

Stumbling Blocks & the Spirit of Servanthood

a. The Scandal of Offenses (17:1-4)

17:1 Why can we never be blasé about our example, taking grace for granted? (Matt.12:36,37); 2 Samuel 12:14; Rom.2:24; 1 Cor.10:31-11:1,19)

[1] [17:1-10] In this chapter connections between the various paragraphs are not obvious. It is possible that Luke has gathered fragments of Jesus' teaching too valuable to be lost, but of which he did not know the historical context. **Leon Morris** Luke p.255

[2] [17:1-4] The word *skandala* is perhaps not quite as specific as this translation. It means the bait-stick of a trap, that which triggers off trouble (the corresponding verb is found in 7:23). Moffatt renders 'hindrances'. All hindrances to the spiritual life are included, but temptations to sin are clearly the worst of these. These are inevitable, but this does not mean that a man who causes them is blameless. **Leon Morris** Luke p.255

[3] [17:1-4] When do men make others stumble? When do they cause "offences" to come? They do it, beyond doubt, whenever they persecute believers, or endeavour to deter them from serving Christ. But this, unhappily, is not all. Professing Christians do it whenever they bring discredit on their religion by inconsistencies of temper, of word or of deed. We do it whenever we make our Christianity unlovely in the eyes of the world, by conduct not in keeping with our profession. The world may not understand the doctrines and principles of believers. But the world is very keen-sighted about their practice. **J.C. Ryle** Luke Vol. 2 p.220

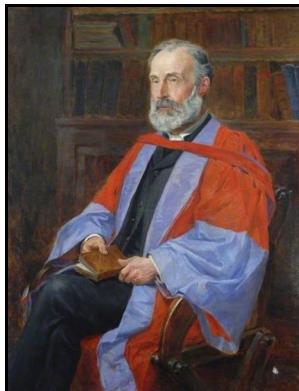
17:2 Can personal responsibility be more sternly underlined?

[4] [17:2] It is probable that our Lord pointed to some of the weak and unestablished followers ... There are always many who are "babes in Christ." (1 Cor. 3:1). **J.C. Ryle** Luke Vol. 2 p.225

[5] [17:2] As the saying is addressed to the disciples (ver 1), it is unlikely that the whole body of the disciples is included in "these little ones." It is more natural to understand it of the more insignificant among them (comp. 7:28), or those who were young in

the faith, or possibly children. ... To lead even one astray is an awful responsibility. **Alfred Plummer** Luke p.399

[6] Let us often ask ourselves whether we are doing good or harm in the world. We cannot live to ourselves, if we are Christians. The eyes of many will always be upon us. Men will judge by what they see, far more than by what they hear. If they see the Christian contradicting by his practice what he professes to believe, they are justly stumbled and offended. For the world's sake, as well as for our own, let us labour to be eminently holy. Let us endeavour to make our religion beautiful in the eyes of men, and to adorn the doctrine of Christ in all things. **J.C. Ryle** Luke Vol. 2 p.221



Alfred Plummer
(1841-1926)
"To lead even one
astray is an awful
responsibility"

17:3,4 What is Christ's counsel when offenses DO come? (Prov.17:10; Matt.5:21-26, 18:10-17)

[7] [17:3] This expression shows the Christian duty of plain, straightforward, faithful dealing with those who injure us. To say that of a brother behind his back which we are not prepared, if needful, to say before his face, is not the conduct of a true servant of Christ. **J.C. Ryle** Luke Vol. 2 p.225

[8] [17:3,4] When someone sins he will *rebuke him*. This does not mean that he will adopt an attitude of censoriousness, for the context stresses forgiveness. It means that, though he will be compassionate, he will not be weak. **Leon Morris** Luke p.256

[9] [17:3,4] Those who connect this saying with the one which precedes it, make an unforgiving spirit to be set forth as a common way of causing others to stumble. **Alfred Plummer** Luke p.399

[10] [17:1-4] There are few Christian duties which are so frequently and strongly dwelt upon in the New Testament as this of forgiving injuries. It fills a prominent place in the Lord's Prayer. The only profession we make in all that prayer, is that of forgiving "those who trespass against us." It is a test of being forgiven ourselves. The man who cannot forgive his neighbour the few trifling offences he may have committed against him, can know nothing experimentally of that free and full pardon which is offered us by Christ. **J.C. Ryle** p.222

Why quarrelsome Christians have to worry

[11] [17:1-4] The doctrine laid down by our Lord in this place is deeply humbling. It shows most plainly the wide contrariety which exists between the ways of the world and the Gospel of Christ. Who does not know that pride, and haughtiness, and high-mindedness, and readiness of take offence, and implacable determination never to forget and never to forgive, are common among baptized men and women? Thousands will go to the Lord's table, and even profess to love the Gospel, who fire up in a moment at the least appearance of what they call "offensive" conduct, and make a quarrel out of the merest trifles. Thousands are perpetually quarrelling with all around them, always complaining how ill other people behave, and always forgetting that their own quarrelsome disposition is the spark which causes the flame. One general remark applies to all such persons. They are making their own lives miserable and shewing their unmeetness for the kingdom of God. An unforgiving and quarrelsome spirit is the surest mark of an unregenerate heart. What says the Scripture? "Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3:3; 1 John 3:18-20; 4:20) **J.C. Ryle** p.223

b. The Servant's Attitude is the Character of Sons (17:5-19)

17:5,6 Even the Apostles, judging themselves by these standards, are aware of how far short they fall. Do they content themselves merely with being forgiven sinners? (I Tim.1:12-17 - note how thanksgiving flows)

[12] [17:5] We know not the secret feelings from which this request sprung. Perhaps the hearts of the apostles failed within them, as they heard one weighty lesson after another fall from our Lord's lips. Perhaps the thought rose up in their minds, "Who is sufficient for these things? Who can receive such high doctrines? Who can follow such a lofty standard of practice?" **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol. 2 p.226

[13] [17:5-10] If we have any faith let us pray for more of it. It is a bad sign of a man's spiritual state when he is satisfied to live on old stock, and does not hunger and thirst after growth in grace. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol. 2 p.227

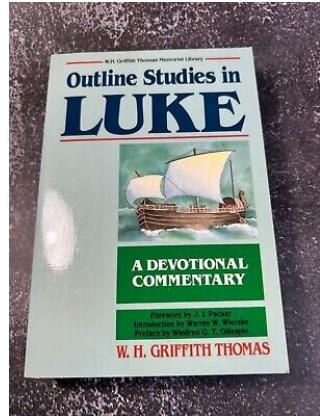
17:7-10 What should be the perpetual attitude of the 'saved'?

[14] The fact that Jesus here illustrates God's relation to man by that of a master to his servants (or slaves) need not seem contradictory because He so frequently elsewhere describes it as that of Father to children. ... The point here is what men should feel towards God. ... The realisation by a son of his father's paramount claim upon his services, without thanks and without reward, need not in any way lessen his affection for him. **H.K. Luce** (*Cambridge Bible: Luke* p.177)

[15] [17:5-10] There is not a heart upon earth which does not contain a piece of the Pharisee's character. **J.C. Ryle** p.228

17:11-14 How is the faith of the ten lepers? (Lev.13,14)

[16] [17:11-19] How is it, again, that true believers often pray so coldly? What is the reason that their prayers are so feeble, and wandering, and lukewarm, as they, frequently are? ... If saints could only see their souls as the ten afflicted lepers saw their bodies, they



would pray far better than they do. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol. 2 p.232

[17] [17:19] Presumably the nine had faith also, for this was the common (though not invariable) prerequisite of Jesus' miracles. But certainly this Samaritan had faith and he had gratitude. **Leon Morris** *Luke* p.259

[18] [Gratitude] should precede even obedience, for presumably nine had started for Jerusalem or nearest priest. **W.H.G. Thomas** *Luke* p.266

17:15-19 Is there a real-life parable here for those who call Christ 'Jesus, Master'?

[19] [17:16] These heathen immigrants brought their idolatry with them, but gradually mixed with it the worship of Jehovah. Both as regards race and religion it was the Jewish element which grew stronger, while the heathen element declined. Refugees from Judea settled among them from time to time; but we do not hear of fresh immigrants from Assyria. The religion at last became pure monotheism, with the Pentateuch as the law of worship and of life. But in race the foreign element no doubt predominated, although Christ's use of [allogenes, foreigner] does not prove this. **Alfred Plummer** *Luke* p.405

[20] [17:15,16] Normally Jews and Samaritans had little to do with one another and it is a mark of the horror of leprosy that those suffering from this disease had lived together, ignoring distinctions they would otherwise have seen as compelling. **Leon Morris** *Luke* p.258

[21] If the Samaritan had first been to the priests (Calvin, Schleiermacher), Jesus could not put the question which He asks at v.17f., since the nine Jews had a much farther journey to the priests. **Heinrich E.W. Meyer** *Gospels of Mark & Luke* p.489

[22] [17:17,18] It might have been expected that all would give praise to God. But apparently the nine were so absorbed in their new happiness that they could not spare a thought for its source. **Leon Morris** *Luke* p.258

What are the causes of ingratitude?

[23] *Ingratitude is still surprising.* a. Its Forms – many: (1) Thinking of gifts, not Giver. (2) Taking benefits as matter of course – e.g., health until sickness, safety until accident. (3) Ignoring many mercies in single sorrow – cf. "all" in Gen. 42:36 with Rom. 8:28. (4) Forgetting answers to prayer and failing to follow specific prayers with equally specific praise. ... Old lady told inquirer she felt better because she had moved to healthier place – had left Grumble Alley for Thankful Street – and change agreed with her! **W.H. Griffith Thomas** *Luke* p.267

[24] The lesson before us is humbling, heart-searching and deeply instructive. The best of us are far too like the 9 lepers. We are more ready to pray than to praise, and more disposed to ask God for what we have not, than to thank Him for what we have. Murmuring, and complainings, and discontent abound on every side of us. Few indeed are to be found who are not continually hiding their mercies under a bushel, and setting their wants and trials on a hill. These things ought not so to be. But all who know the church and the world must confess that they are true. The widespread thanklessness of Christians is the disgrace of our day. **It is a plain proof of our little humility.** Let us pray daily for a thankful spirit. It is the spirit which God loves and delights to honour. David and St Paul were eminently thankful men. It is the spirit which has marked all the brightest saints in every age of the church. ... It is the spirit which is the very atmosphere of heaven. **J.C. Ryle** p.234 (emphasis added)