

# The Source

## Luke 17:5-10

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### A. Microscopic (vs. 5-6):

1. The apostles said – After Jesus talked about the consequences of being a false teacher and the need to forgive seventy times seventy the apostles requested faith.
  - a) Seventy times seven (some interpreters read seventy-seven) does not really mean exactly 490 here; it is a typically graphic Jewish way of saying “Never hold grudges.” Because true repentance should involve turning from sin, some rabbis later limited opportunities for forgiveness for a given sin to three times; Peter might have thought his offer of seven times was generous.
2. The apostles - By apostles, Luke is identifying those who had seen Jesus and have been the authority (Paul – 2 Corinthians 15:6-9; Acts 9; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; 1 Corinthians 9:1; Acts 1:20-26) to write the scriptures (John 17:13-19), and represent Christ throughout the world while establishing the church. As a result, it was important for them to understand what Christ was saying.
3. Lord – The apostles addressed Christ as the one who has all authority and power and must dominate the direction of their lives each day.
4. Increase our faith – The apostles commanded Christ to take to a whole another level to increase their confidence and steadfast conviction in His Word so that they can intensely trust, fully surrendering to do whatever He request of them.
  - a) Faith comes from God (Romans 10:17; we hear because of John 6:44).
  - b) Faith begins with hope and this expectation creates faith (Hebrews 11:1).
  - c) Doubting cancels faith (James 5:6)
  - d) “Give us faith in addition: add it to the gifts already bestowed.” The “faith” here means faith in Christ’s promises. It is very forceful to make it refer to what precedes; the faith that enables one to forgive a brother seven times in a day. Power to fulfil that duty would have been otherwise expressed. See Sanday on Rom. 1:5 and additional note pp. 31–34.<sup>[1]</sup>
5. The Lord said - The One who they stated they would like to direct their lives each day broke His silence by saying to them what He intends to communicate forever.

6. If they had faith like a mustard seed – Jesus said to them that their confident trust in His ability to do what He is teaching does not need to be large. It just needs to exist even if it as small as a mustard seed.
  - a) Ancient Jewish writers sometimes observed that the black mulberry's roots are spread out, which makes it a difficult tree to uproot. Mustard seeds were proverbially small. (From IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener Copyright © 1993 by Craig S. Keener. Published by InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.)
  - b) Faith as a grain of mustard seed. The mustard seed was the smallest of all the seeds known to the farmers of Palestine (cf. Luke 13:19). Christ emphasized the vitality of faith rather than its quantity. Most scholars identify the Sycamine tree it with the black mulberry tree, though the same word (Greek sycaminos) in the LXX and elsewhere denotes the sycamore. The mulberry tree, cultivated in Palestine for its fruit, could be found almost everywhere. The transplanting of such a tree into the sea seems fanciful; but Jesus was endeavoring to show his disciples that faith knows no impossibilities. (From The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press)
7. Say – The apostles can endlessly speak concerning all the divine truths they have heard Christ say with complete confidence that the Lord has the ability and willingness to do what He said He will so.
8. It would obey you - Once they say only what the Lord is saying, based on His Word, whatever they are speaking to will conduct itself accordingly. When they do this, they subject themselves to His will and whatever they are speaking to, no matter how impossible it may seem. It will submit to His will as well because the Lord God has all authority and power over everything.
  - a) To “plant it in the sea” is an odd and paradoxical image, since the roots could not be established in water. The point is that faith can do the impossible.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **B. Directional (vs. 7-9):**

1. Have a slave – Trusting the Lord at His Word, in the manner described above, is like being completely at the will of another. This slave is someone who actively obeys the will of their master by continuously plowing or tending sheep; in other words, they diligently, habitually work hard at fulfilling what they were assigned to do. This is the main point to what Christ is seeking to teach so that He increases the faith of the apostles.

- a) These occupations are not selected at random but with a view as the work of the apostles. For plowing compare 1 Cor. 3:9: “ye are God’s husbandry,” meaning tillage; the figures of sowing and reaping presuppose plowing. Plowing is hard work, to be understood as such here. “Or shepherding,” which, according to the constant analogy of Scripture, refers to sheep (R. V.), certainly not to cattle (A. V.). This, too, is hard work and pictures the coming task of the apostles, John 21:15, etc.<sup>[3]</sup>
2. They will say – Even though the slave functions in a diligent manner they will still be treated as a slave and will always be required to serve their master whether in the fields or when they come to church. They will always be at the will of their master.
  3. Come, sit down and eat - The slave is not first asked to come and find shelter, rest and refreshment because they diligently obeyed their master.
    - a) Most slaveholders had few slaves; thus, the slaves did both field-work and food preparation. Masters regarded this work as their slaves’ duty, not an option. It was not considered honorable for masters to eat with their slaves, and it was virtually never done. The point of the illustration seems to be: Faith grows as one uses it as a servant; its’ end is service, and it is never an end in itself. (From IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener Copyright © 1993 by Craig S. Keener. Published by InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.)
  4. But will he not say to him - No one treats their slave in this manner; again, because the slave is always at the will and service of their master.
  5. Serve - When the slave come inside, they would be commanded to manage the serving of food which is a lot of work in their day because everything was prepared from scratch. The work of the slave is not done until all the needs of the master are taken care of.
  6. He does not thank the slave – The master does not provide generosity to the slave as he would to an employee who works hard.
    - a) Jesus used the example of a slave who renders service and does not expect to be thanked. Obedience is not something extra done for God, it is the duty of anyone who desires to be Christ’s follower. Before God, all people are sinners, saved only by God’s grace, but believers *are* saved and therefore have great worth in God’s Kingdom. They must lay aside selfishness and treat others with respect and common courtesy.<sup>[4]</sup>

7. The slaves did what they were commanded to do - There are no special favors extended to the slave because he only did what was required.

a) Jesus' followers focused their eyes on God with their goal only to serve and please him. They don't work for recognition or rewards or even for God to praise them for their hard work. They understand that their duty is to serve the Master.<sup>[5]</sup>

### C. Comprehensive (v. 10):

1. When you do – The disciples must operate with the same mindset as a slave if they want their faith increased.

2. When you do – Christ takes this story and directs the disciples to it to answer the question they asked earlier about if Christ could deepen their conviction, so they do all that He is saying to them especially if they have to forgive seventy times seven.

a) Jesus rejected such a request. Increased faith is not the answer. Faith is not something measured and compared to see who wins the faith championship. Faith is either true or false. The smallest amount of faith can do the impossible. Forgiving is not the impossible; it is the normal act of faith. Jesus' followers, trusting him in faith and seeking to do the Father's will, naturally forgive people without keeping score.<sup>[6]</sup>

2. Commanded; directed - The disciples are like the slaves when they do all (everything) that they are appointed to do by the Lord and only what they are appointed to do.

3. Say – When the disciples behave in the same manner as the slave described in this passage they must continually keep saying they are undeserving of praise. If they only do what the law demands that they do and not forgive beyond what is expected, then they are like the slave described in this passage.

4. Unworthy slave - If the apostle's function at the will of the master, as described in this passage, they prove to lack the qualities that would have provided to them special commendations. As a result, they would prove to be useless and undeserving of any special praise.

a) We have conferred no favor. We have "merited" nothing. We have not "benefited" God or laid him under "obligation." If he rewards us, it will be a matter of unmerited favor. (From Barnes' Notes, Electronic

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b) So having done all you know to do, simply sit down, and say to God, “We are worthless slaves”. All we have done is the task assigned us to do. Faith is accepting the role of an obedient servant without expecting great gratitude and reward. Faith trusts Jesus and so follows Jesus.<sup>[7]</sup>

5. They have done – They would have completely accomplished only what was required by the Lord.
6. Ought to do – They kept continuously doing what they were obligated to do because of the commands of the Lord. This is the increased faith because they remained steadfast, abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

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repentance Repentance. In the New Testament, this term does not merely mean “change of mind” (as some have gathered from the Greek term); it reflects the Old Testament and Jewish concept of “turning around” or “turning away” from sin. Jewish people were to repent whenever they sinned; the New Testament uses the term especially for the once-for-all turning a Gentile would undergo when converting to Judaism or any sinner would undergo when becoming a follower of Jesus.

rabbis \*Rabbi. Jewish teacher. Sometime after A.D. 70 the term became a technical one for those ordained in the rabbinic movement, which probably consisted primarily of Pharisaic scribes. (To accommodate customary usage this commentary sometimes applies the term to Jewish teachers of the law in general, although such common usage may have technically been later; it also applies the term to the teachings of Jewish legal experts collected in rabbinic literature.)

<sup>[1]</sup> Plummer, A. (1896). *[A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke](#)* (p. 400). London: T&T Clark International.

<sup>[2]</sup> Arnold, C. E. (2002). *[Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke](#)* (Vol. 1, p. 454). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>[3]</sup> Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). *[The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel](#)* (p. 870). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

<sup>[4]</sup> Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). *[Life Application New Testament Commentary](#)* (p. 326). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale.

<sup>[5]</sup> Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). *[Life Application New Testament Commentary](#)* (p. 326). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale.

<sup>[6]</sup> Butler, T. C. (2000). *[Luke](#)* (Vol. 3, p. 280). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>[7]</sup> Butler, T. C. (2000). *[Luke](#)* (Vol. 3, p. 280). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.