

Lk 17:1-10
Unity and Faith

It's a good thing to ask ourselves, "What does Jesus really want from our church? Does Jesus want us to start new ministries? Maybe plant a church? Expand education space so that the Word increases?" Does that excite you? Well I don't know the exact answers to all of that now, but from Scripture I do know without a doubt what Jesus does want from us today, and it is found in two themes in this text— unity and faith.

Listen to Jesus' heart for unity in Jn 17:22-23:

²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Our witness rests not just on doctrinal truth, but the unity we live in. But how does Jesus want us to be united? We find the answers in the first four verses.

1. Disciples seek unity in a stumble-free environment (1-4)

- My high school had a sign as you entered - "This is a Drug-Free Zone." It communicated what type of environment you should expect when entering. Churches need to have the same mentality when it comes to righteousness and holy living—"This is a Stumble-Free Zone".

Christ desires his followers to cultivate and live in an environment where it is not easy to sin, get away with sin, or tempt others to sin.

5 marks of creating a stumble-free environment:

1) Never be surprised at stumbling blocks (1a)

- Jesus makes it pretty clear that stumbling (lit Greek) will happen.
- The word for sin, "stumble" (where we get our English word scandal), is a word that would describe bait in a trap.

- The point is that we are not to be caught by surprise with stumbling blocks. The world is a dangerous place for disciples. Anyone can get caught at any time.

Illus: December 6th, 2009 - an ordinary day for most of us. It was the day that a man, Michael James Crawshaw, lost his life. Here are his last moments:

(<https://www.odmp.org/officer/20144-patrolman-michael-james-crawshaw>); accessed March 8, 2019.

Patrolman Michael Crawshaw was shot and killed in an ambush while responding to a call in the 200 block of Johnston Road. He had been the first officer to arrive on the scene and had parked two houses away to wait for backup.

As he waited he reported to dispatchers that he heard gunfire from inside the home and he then unholstered his weapon. Moments later a suspect exited the home and immediately opened fire with an AK-47, fatally striking Patrolman Crawshaw several times as he was still sitting in his patrol car.

Officer Crawshaw was a coworker with my dad and his friend. That day changed the dynamic of their police department. They knew that danger was not just a possibility, but a reality. The job was a violent one, and anyone could be taken by surprise.

The same warning goes out to fellow disciples. Following Christ is not safe. Being a disciple is a dangerous duty, and any of us can be taken by surprise with temptation.

2) Never be a stumbling block (1b)

- Jesus warns people who would live in a way that causes others to fall. This is a wisdom statement: it is better to die in a violent, sudden way than to cause a believer to stumble. *A stumbling block is anything that causes me to lose or lessen my devotion to Jesus Christ.*

Matthew Henry has 3 categories of people who become stumbling blocks.

The Persecutor: Someone who intentionally tries to trip up disciples. They want to injure the faith of another.

The Seducer: Those who participate or pass along false teaching. They also harm the faith of another, yet in a more subtle, crafty way.

The Scandalous: Anyone in the church who lives carelessly. It could be a youth who entices others into sin; can be a leader who is a blatant hypocrite; or a parent who takes sin lightly in the home.

3) Always be on guard (3a)

- There is a general guard we need to have against sin. It fits the logical order of what follows – “remove the log before trying to get the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Mt 7:3).
- The focus is keeping an eye out *on your own heart*.

It’s the responsibility of each disciple to know their strongest pulls of temptations. Do you know your heart well? What triggers temptation in you the most? Not just that you fall into temptation, but how? And are you guarding yourself?

“Above all else guard your heart” (Pr 4:23)

4) Always call out and confront sin (3b)

- Followers of Jesus don’t promote sin, they oppose it.
- Here we get the principle. This is similar to Matt 18:15-22 which gives us the process.
- Being a disciple means I share a commitment to pursue righteousness with other disciples, which implies accountability. The idea is to warn and correct and restore— not to humiliate and drive away. A rebuke is not simply to shame and shun.

There’s a story I heard once happened at Three Rivers. I describe our church culture as a “happy-intensity”. There is a joy; people laugh and are fun and love to be around each other. But there is an intensity when it comes to God, his honor and glory.

The story took place at a Wed night prayer meeting. Prior to starting, people were laughing and enjoying each other. But at 7pm when the meeting began, a leader called everyone together and got very serious. He went on to lovingly admonish the church.

“I hear there is a problem in the church. It’s called *gossip*. We are dealing with it tonight. We are going to stop it!”

Church family, we need to maintain that. Sin is not mainly about how we feel.

It’s about God’s honor, glory, and reputation. That’s why we always call out acts that harm fellow family members in Christ. And it also means that we are humble enough to repent if called out.

5) Never withhold forgiveness (v4)

- Even though Jesus cares about correction, he also cares deeply about extending forgiveness which has no limits.

One of the ways that church unity is really disrupted is when an unforgiving spirit begins to creep into the church.

- Yet sometimes after a person has been confronted they can feel excessive sorrow and shunning (e.g. 2 Cor 2:7).

Friends, we can live in a stumble-free zone because of the gospel. Christ gave his life, shed his blood to bring his people into the stumble-free life. In the gospel, Christ pays for our holiness. Living in the stumble-free zone is a gospel benefit. If you are not in the stumble-free zone, come to Jesus today to gain entry.

2. Disciples seek a genuine faith that is extraordinary and humble (5-10)

- Apostles have a small request of Jesus: increase our faith!
- Jesus answers by stressing what faith really looks like. In other words, Jesus’ teaching does not suggest they grow in faith—he simply says: “here is what it looks like if you *have* faith.”
- We get two pictures of what having faith looks like: one extraordinary and another ordinary. Jesus does not focus on the quantity of our faith, but the *quality*.

Extraordinary faith (v6)—Jesus describes how *great faith is simply faith in a Great God*

The point is that faith can bring the unthinkable into a reality.

- The tree Jesus describes had a deep root system that enabled it to live for 600 years.

Faith is knowing that God is big enough to bring the unthinkable to reality, like heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, or extend unlimited forgiveness (v4).

It's unthinkable to some to forgive a repeated offender. But faith makes it possible.

Faith also makes it possible for other unthinkable things, like restore broken marriages, or be set free from years of porn addiction, or return the prodigals back home.

Ordinary faith (7-10)

- Even though this looks like a separate teaching, it seems natural to have an organic connection to the topic of faith.
- Sometimes when we think of “great faith” we are looking at stories that are moving.
- But great faith is so often seen in the ordinary—specifically a life of *faithful obedience*.
- Jesus tells a parable about a servant who gets done working. When the job is done, his master does not throw a party, or give a participation trophy, or even thank him. The master simply says, that's your job. At the end of the day you are an unworthy servant.
- We have a great illustration back in Lk 7 when Jesus heals the centurion's servant. This is an example of the type of ordinary faith Jesus seeks.

(Lk 7:4-10)

⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, “He is *worthy* to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.”

⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am *not worthy to have you come under my roof*. ⁷ *Therefore I did not presume to come to you.* But say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸ For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

⁹ When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such *faith*.”

Conclusion:

So here is a picture of what Jesus wants of us. Jesus wants his church to be unified in a fight against sin. Let's live with a “happy intensity” together.

He also wants us to be a people of faith. Mulberry tree-moving faith. What is the unthinkable that God can bring into reality? I hope we trust in Christ for some big things together for our happy future! Faith is not just for the big moments but is characterized in the person who says every day, “I'm going to serve Christ faithfully and obediently today; I'm an unworthy servant simply doing my duty.”