

Just doing your duty

Luke 17:1-17:10

Pastor John LeProhon, December 29, 2019

Well, good morning. I see you are passing out the colouring sheets for the kids, and crayons, I'm really disappointed, I saw a couple of adults take them.

I'm really honoured to be here today and I really appreciate Jeremy inviting me up to come and preach here. I don't know if it's true in Canada (it's true in the US) - that the Sunday after Christmas is typically, historically the lowest attended day or the lowest attended Sunday. And I'm not sure what that means, that he invited me up to the Sunday that I could do the least amount of damage. But I appreciate it anyway, so we're glad to be here today.

As Richard mentioned, Jeremy and I went to Master's Seminary at the same time. I confess that I really didn't know him - I knew of him. We would see each other, and then we would run into each other at Shepherd's Conference every once in a while. And I ran into him last year and we kind of had lunch together at Shepherd's Conference.

I pastor a church outside of Seattle and there's a lot of Master's Seminary guys in the surrounding area, but most of them are just single pastor churches. They don't have a staff, and I've got a staff. So we just make ourselves available and say, "If you need to take a vacation, call us and one of our staff guys will come in and preach for you on that particular Sunday."

So I made that offer to Jeremy and then I got a call from him, to say, "Hey, would you come on up and preach for me so I could take a vacation?" I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to." So that's how all that worked out. We're glad to be here.

Now, I did hear as Richard was praying, that he said that the preaching lasts an hour and a half, so thank you for that, I appreciate that. That's what you all heard, right? Hour and a half. Well, we'll see.

Hopefully, you have your Bibles and you can turn to Luke chapter 17. How many actually turn to a Bible or scroll in your Bible? How many scroll in your Bible? Several of you. Most of my church, I live in a tech world. I mean Microsoft is headquartered right outside of our city, and I say, "Turn to my Bible" and people go like this ... but we've come full circle, right? We started with scrolls and now we're scrolling. They wrote on tablets and I'm preaching from a tablet. Navigate to Luke chapter 17, however you get there.

During the reign of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, many Christians were arrested, tortured, killed. Among them was a young deacon from Vienna, Austria by the name of Sanctus or called Sanctus. According to the book, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, it says this:

Sanctus endured all the excessive and superhuman tortures which man could possibly devise against him. For the wicked hoped on account of the continuance and greatness of the tortures to

hear him confess some unlawful practices. But he opposed them with the firmness that he did not even tell them even his own name, nor that of his nation or city, nor if he were slave or free. But an answer to all these questions, he said in Latin, "I am a Christian."

No matter what they did to him, he just responded, "I am a Christian." They would come in every day with new torturous techniques; red-hot pokers, tearing and cutting his flesh, and still, all he would ever say is, "I am a Christian." They wanted to break him, they wanted him to deny the faith. They wanted him to deny Christ, and they wanted him to beg for mercy. But the only thing he ever said was, "I am a Christian." And they got so frustrated that one day they strapped him to an iron chair and they literally roasted him alive. Yet through it all, he never said anything except, "I'm a Christian."

In his book, "Slave," John MacArthur writes a Sanctus quote:

For Sanctus whose identity including his name, citizenship and social status, was found in Jesus Christ. Hence no better answer could be given to the questions he was asked. He was a Christian and that designation defined everything about him.

Does the designation "Christian" define everything about you? Does the title "Christian" define your identity, your citizenship, your priorities, your dreams, your goals, your direction, your vision, your lifestyle?

In Luke chapter 17, Jesus is making a final trip to Jerusalem before He would be crucified. Knowing that He's on earth for a limited amount of time, He pours into the disciples the identifying marks of the Christian. And in Luke 17:1-10, He makes several statements. And in fact, most commentators think this is a set of three unrelated statements that Luke just put here because he didn't know of a better place to put them. But that's not the case, they are a unit. Verses 1 through 10 all go together, and they teach one central lesson. On this particular occasion, Jesus speaks of the need to avoid causing others to sin, and the obligation to forgive those who sin against us.

We can divide it into three sections easily enough. Verses 1 and 2, we'll call "causing offenses is a great sin." Look at Luke 17:1: "And He said to His disciples ..." I'm reading the New American Standard, by the way - it was good enough for Moses, it's good enough for us.

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

It's where we get our word "scandal." It means "to trap" or "to snare." It's to entice somebody. You think of trapping an animal where you would bait a trap and it would attract the animal. That's what the word is intended to imply. The stumbling block in this context is that which leads anyone else into any type of sin with the intent of causing them to sin. Notice what Jesus says here: "It is inevitable that they'll come."

A literal translation from the original Greek would read this way: "Impossible it is for stumbling blocks not to come." It's a given, they will come. It's impossible that they won't. It cannot be otherwise. Temptations will come, some people will lead other people into sin. It's going to happen. It's going to happen because well, the sin nature that we all possess. Now, this isn't an excuse to sin. Because being led into sin is

inevitable, it does not give us a license to sin. We don't get to say, "Hey, I'm sinning. Well, I got a license to sin. It's okay."

First Corinthians 10:31 says, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape also, that you will be able to endure it."

We're still supposed to flee temptation. Just because being led into sin is inevitable, it doesn't give us an excuse. So Jesus is not excusing sin because it's inevitable. Rather, He's issuing a warning specifically to those who would cause others to sin. Far from excusing sin, Jesus pronounces a curse on those who had caused others to sin. This is a strong warning. This is a skull and crossbones type warning.

A good friend of mine spent 27 years in the Navy up in Washington. And we went to his retirement party. We still lived in Southern California at the time. So we came up and spent a few days with them as he was getting ready to retire. And he spent much of his time working on nuclear submarines.

And the day before his retirement, he and I were driving around and he said, "I've got to go turn in some paperwork on the base. You want to come with me?" I said, "Sure." So we drove onto this nuclear submarine base and maybe you've been on one, I've never been on a nuclear submarine base. And we drove in and there was this building with a barbed wire fence in front of it. He says, "I got to go in this building. You stay in the car." I said, "No problem." And he looked at me very seriously, said John, "Stay in the car." I said, "Bruce, I got it. I'll stay in the car."

He says, "You see that sign over there? It says no trespassing?" I said, "Yeah, I see it." He said, "If you approach that fence, there's a guy you can't see that has orders to shoot to kill you." "I'm staying in the car." He said, "On the other side of that fence, you see that building?" I said, "Yes." He said, "On the other side of that building is a nuclear submarine. Stay in the car." "Got it." – "Woe to you if you get out of the car." I'm not getting out of the car.

When Jesus says "woe," this is the strongest kind of warning you could possibly give. This is the nuclear submarine somebody's going to shoot you type of warning. Jesus is issuing a curse, a severe punishment on those who would cause others to sin. We all seem to take a certain amount of sin lightly. We take a certain amount of sin as acceptable.

Jerry Bridges wrote a book called "Respectable Sins." Those things that we overlook. We know they're sin, we know the Bible calls them sin, but we just kind of ignore it. Kind of think, it's just part of living life. All sin is bad and it's bad enough when we sin, but it's even worse when we cause someone else to sin.

To emphasize the wickedness of leading someone into sin, Jesus gives a better option. Look at verse 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."

A millstone is this massive stone weighing several hundred pounds that they would use to crush grain into wheat. It was so heavy that it was often hooked to a donkey or a horse, and that horse would walk in the circle, as that wheel turns and crushed the grain underneath it. And I want you to notice what Jesus says here

- look at this, verse 2: "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he was thrown into the sea."

It would be better to have the engine of your car tied around your neck and thrown into Cultus Lake, rather than causing someone else to sin. It would be better to tie an anchor around your neck and throw yourself off of a fishing boat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. As the weight throws you down to the bottom of the sea and you feel the crushing depths of the ocean, Jesus says that would be better for you than causing someone else to sin. That's the alternative.

If you have to choose between leading someone else into sin and the crushing depth of the ocean, take the crushing depths of the ocean. That's pretty significant, don't you think? It would be better, it would be preferable, and it would be more advantageous. It is the lesser of two evils compared to leading one of these little ones into sin. But who are the little ones?

Well, when Jesus uses that term, He's using it for believers in general. It's all believers. We can narrow it down to especially those who are weak in the faith. But it really applies to any believer. If you lead any other Christian into sin, Jesus said it would be better for you to tie a heavy weight around your neck and thrown in the ocean. As Christians, we must constantly be on guard against sin, but especially leading someone else into sin, causing them to sin.

Now, you don't just cause other people to sin through direct temptation, like offering me a dozen donuts. That would be a temptation - you know, there's a way of escape. To me, the way of escape is through the donuts. So, we don't always cause somebody to sin just through direct temptation. There's a myriad of ways we can do it. Sometimes we cause them to sin through our own sinful acts and habits.

Other Christians are looking at you, and you may not even be aware of this. But other Christians and people that you're not aware of are looking at you as examples of how to live the Christian life. And sometimes by our own example, our own habits, our own attitudes, our own words, we lead other people into sin. Not just your own children, although that's a huge possibility, isn't it? Sometimes we lead others into sin by promoting a low view of God. Your attitude toward God is wrong and that leads other people into having a wrong idea of who God is.

Sins of omission; omitting the things that God has told us to do. We can cause others to sin by our own teaching directly and indirectly. We directly teach the wrong things, we can lead people into sin. We indirectly teach the wrong things. Maybe it's a post on social media, it teaches the wrong things about Scripture. And you say, "Well, it's just my opinion." Be careful that you're not leading other people into sin. We need to be careful as teachers, preachers.

James 3:1 gives us the warning – "Let not many of you become teachers, my brother, knowing that as such, we will incur a stricter judgment." Jesus made it clear that causing another Christian to stumble should be avoided at all cost. Remember, the sheep that you lead into sin don't belong to you, they belong to God. Be careful that we don't lead those little lambs into sin. So causing offenses is a great sin. Even still, we can be certain that people will sin against us. It happens, right? Therefore, we must keep in mind that granting forgiveness is a great duty.

Look at verse 3: “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him.” Not only is a mature Christian to avoid causing other people to sin - as a mature Christian, you’re to avoid taking offense when somebody tries to sin against you. We tend to look for excuses for our attitudes and our actions. It’s kind of the human nature, the sin nature to excuse away our sin, to blame others for why we are what we are. We blamed our parents, there were too many rules, they were too strict, they weren't strict enough, there weren't enough rules. They were too liberal, they were too legalistic, they were unfair, they were whatever.

We blame other people - “Well, that person makes me so mad. If they wouldn't do that, I wouldn't get angry.” We want to feel justified in holding a grudge, we want to feel justified in being offended. But Jesus begins the statement in verse 3 by “Be on your guard, pay attention, be careful.” Be concerned about, continually on alert on how you respond. Be careful how you're responding to those who sin against you.

He says, “If your brother sins against you ...” and again, the Greek grammar here is such that it makes it a certainty. We could even translate it: “When your brother sins against you.” It's not a hypothetical, it's a reality.

When our daughter was first driving, she was backing out of a parking space and just tapped a car, barely left a mark on the car. The person had a right, “You know, you hit my car, we need it fixed.” So I went and looked at it and I said, “Where's the mark?” And they said, “Right here.” And I said, “Where?” - “Right here?” - “Where?” - “Right here, you see this little mark?” I said, “Oh yeah, okay. I see it.” And they said, “Well, we need to have it repaired.” I said, “Absolutely, it's your car. Sure, she did hit it.”

I called my insurance company, I said, “Should I report this to you or should I wait?” And they said, “Wait until she has a real accident, because you only get one accident forgiven on our insurance rate.” So they said, “Wait until she has a real accident.” And it's not if, it's when. And it was about two months later, she rear-ended a car and crushed the front of hers and the back of that one. Thankful for the insurance company for knowing it's not if, it's when.

Well, it's not if somebody is going to sin against you, it's when. In fact, just in saying that, many of you could think right now of somebody who’s sinned against you, maybe in the recent past. Maybe it was today.

Now, when Jesus says your brother sins against you, I want you to understand He's speaking about real sin. He's not speaking about somebody who steps on your toe. He's talking about somebody who really sins against you, who really does something that is offensive to you, something that’s very hurtful, something that you may remember for years to come. Sin that has a significant impact on you directly.

So what's the response? Well, first is rebuke him. Now, rebuke does not mean shake your fist. Rebuke does not wag your finger. Rebuke is the loving response to your brother, to love them enough to gently show them their sin. To rebuke a Christian brother is to care about their soul and desire their growth and maturity. And because we desire them to be like Christ, we show them the sin that is keeping them from pursuing Christ likeness.

Well, what's the alternative? If we don't show them their sin, we allow them to stay on a path that will only lead to their harm. If I'm driving down a dead end road, I'm speeding down a dead end road and you're in the

passenger's seat and you know it's a dead end road, I would hope you would love me enough to tell me. I don't want to follow a path that's going to lead to my destruction. We need to love one another enough to show them the path that they're on.

The alternative is to allow them to continue to dishonour God. It's to harbor a grudge against them, to become angry with them or bitter against them. Those are the alternatives to lovingly rebuking a brother who is sinning.

Now, before you rebuke somebody, you have to know it's really sin, what they're doing. Sometimes we think things are sin because they violate our conviction, or they violate our desire. Let's make sure they're violating Scripture before we rebuke them. We don't rebuke people because they didn't vote the way we think they should have voted. We don't rebuke them because they don't dress the way we think they should dress. We can only rebuke things that the Bible calls sin.

We politely show them their sin. This is discipleship 101, this is obedience to God. You shall make disciples wherever you go. This is what discipleship looks like. Helping them be more like Christ. We do this as lovingly as possible. If they don't accept the rebuke, we move into a Matthew 18 situation, where we take somebody else along with us to show the truth of what the Bible says so every word is established on what we are saying and what the other person is saying.

Jesus says, if he repents, forgive him. If he turns from his sin, he acknowledges his sin, stops, you forgive. You dismiss the offense. You don't hold it against him, you don't hold it over his head. You don't say things, "Well, I'll forgive you, but I'll never forget." There's no limit to the number of times that you forgive the person.

Look at verse 4: "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." Imagine, somebody walks up to you, gets six inches from your face and goes [spits] and then walks away. You're wiping spit, whatever they had for lunch off your face. The guy comes back 30 minutes later and says, "I'm so sorry, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that. Will you forgive me?" You say, "Sure."

30 minutes later they come back to you and they walk up to you and go [spits] - "What are you doing?" And the guy storms off. Comes back to you in 15 minutes and says, "Oh man, I'm so sorry. Please, please forgive me. I shouldn't have done that. I'm wrong, will you forgive me." - "Okay."

And then somebody taps you on the shoulder 20 minutes later and you turn around, it's the same guy - [spits]. And then he comes back another 20 minutes and you go, "Whoa," and you're backing up at this point. And he says, "I'm really sorry. Will you forgive me?" - "Yeah, you stay there, I'll forgive from here, okay?"

Imagine that happens to you seven times in a single day. Jesus says, "Every time they repent, you forgive them. You treat them as if the offense had never happened." This is hard. This is forgiveness in the extreme. This is the X games of forgiveness. Who does this? Jesus is saying, "You do it." If somebody sins against you seven times in the same day, and comes to you each time and asks you to forgive them, you forgive

them. Hey, we find it hard enough to do it after the first or second offense in a year. Jesus says, “Seven times in the day, you forgive them.”

Take that same scenario and then move into something even more significant - they betray you seven times in the day. And seven times each time, come to you and say, “I’m sorry for betraying you. I’m sorry for stabbing you in the back. I’m sorry for telling lies about you.” And each time, you forgive them. Well, forgiving others is necessary in light of the forgiveness that we’ve received.

Colossians 2:13 and 14 says;

“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to a cross.”

In Matthew 18, as Jesus gave the layout of church discipline, He follows that up with a parable of the servant who owed an amount that he could never repay in a hundred lifetimes. And the King said, “Okay, you got to go to debtor’s prison.” And the man fell on his knees and said, “I’m sorry, forgive me, and I’ll do whatever I have to do to pay it back, even though it was impossible for him to do it.” And the King says, “The debt’s been forgiven because you asked me.”

Then that man went out and found somebody that owed him a year’s worth wages, grabbed him by the neck and began to choke him and said, “Give me what you owe.” And that man fell down on his knees and said, “Forgive me and I’ll pay you back no matter what it takes.” And he says, “No, I want my money now and I want to throw you into debtor’s prison until I get it.” The king found out and got so angry, took that first servant and had him thrown into prison. And the passage ends with we forgive because of what we’ve been forgiven for.

We have sinned against God way more than what any one person or any group of people could do to us. Forgiveness is necessary for fellowship with God.

Matthew 6:14-15; “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.”

Forgiving others expresses the love of Christ. Remember, Jesus on the cross in Luke 23:33-34:

“When they came to the place of The Skull, and they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.””

Forgiving others is not always easy, but it is always necessary. Forgiveness is hard. Extreme forgiveness is extremely hard.

For that reason (verse 5) “The apostles said to Jesus, ‘Lord, increase our faith!’” The disciples are saying, “Give us additional faith. We need more faith if we're going to forgive others like that.” They consider the type of forgiveness that Jesus was commanding, and their initial response is, “In order to pull that off, I'm going to need more faith than I have. I need more faith. I need the faith that God's going to care for my offended heart. I need the faith that God's going to deal with the offender. I need the faith that everything's going to work out okay. I need the faith and I'm not going to be hurt by that person in that way again.”

They hear what Jesus is saying – “Be careful that you don't cause anybody else to sin.” It's inevitable that someone is going to cause you to sin or they're going to sin against you rather. And if they do, you forgive them every time. It doesn't matter how many times they do it in a day, you forgive them. And the disciples are going, “No one can do that. God, I need more faith. Lord, we need more faith.”

And then look at Jesus' response in verse 6. “The Lord said, if you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.” The mustard seed was the tiniest seed that was used in Palestine during the time of Christ, it was very small. And Jesus was saying, “If you had faith the size of this tiny seed, you would tell this tree with its extensive root system to get up and walk over to the Sea of Galilee and jump in and it would do it.” In other words, the smallest amount of faith would replant that tree, or in Matthew 17, move mountains.

Now this verse, verse 6, is one of the more well-known sayings of Jesus. And it's often misused and taken out of its context. And contrary to popular opinion, Jesus is not chastising the apostles here for having faith smaller than a grain of mustard seed. He's not chastising them because of little faith. Rather, Jesus is making a point here about forgiveness, and his point is faith is not the issue, obedience is. When it comes to forgiving, it's not a question of how much faith you have, it's a question of how obedient you are. You don't need a great amount of faith to forgive others, you only need to obey. And that's the reason for the parable in verses 7 through 10.

While causing offenses is a great sin and granting forgiveness is a great duty, third, being obedient is a great obligation. Being obedient is a great obligation. The apostles have asked for more faith in order to forgive, and Jesus in essence is telling them it does not matter how much faith you have. All you need to do is obey.

Look at verse 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, sit down to eat?’” Slavery was so common during the time of Christ that as He gives this parable, all the apostles understand exactly what he's talking about. They may not have owned their own slaves, but they knew people that did own slaves. Peter and James and John and Andrew were all in the same fishing business. They apparently had slaves that worked for them in that business, so they would have understood exactly what He was talking about.

Slavery was not – obviously, it's not preferable, but it was common. Some people were sold into slavery. Think of Joseph sold by his brothers as a slave. Some were conquered nations and they became slaves, as the Romans conquered. They could take a Jew and compel the Jew to carry their armor for a mile if they wanted to. Some people were forced into slavery to pay off a debt, some were self-imposed.

Many of the slaves in the day of Christ were better off than the day laborers. They always had a place to live. They always had clothes, they always had food, and some of them decided they wanted to stay a slave

forever and they would pierce their ear. Their owner would pierce their ear as a sign that they would be a slave forever, and that was the choice of the person, the slave.

Moses even makes provision in the law in Exodus chapter 21, on how to treat slaves. While not desirable, it was a fact of life. So the illustration stands out for the apostles very clearly. “Which of you having a slave plowing and tending sheep will say to him when he comes in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down and eat?’” It’s a rhetorical question. And Greek has an interesting dynamic in the way the verbs that are used in the statement already give you what the expected answer is. And the expected answer of the rhetorical question is “Not me.”

“Which of you having a slave who was plowing in the field when he came in could say, ‘Hey’ to the slave, ‘Come in and sit and eat?’” The answer is, “Not me.” No one would do that. The slave comes in from the field after working all day, nobody says, “Hey, slave, come on in and sit down and eat and rest, put your feet up.”

No, verse 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?’” That’s the reality. The master has the right to tell the slave to do additional work, even though he’s been working in the field all day. He has that right because, well, he’s the master and the other is the slave. And there’s a master-slave dynamic.

The master has a right to tell the slave, “Okay, slave, take off your farmer hat, put on your chef’s hat, wash your hands, put on clean clothes, fix my dinner. And after I’m done eating and you’re done doing the dishes, you can eat.” He has the right to do that because he’s the master and the other is the slave. And the slave does not have any rights because well, he’s a slave. The slave doesn’t have the right to say, “Dude, I’ve been working in the field all day. I’m tired.”

He doesn’t get to say that. He doesn’t get to appeal to some labor board, saying, “My master’s being unfair to me. He has unfair expectations on me.” The master is not unfair, the master’s not unkind, the master’s not even unreasonable. He is merely exercising his rights as the master. He is in fact, doing what we expect the master of the slave to do - to give the slave more work.

Verse 9: “He (that’s the owner, the master) does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?” In other words, the owner, the master, when the slave comes in after working all day, doesn’t grab his hand and say, “Good job, slave. Thank you.” Gives them a hug, high five, a pat on the back, for doing what he is supposed to do.

Now, this to our Western diplomatically sensitive ears, this doesn’t sound very kind. We think the master’s being rude. The master’s being inconsiderate, being insensitive. If you work for someone, does your boss pat you on the back every day and give you a hug and thank you for doing your job? No, he gives you a paycheck for doing your job. It’s what you expect. If you’re a boss, you don’t necessarily embrace all your employees every day and say, “Oh, thank you for coming to work. I can’t tell you how much this means to me. I’m so proud of you for coming to work today.”

You parents who work and you come home with the paycheck or the groceries, your kids don’t run up to you and say, “Mom, dad, thank you for working. It’s so wonderful that you do this. I’m so happy that you went to

work and you slaved all day so I could have Cheerios.” And we don't expect our children to do that. It's the role, it's what we do.

In the time of crisis, as He's pointing to this, Jesus is saying the slave is obligated to do what the master says, and the master doesn't apologize for making him cook the meal after he's worked in the field. The master's not unkind, he's not unreasonable. He's exercising his rights as a master. So what do we do with all that?

Verse 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.’” When you obey God and you forgive those who sin against you, you say, “We are unworthy slaves. We have done only that which we ought to have done.” We don't pat ourselves on the back and say, “Look at me, I'm a super Christian.” It's just being obedient to our master. The idea of God being master and we being slaves are nothing new.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

As slaves of God, we are under obligation to obey Him no matter what. Even when we're tired, even when we're emotionally spent, we don't get to complain. We don't get to say, “God, you're being unfair.” We don't file a grievance with the Christian Labor Board – “God expects too much of me.” We don't gather together and form a union and get hats and badges and say, “God, we're on strike because You're too demanding.” He's the master, we're slaves. He has the right to tell us to do whatever He wants.

When someone sins against you, your master has told you, you're obligated to forgive them. If someone sins against you significantly, and they sin against you seven times in the same day and seek forgiveness, your master said you're obligated to forgive them. It's not a matter of faith, it's a matter of obedience. When this life is over and we stand before God and He looks at us and he says, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” our response is, “We are unworthy slaves. We've only done that which we ought to have done. Only that which we ought to have done.”

No one, there's not a single person, not a single Christian who goes above and beyond in their service to God. There are many who do less than God requires, but there's no one who does more. No pastor, no missionary, no servant of God does more than God requires. When you've done all that you can think of doing in serving God, you have still only done that which you ought to do.

1 Corinthians 9:16, Paul said, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.”

Many Christians are under the misguided notion that God operates on a minimum obligation method, that if we just do the minimum, then God is pleased. If we make a plan to read our Bible through in the year and we get partway through it, and we only die when we get to Leviticus, then God is somehow pleased. That God is pleased with the minimum. You know, if I make it to church three out of four Sundays a month, God's got to be impressed by that.

We must guard against thinking that if we faithfully serve over a period of time, that God owes us a certain amount of blessings and we can now just back off and let the next generation take over. “Yeah, I taught Sunday school for 15 years, it’s somebody else's turn now. I've done my duty, God's got to be impressed by that now.” When you've done everything that you can possibly do, you've still only done that which you ought to have done.

And the context, it's about forgiveness. It's about people who've hurt you. It's about people who have sinned against you, about people who've offended you, hurt you, your spouse, your children. And if they seek forgiveness - they're brothers in Christ, sisters in Christ, and they seek forgiveness, God says you're obligated to forgive them.

And there's no statute of limitations on the number or the type of sin. That we are seeking to obey our Lord Jesus Christ, our master by forgiving, because that represents Him, because that's what He did. It shows the love of God to them, which is what we're commanded to be doing.

When we serve God to the best of our ability, we are only doing that which we ought to have done. That's what it means when someone says, “I am a Christian.” When Christian characterizes your life, when Christian characterizes your attitudes and your actions and your citizenship, it is to do only that which you ought to have done, is to obey our God. Let's pray.

Our heavenly Father, we confess that it's hard for us to be obedient to this degree. But Father, may we recognize that it is our role, that we are Your slaves, we are Your servants, You're our master, You're our Lord. And we have no right to minimize Your expectations for us. But Father, we have the responsibility to represent You rightly into this world. To show others the love of Christ, to forgive the way we've been forgiven.

And Father, I have no intention of trying to minimize the heart that many have felt. Father, You know much better, the pain, the grief, the degree to which many have been sinned against. And Father, may You give them the spirit of obedience of the slave, give them the heart of the slave. Who no matter what You ask us to do Father, our response is, “We are unworthy slaves doing only that which we ought to have done.”

Father, we are so unworthy, so unworthy to be called Your servants, to be called the children of God, but by Your grace we are. Father, may we obey You as You deserve, as You command. May we obey You in a way that represents You effectively, correctly to this lost and dying world.

And Father, if there's any one here today that doesn't know You as Lord, I pray that You would draw them to Yourself. They would recognize that they need the forgiveness that only comes in Christ. May You save their soul, for they're good and Your glory. We commit this to You in Jesus name, we pray, amen.