your advantage to die horribly rather than accumulate Eternal Wrath for offending these little ones. Jesus said you'd be better off dead.

Now the word **"millstone"** here is talking about a massive stone that had a smaller stone on the top that was turned by an animal. And this massive stone was tied around somebody's neck and it would take them to the bottom of the lake or river very fast.

Now the Jews hated the idea of drowning. They thought that drowning someone was a horrific kind of punishment. And so the Jew didn't drown anyone. The Romans did. In fact, the rabbis taught that drowning was for Gentiles and not for Jews at all. And yet Jesus tells the Pharisees, *"You guys would be better off drowned than to keep doing what you are doing."* So this was a terrible insult to these Jews for Jesus to say this because in effect- he was calling them Gentiles.

So for anybody to hinder the faith of a believer or to hinder the understanding of a believer or to hinder the life of a believer in spiritual progress toward God and toward Truth is a horrendous and enormous

crime. To hinder his grasp of the truth or to blur his knowledge of God and Christ and the Spirit and the Scripture, to damage his growth to Christ's Likeness by lies or sin is so bad that you'd be better off dead now. And that's one of the reasons James says,

James 3:1

Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

So if you're going to teach- you better be teaching the Truth because if you're teaching something that hinders true spiritual progress- you're only compounding your own Judgment.

So humble people consider others first out of love and unselfish good will. They pursue the Truth with a passion so that they might truly represent the Word of God so that they do not put an obstacle or a hindrance in someone's way. They live a godly life. They set a pattern of righteousness. They voluntarily restrain even their own liberty in Christ rather than offend- and they don't abuse their liberty which can cause others to stumble.

So the leaders of this Church seek to live and to teach in a way that does not offend saved people but that blesses saved people. And we don't live our lives in an offensive way. We seek to set a godly example and always to speak that which is absolutely true so that we may aid the spiritual growth of others and not hinder it.

So we see that the “**little ones**” that Jesus is referring to here in **Luke 17:2** are those who “believe in Jesus”- the saved. So Jesus is *not* talking about ordinary children or infants here- He is talking about saved people. So we are told here that true humility is manifested in not causing saved people to stumble or offending other saved people to the point where they stumble. And we pray that this will always be true.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.