





Sunday School Lesson
Luke 17:1-10
 by Lorin L. Cranford
 All rights reserved ©
Something Jesus Said



A copy of this lesson is posted in Adobe pdf format at <http://cranfordville.com> under Bible Studies in the Bible Study Aids section. A note about the blue, underlined material: These are hyperlinks that allow you to click them on and bring up the specified scripture passage automatically while working inside the pdf file connected to the internet. Just use your web browser's back arrow or the taskbar to return to the lesson material.

Quick Links to the Study

I. Context

- a. Historical
- b. Literary

II. Message

- a. Causing Problems, vv. 1-4
- b. Faith and Expectations, vv. 5-10

This third study in the “What Would Jesus Do?” series of the Formations Sunday School lessons by Smyth-Helwys puts the spotlight on three sayings of Jesus found in Luke 17:1-10. The first two have parallels in both Matthew and Mark, but the third one is only found in Luke and has an uncomfortable twist to it for many American readers. This is especially true in contemporary American society with a strong emphasis upon self-affirmation, and self-esteem -- sometimes to an unhealthy, counter productive extreme. Thus this study will challenge us in unusual ways.

I Context

Again because of previous studies in the gospel of Luke, we will simply refer the reader to one of those studies for background details for the historical and literary context -- in particular, the Luk 13:10-17 study -- at Cranfordville.com under NT Bible Studies. Here, I will only present a brief summary of that material.

a. Historical

Regarding **external history**, most likely Luke's gospel was written in the late 70s to early 80s, after first Mark and then Matthew were composed. This time frame can vary according to how soon Acts was written, since it is volume two of Luke's two volume project. Luke had access to a copy of Mark's gospel and used it heavily. What is less clear is whether or not Luke had a copy of Matthew's gospel or instead had access to another document called Q which contained the common material in both Matthew and Luke. This is a major point of discussion among New Testament scholars currently. The tra-

ditional view of authorship derived from the Church Fathers from the second century on is that the “author” was Luke the physician who accompanied the apostle Paul from the middle of the second missionary journey to the end of Paul's life in Rome in the mid-60s. During that time, according to his own statement in Luke 1:1-4, he was collecting information from a variety of individuals, especially as he traveled with Paul in Palestine. Although this view of authorship cannot be proven without doubt, no better alternative proposal has come forth with more convincing arguments.

The **internal history** of 17:1-10 is more challenging. The sparse discourse markers in vv. 1,5,6 only indicate “Jesus said... the apostles said...Jesus said...” No clue is provided about where they were when this conversation took place. A spatial marker surfaces in 17:11, “On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village,...” The previous clear spatial marker is found in 9:51-53: “51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53 but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.” Assuming -- and that is a huge assumption -- that the material between 9:53 and 17:11 comes while Jesus was traveling between these two spots, then 17:1-10 comes as Jesus and his disciples were leaving Galilee and heading toward Jerusalem for what would become the crucifixion. The miscellaneous nature of much of this material, coupled with many parallelisms of Luke with Matthew and Mark, suggests great caution in trying to nail down a precise geographical location for the

occasion of the sayings in 17:1-10. Some consideration of the literary aspects will be treated below since our passage is a part of the Lukan Travelogue section.

b. Literary

Regarding the **genre** of 17:1-10, these verses fall generally under the category of “sayings” (logia) material. This label means the recorded words of Jesus, and comes from the Greek word λογία, which means sayings or words spoken in a somewhat formalized manner. The material in the synoptic gospels is typically divided into two basic types of material: 1) narratives (what Jesus did) and 2) sayings (what Jesus said). This category is only partially accurate, since most of the narratives contain things that Jesus said. Usually the second category of sayings is seen most clearly when no narrative introduction or conclusion is provided for what Jesus said. The distinguishable literary types of sayings usually divide themselves out between the parables of Jesus and everything else. The latter can be subdivided extensively against the backdrop of ancient literary forms, but this goes beyond the scope of our study and doesn’t become all that helpful to interpreting a text.

Important to remember in this is that the gospel writers do not give us a six o’clock evening news recounting of what Jesus said on any given occasion. A lot of interpretative slant is inserted in order to make more applicable what Jesus said to the respective targeted readers of each gospel account. This becomes clear when comparing double or triple tradition material where two or three gospel writers describe the same event or saying. The differences of wording, emphases etc. surface even in English translations.

The **literary setting** of 17:1-10 is closely linked to the above discussion of internal history. One of the very distinctive segments of Luke’s gospel is a major section in the middle of the document that



records a large volume of things Jesus said and did while traveling between Galilee in the north and Jerusalem in the south. Often it is labeled the **Travelogue** or Greater Interpolation and covers 9:51 through 18:14. Of [the 169 pericopes](#) in Luke this material covers #s 67 - 113 and amounts to over a third of the total content of the entire gospel. 17:1-10 are pericopes 106-109. D. L. Bock (“Luke,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Logos Systems, p 501) summarizes this material, which includes 9:51-19:44:

This part of the Gospel is particularly Lukan, with over forty-four percent consisting of material found only in Luke. There is a high concentration of teaching and parable. In fact there are seventeen parables, fifteen of which are unique to Luke. The journey to Jerusalem is not a chronological, straight line, since Jesus in 10:38–42 is near Jerusalem, while later in the section he is back in the north. Rather, it is a journey in time within the context of the necessity of God’s plan. Journey notes punctuate the section (9:51; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:28, 44). Jesus travels to meet his appointed destiny in Jerusalem (13:31–35).

Our passage is rather typical with parts of it found in the other gospels and some of it unique to Luke.

II. Message

The **internal literary structure** of 17:1-10 is somewhat difficult to determine with certainty. If one takes the narrative markers seriously in vv. 1,5,6, then the passage has a twofold division (vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-10). The uncertain issue is whether or not vv. 7-10 should be linked to vv. 5-6 as a part of Jesus’ answer to the apostles’ request for a strengthened faith. It may simply be inserted as an independent unit of Jesus tradition here by Luke. If so, then one has to conclude that Luke does frame it as the second part of Jesus’ reply to the apostles. We will take our clue from this and treat the passage in an twofold division of thought.

a. Causing Problems, vv. 1-4

Greek NT

17:1 Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ, Ἄνένδεκτόν ἐστιν τοῦ τὰ σκάνδαλα μὴ ἔλθεῖν, πλὴν

NASB

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

NRSV

1 Jesus said to his disciples, "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone

NLT

1 One day Jesus said to his disciples, "There will always be temptations to sin, but

οὐαὶ δι' οὗ ἔρχεται· 17:2
λυσιτελεῖ αὐτῷ εἰ λίθος
μυλικὸς περικείται περὶ
τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ
ἔρριπται εἰς τὴν
θάλασσαν ἢ ἵνα
σκανδαλίση τῶν μικρῶν
τούτων ἕνα. 17:3
προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς. ἐὰν
ἀμάρτη ὁ ἀδελφός σου
ἐπιτίμησον αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐὰν
μετανοήσῃ ἄφες αὐτῷ.
17:4 καὶ ἐὰν ἑπτάκις τῆς
ἡμέρας ἀμάρτησῃ εἰς σέ
καὶ ἑπτάκις ἐπιστρέψῃ
πρὸς σέ λέγων, Μετανοῶ,
ἀφήσεις αὐτῷ

Notes:

This first segment is introduced in a very simple manner: “and he said to his disciples...” This is the third such instance of this exact statement (εἶπεν πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ) in Luke: cf. 9:14; 12:22 and here. The immediately preceding narrative marker is [16:14-15](#): “14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. 15 So he said to them,...” Nothing indicates where Jesus was and when this was said. In that previous episode Jesus rebuffed the criticism of the Pharisees (vv. 15-16), affirmed the permanency of the Torah (v. 17), warned about marital unfaithfulness (v. 18) and told the story about the rich man and Lazarus (vv. 19-31). What does emerge here is a picture of the somewhat random nature of Luke’s insertion of the teachings of Jesus. Sometimes a logical thought flow is detectable, at other times it isn’t. Thus 17:1 introduces another saying of Jesus and all that is provided is indication that it was addressed to the disciples, who evidently were the only ones present when these words were spoken.

One question that does emerge is the identity of the disciples. In 17:1 the term “disciples” (τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ) is used whereas the term “apostles” is used in 17:5 (οἱ ἀπόστολοι). Luke makes much greater use (6 uses) of this latter term as a designation of “the twelve” than either Matthew (1 use) or Mark (2 uses). The identification of who the apostles were is established in [6:13](#): “And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles:...” Thus one can assume that in 17:1-10 the terms “disciples” and “apostles” are used interchangeably.

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."

by whom they come! 2 It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. 4 And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent," you must forgive."

how terrible it will be for the person who does the tempting. 2 It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around the neck than to face the punishment in store for harming one of these little ones. 3 I am warning you! If another believer sins, rebuke him; then if he repents, forgive him. 4 Even if he wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him."

Two points of emphasis comes from Jesus' lips in vv. 1b-4: 1) offenses and 2) forgiveness.

First Jesus warns the disciples about “offenses.” What are these? The Greek word used here is τὰ σκάνδαλα (ta skandala). John Nolland (Luke, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) has a helpful comment:

σκάνδαλα, “things which cause one to stumble,” is probably used in line with the Septuagintal tradition, from which it gains overtones of that which causes stumbling in addition to the imagery of a snare or trap from the Greek origins of the term. We need not think that some extreme form of sin or apostasy is in view here.

Jesus observes that such things are going to happen in life; that’s a reality. In a sinful world we are going to find things that trap us; people are going to do things that trap us and perhaps cause us offense. This is more than people doing things that make us mad or that hurt us. These are actions that impact us in one way or another so that we commit sin ourselves. This can be either in our reaction to them or more likely in the influence these σκάνδαλα have upon our life.

The point of Jesus here is a warning about becoming the person who produces these σκάνδαλα. Jesus pronounces a woe upon such a person: οὐαὶ δι' οὗ ἔρχεται (v. 1b). A “woe” essentially was the invoking of God’s wrath upon someone, as Kenneth Archer says (“Woe,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Logos Systems), “In the NT “woe” functions as prophetic denunciation (Matt. 11:21; Jude 11) or lamentation. It appears predominately in the Synoptic Gospels.”

The seriousness of the offense is defined in the comparison in verse 2: “It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.” Rather than offend, one would be better off dead. The sternness of this warning has led to some church fathers seeing the offense as leading someone into heresy or apostasy, rather than the more generalized concept of “causing someone to sin.” But other church fathers had some interesting assessments about offenses, as is pointed out in volume three of the *Ancient Commentary on the Scriptures* on Luke (Logos Systems) as A.A. Just notes:



Basalt Millstone at Capernaum

The meaning of “stumbling block” is any impediment that might keep a believer from confessing that Jesus is *the* stumbling block. This impediment may be a temptation to sin or the sins that individuals commit against one another that are in need of forgiveness, as the context seems to indicate (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The scandal may also be connected to the passion of Christ (PETER CHRYSOLOGUS). In either case, scandal is sin because it causes offense (JEROME). How appropriate that Jesus would follow the parable about the rich man with words about mercy (AMBROSE).

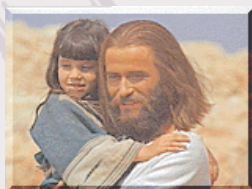
Additional insight can be gleaned from comparing [the parallels](#) in Matthew and Mark to Luke’s statement here.

Matt. 18:6-7 NRSV

6 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"

Mark 9:42

42 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea."



The central idea about the danger of becoming a stumbling block is identical through all three gospels. The additional insight comes from a more de-

tailed identification of “one of these little ones” (τῶν μικρῶν τούτων ἕνα). In Luke the term is left vague, but in Mark it is “one of these little ones who believe in me” (ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ) and Matthew (ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ) follows Mark. For them, the offended one is a believer in Christ and a “little one.” This may

mean either a child or more likely a new convert. I. Howard Marshall (Luke, *New International Greek Testament Commentary*, Logos Systems) summarizes as follows:

The word may refer literally to children (cf. Manson, *Sayings*, 138f., who thinks that this was the original meaning), or to the disciples (cf. 12:32; Klostermann, 171; O. Michel, TDNT IV, 651f.), or to the ‘poor’ to whom the gospel is preached (Kümmel, 93f.; cf. Grundmann, 332, who sees Lazarus as an example of this group). Mt. 18:6 clearly identifies them as those who believe in Jesus, but this is generally regarded as a clarification. The curious feature is the uniform use of οὗτος in the phrase, presumably referring to people present.

This emphasis is concluded with the admonition: “Be on your guard!” Viewing this as a conclusion to the preceding is one possibility and is logical, although some will take it as setting up the following statements in vv. 3b-4. John Nolland (WBC) sees it as linked to both, thus pulling both teachings into a cohesive unit of vv. 1b-4. In my estimation, the climatic nature of v. 3a to vv. 1-2 is the best explanation, given the admonition in v. 3b.

The warning about becoming a stumbling block is followed by a powerful emphasis upon sin in a spiritual brother’s life. Whereas the stumbling block issue pertains to something in our life causing problems to others, the focus now turns to something in a brother’s life causing us problems.

A two sided hypothetical situation is set up in the Greek third class conditional protases: 1) *If your brother sins...* (ἐὰν ἀμάρτη ὁ ἀδελφός σου) and 2) *If he repents...* (ἐὰν μετανοήσῃ). This kind of if-clause is used here to imagine such a situation without making accusations to the listeners that someone in the group meets these qualifications. Each listener will have the burden of examining himself about this is-

sue.

Two responses are demanded by Jesus when such a situation takes place. First, the brother is to be rebuked for his sin. And then forgiveness is to be granted upon repentance being expressed. [Matt. 18:15-18](#) provides a larger framework in this matter:

15 "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The Lukan scenario assumes both rebuke and repentance, while Matthew assumes rebuke and both repentance and unwillingness to repent.

Then the issue of the quality of forgiveness is addressed: "And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive." This has echoes of Peter's puzzled question in [Mt. 18:21-22](#), "21 Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' 22 Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'" In a Jewish legalistic atmosphere which limited one's responsibility to forgive, Jesus blew the lid off with his limitless forgiveness demand. The biblical expression for forgive, ἀφίημι (aphiemi), carries with it the idea of letting go, sending away, turning loose. The imposition of limits on how many times we will "turn loose" of our sense of being offended means that we haven't genuinely turned it loose the first time. Forgiveness demands a letting go, completely and genuinely. Keeping score is the opposite of this.

One important aspect to remember is that both elements must be present in a genuine restoration of relationships inside the community of faith: *rebuke* and *forgiveness*. If sin is ignored, forgiveness is also

ignored. Both make the dangerous mistake that sin doesn't matter and also they fail to recognize the cancerous nature of sin in the life of both the believer and the community of faith. The contemporary attitude of "live and let live" runs counter to this spiritual principle of Jesus.

The other side of this matter is that both elements -- rebuke and forgiveness -- must be present. That is, rebuke without genuine forgiveness is a serious violation of Jesus' teaching. Equally, forgiveness is predicated solely upon repentance. No forgiveness is possible without repentance.

The idea of repentance is presented by Luke here with both basic Greek words for this concept in the New Testament. There is an inward dimension to repentance expressed in the verb μετανοέω (metanoëo). Literally a changing of one's mind about sinful conduct is the point. Implied is a recognition that such an action is wrong in God's eyes. Sorrow for hurting God and violating His love flows out of this recognition. Secondly, the second word ἐπιστρέφω (epistrepho) is used in v.4 to describe the person's turning back to the offended brother. This action of turning back underscores a life style change in behavior. Sinful conduct is abandoned; healthy spiritual relationships are sought after.

Luke's placing of these sayings of Jesus right after the story of the rich man and Lazarus in 16:19-31 only highlights the crucial importance of building proper spiritual relationships with one another in this life. The rich man's elitist treatment of the beggar Lazarus represented the opposite and thus sealed his eternal fate.

There are powerful implications of these verses for us Christians today. We need to be aware of the potential impact of what we do on the lives of others, just as their actions will impact us. Jesus' objective is for us to build healthy, positive relationships with openness and honesty toward one another. As is elsewhere asserted, the foundation for this is love, the authentic self-giving kind of love that Jesus demonstrated on Calvary for us.

b. Faith and Expectations, vv. 5-10

Greek NT

17:5 Καὶ εἶπαν οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῷ κυρίῳ, Πρόσθεσ ἡμῖν πίστιν.
17:6 εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος,

NASB

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 And the Lord said, "If you had faith like

NRSV

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size

NLT

5 One day the apostles said to the Lord, "We need more faith; tell us how to get it." 6 "Even

Εἰ ἔχετε πίστιν ὡς κόκκον σινάπεως, ἐλέγετε ἂν τῇ συκαμίνῳ [ταύτῃ], Ἐκριζώθητι καὶ φυτεύθητι ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ· καὶ ὑπήκουσεν ἂν ὑμῖν.

17:7 Τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν δοῦλον ἔχων ἀροτριῶντα ἢ ποιμαίνοντα, ὃς εἰσελθόντι ἐκ τοῦ ἀγροῦ ἐρεῖ αὐτῷ, Εὐθέως παρελθὼν ἀνάπεσε, 17:8 ἀλλ' οὐχὶ ἐρεῖ αὐτῷ, Ἐτοίμασον τί δειπήσω καὶ περιζώσαμενος διακόνει μοι ἕως φάγω καὶ πίω, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα φάγεσαι καὶ πίεσαι σὺ; 17:9 μὴ ἔχει χάριν τῷ δούλῳ ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὰ διαταχθέντα; 17:10 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ποιήσητε πάντα τὰ διαταχθέντα ὑμῖν, λέγετε ὅτι Δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί ἐσμεν, ὃ ὠφείλομεν ποιῆσαι πεποιήκαμεν.

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.' "

of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

7 "Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, "Come here at once and take your place at the table"? 8 Would you not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink"? 9 Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!" "

if you had faith as small as a mustard seed," the Lord answered, "you could say to this mulberry tree, 'May God uproot you and throw you into the sea,' and it would obey you!

7 "When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, he doesn't just sit down and eat. 8 He must first prepare his master's meal and serve him his supper before eating his own. 9 And the servant is not even thanked, because he is merely doing what he is supposed to do. 10 In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty.' "

Notes:

This section is framed as a dialogue between Jesus and the apostles. The disciples make a plea to Jesus for help in strengthening their faith. The Lukan redaction here probably follows the similar path of [Matthew 18:1-22](#) where similar teachings prompt an exasperated Peter to ask how many times he was obligated to forgive a sinning brother. But here the plea of the entire group is more positive. They realize the need for a stronger faith in order to obey what Jesus has demanded of them in forgiveness etc.

The disciples recognition for a greater faith was underscored by Mark (9:28-29) and Matthew (17:19-20) in their inability to heal a boy without speech ability (Mk. 9:14-29 // Mt. 17:14-20).

I. Howard Marshall (Luke, *NIGTC*) has a helpful comment on the meaning of their request, Πρόσθετε ἡμῖν πίστιν:

It may be meant here to associate the apostles with the gift of wonder-working faith, although there is nothing in the context to suggest this motif. προστίθημι is

probably also Lucan (3:20; *et al.*). The phrase may mean simply 'give us faith' (AG), or 'give us also faith (in addition to other gifts)' (Klostermann, 171; Creed, 215), or 'give us more faith' (cf. Is. 2:19; 26:15; Turner, 51 n.; most translations). The third possibility fits in best with the thought in the next verse, which in effect denies that faith can be quantified.

John Nolland (Luke, WBC) adds to this understanding with his observations:

The request is probably given to the apostles because Luke wishes to emphasize the extreme challenge of the teaching that has just been given, to even the most committed of the followers of Jesus. At the same time Luke's use of "Lord" underlines Jesus' right to direct them in this way. The continuation in v 6 suggests that we should read "grant [additional] faith to us," rather than "give us faith," which the language could equally support (Delebecque's "have faith in us" seems hardly possible [*Études grecques*, 103]). The apostles seek additional faith to rise to the challenge of the teaching that has just been directed at the disciple band and the terrible responsibility to and for others that it creates (cf. the rather different response to teaching that was

considered to be excessively challenging in Matt 19:10).

Jesus' response turns the tables with the use of hyperbole. Faith the size of a mustard seed (extremely small) possesses the strength to uproot a mulberry, or possibly a sycamore, tree and throw it into the sea. The sycamore tree was understood to have deep roots and thus be more difficult to uproot. Plus, the Greek term can refer to a fig producing tree. If so, then a fruit bearing tree is in mind.

Some background is important for making sense out of this assertion about faith. Mt. 17:20 phrases Jesus' words as "For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." Here the issue is faith moving mountains. In Luke 17:6 it is faith uprooting a mulberry tree and tossing it into the sea. In both instances the extremes of contrast push the matter to the absurd. No sensible person would want to magically relocate a mountain or toss a mulberry tree into the sea. The imagery of mountains being uprooted was found among the ancient Jewish scribes; Rev. 8:8 describes a mountain being thrown into the sea; Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 13:2 of a faith that can move mountains.

The point here seems to be that it's not the quantity of faith that is needed to build the genuine relationships described in vv. 1-4. Rather, it is a matter of authentic faith. A fake, or superficial, faith will not build healthy relationships because of the pressure that is put upon it by human sinfulness and the demand to forgive etc. A real, true faith is the necessary ingredient for building and cementing these kinds of relationships.

The disciples were thinking in terms of quantity but Jesus was talking about quality. This is the most natural way to understand vv. 5-6. To function in terms of quantity risks pushing faith into a human achievement, rather than it being a surrender of everything into God's hands.

The other section (vv. 7-10) in vv. 5-10 is the most curious part. It is only found in Luke, and it is based upon a typical social custom in a world where slavery was normative. The story contains no affirmation or condemnation of the institution of slavery. It simply uses a familiar custom from that practice to make a spiritual point. Probably it is this spiritual point that is most troubling to us in a contemporary American cultural setting, rather than its neutral stance on slavery itself.

The social custom itself is described in vv. 7-9 with the climax reached in v. 9. Then the application

to believers is made in v. 10 with startling forcefulness.

The social custom was simply the use of slaves to plow the fields and/or to shepherd the flocks of sheep and goats. When they came in from working all day, they weren't told by their master to immediately sit down for supper. Rather, they were responsible to change clothes and prepare the evening meal for the master of the household. Only after he and his family and/or guests had finished eating would the slave be able to eat the evening meal for himself. The climax of the story is reached in verse 9: "Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?" (μὴ ἔχει χάριν τῷ δούλῳ ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὰ διαταχθέντα;) More literally, the point is that the master does not have praise (χάριν) for the slave only doing his duty.

The interesting aspect of this is the social assumptions made in the story. Jesus is assuming a master to have only one slave, not a large number. In such cases, there were slaves who worked exclusively in the fields; others who took care of the animals; and a third group responsible for taking care of a wide variety of things inside the house. These ranged from the master's accountants, lawyers, and doctors to the slave(s) charged with supervising the education of the master's sons. A distinct group of slaves were responsible for food preparation and service, δῆκονοι (hoi diakonoi). All of these were under the direct supervision of the οἰκονόμος (oikonomos, lit. 'the law of the house'), who answered directly to the master of the house.

One can document slaves being rewarded for extraordinary faithful service. Cicero, the Roman lawyer, began as a slave and was rewarded by his master with money and property until eventually he was able to purchase his freedom. He then managed to become a highly influential citizen and politician in Roman society. What Jesus played off of in his story was the usual, typical situation. But there were exceptions in that world.

The stinging point of the story is the application in verse 10: "So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!' " We are told to adopt the assumed stance of the slave in the story. In the context of 17:1-10, this story reinforces the point about faith not being human effort. Faith leads us to obey our Lord. Such is normative and expected. We're not servants of the Lord for the glory to be gained. Against the Pharisaical mistaken notion that faith and minimal service bring God's praise, this assertion is devastating.

Greek NT

17:1 Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ, Ἀνένδεκτόν ἐστιν τοῦ τὰ σκάνδαλα μὴ ἐλθεῖν, πλὴν οὐαὶ δι' οὗ ἔρχεται· 17:2 λυσιτελεῖ αὐτῷ εἰ λίθος μυλικὸς περίκειται περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔρριπται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν ἢ ἵνα σκανδαλίση τῶν μικρῶν τούτων ἓνα. 17:3 προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς. ἐὰν ἀμάρτη ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἐπιτίμησον αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐὰν μετανοήσῃ ἄφες αὐτῷ. 17:4 καὶ ἐὰν ἐπτάκις τῆς ἡμέρας ἀμαρτήσῃ εἰς σὲ καὶ ἐπτάκις ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς σὲ λέγων, Μετανοῶ, ἀφήσεις αὐτῷ

17:5 Καὶ εἶπαν οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῷ κυρίῳ, Πρόσθετες ἡμῖν πίστιν. 17:6 εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος, Εἰ ἔχετε πίστιν ὡς κόκκον σινάπεως, ἐλέγετε ἂν τῇ συκαμίνῳ [ταύτῃ], Ἐκριζώθητι καὶ φυτεύθητι ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ· καὶ ὑπήκουσεν ἂν ὑμῖν.

17:7 Τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν δοῦλον ἔχων ἀροτριῶντα ἢ ποιμαίνοντα, ὃς εἰσελθόντι ἐκ τοῦ ἀγροῦ ἐρεῖ αὐτῷ, Εὐθέως παρελθὼν ἀνάπεσε, 17:8 ἀλλ' οὐχὶ ἐρεῖ αὐτῷ, Ἐτοίμασον τί δειπνήσω καὶ περιζωσάμενος διακόνει μοι ἕως φάγω καὶ πίω, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα φάγεσαι καὶ πίεσαι σύ; 17:9 μὴ ἔχει χάριν τῷ δούλῳ ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὰ διαταχθέντα; 17:10 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ποιήσητε πάντα τὰ διαταχθέντα ὑμῖν, λέγετε ὅτι Δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί ἐσμεν, ὃ ὀφείλομεν ποιῆσαι πεποιήκαμεν.

NASB

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.' "

NRSV

1 Jesus said to his disciples, "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! 2 It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. 4 And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent," you must forgive."

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

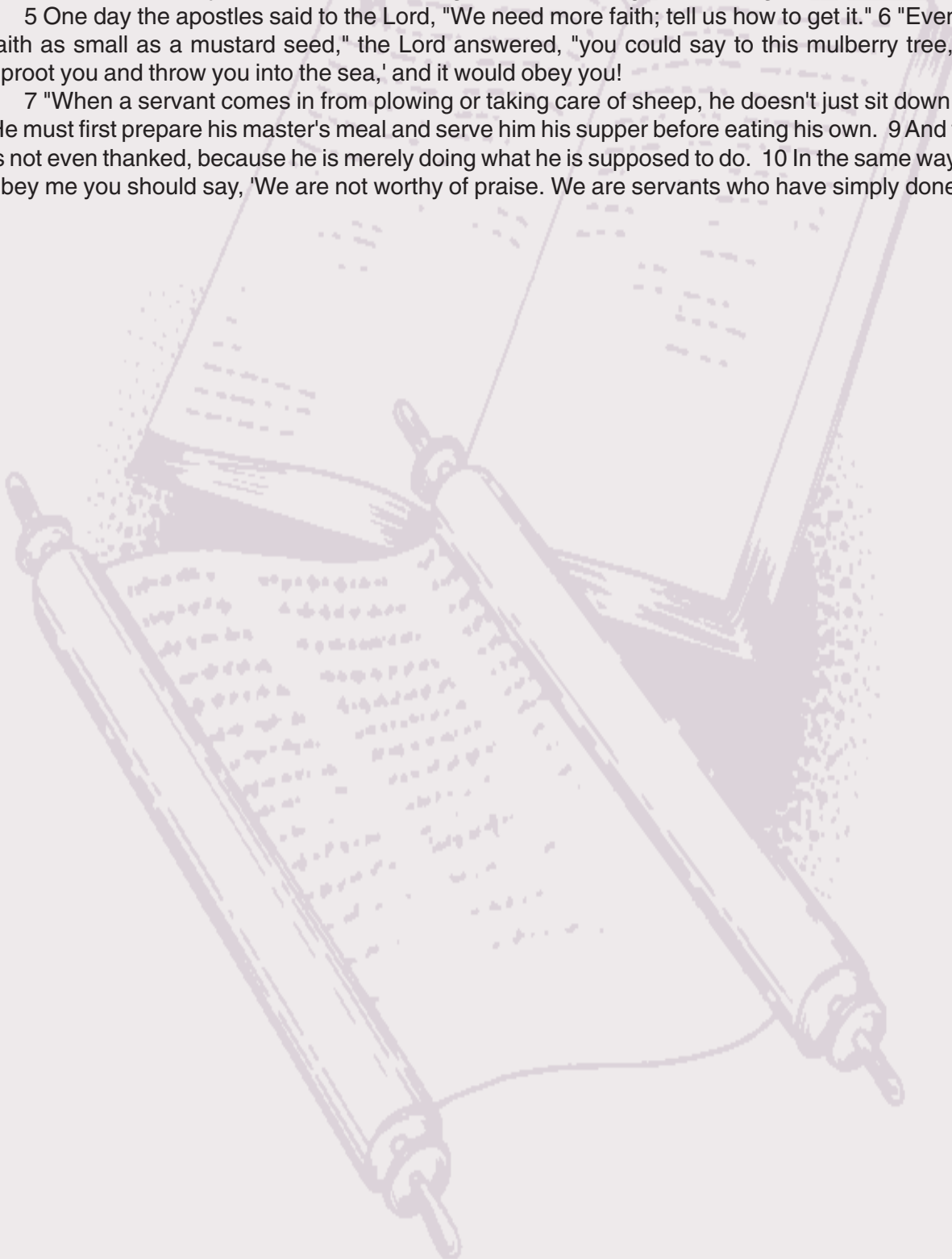
7 "Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, "Come here at once and take your place at the table'? 8 Would you not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? 9 Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!" "

NLT

1 One day Jesus said to his disciples, "There will always be temptations to sin, but how terrible it will be for the person who does the tempting. 2 It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around the neck than to face the punishment in store for harming one of these little ones. 3 I am warning you! If another believer sins, rebuke him; then if he repents, forgive him. 4 Even if he wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him."

5 One day the apostles said to the Lord, "We need more faith; tell us how to get it." 6 "Even if you had faith as small as a mustard seed," the Lord answered, "you could say to this mulberry tree, 'May God uproot you and throw you into the sea,' and it would obey you!"

7 "When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, he doesn't just sit down and eat. 8 He must first prepare his master's meal and serve him his supper before eating his own. 9 And the servant is not even thanked, because he is merely doing what he is supposed to do. 10 In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty.'"



Greek Text Parsed

17:1

Ἔειπεν : 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - λέγω - he said

δὲ : Postpositive conjunction introducing contrastive independent clause - and, but

πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς : 1st - Acc (Ref) - M - P - μαθητής, ὁ - to his disciples

αὐτοῦ, : Pers Pron - Gen (Poss) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - his

Ἄνένδεκτόν : Adj (Pred) - Nom - N - S - ἀνένδεκτος, -ον - impossible

ἐστίν : Pres (Gnomic) - Ind - 3 - S - εἰμί - it is

τοῦ...μὴ ἔλθεῖν, : 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Infin (S: Subj) - ἔρχομαι - to not come

τὰ σκάνδαλα : 2 nd - Acc (Ref) - N - P - σκάνδαλον, τό - scandals, offenses

πλὴν : Coordinate conjunction of contrast - nevertheless, however

οὐαὶ : Impers Verb - woe

δι' οὗ : Rel Pron - Abl (Agency) - M - S - ὅς, ἧ, ὅ - through whom

ἔρχεται : Pres (Gnomic) - Dep - Ind - 3 - S - ἔρχομαι - they come (neuter plural subject with singular verb)

17:2

λυσίτελεϊ : Pres (Gnomic) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - λυσιτελέω - it is better for, more advantageous for (connoting a comparative degree expression)

αὐτῷ : Pers Pron - Dat (Advantage) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - for him

εἰ : Subordinate conjunction introducing first class conditional protasis - if, when

λίθος : 2 - Nom (Subj) - M - S - λίθος, ὁ - a stone

μυλικός : Adj (Attrib) - Nom - M - S - μυλικός, -ή, -όν - a millstone

περίκειται : Pres (Gnomic) - Dep - Ind - 3 - S - περίκειμαι - is hung around, is placed around

περὶ τὸν τράχηλον : 2 - Gen (Ref) - M - S - τράχηλος, ὁ - around his neck

αὐτοῦ Pers Pron - Gen (Poss) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - his

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

ἔρριπται : Perf (Gnomic) - Pass (NAE) - Ind - 3 - S - ῥίπτω - he be cast, thrown

εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν : 1st - Acc (Measure) - F - S - θάλασσα, ἡ - into the sea

ἢ : comparative particle - than

ἵνα : subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory substantival subject clause in a comparison - that

σκανδαλίση : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Subjunctive (Indirect Command) - 3 - S - σκανδαλίζω - he should offend

τῶν μικρῶν : Adj (Attrib) - Abl - M - P - μικρός, -ή, -όν - of these little, small

τούτων : Dem Pron - Abl (Partitive) - M - P - οὗτος, αὕτη, τοῦτο - of these little ones

ἓνα. : Cardinal Adj (Subst) - Acc (Dir Obj) - N - S - εἶς, μία, ἓν - one

17:3

προσέχετε : Pres (Desc) - Act - Imper (Command) - 2 - P - προσέχω - take heed, be cautious

ἑαυτοῖς. : Reflex Pron - Dat (Dir Obj) - M - P - σεαυτοῦ, -ῆς - for yourselves

ἐὰν : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory adverbial 3rd class protasis - if

ἀμάρτη : 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Subjunc(Potential) - 3 - S - ἀμαρτάνω - he may, might sin, commit a sin

ὁ ἀδελφός : 2nd - Nom (Subj) - M - S - ἀδελφός, ὁ - a brother

σου : Pers Pron - Gen (Dir Obj/ Disadvantage) - S - σύ - against you

ἐπιτίμησον : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Imper (Com) - 2 - S - ἐπιτιμέω - (you) rebuke

αὐτῷ, : Pers Pron - Dat (Dir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - him

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

ἐὰν : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory adverbial 3rd class protasis - if

μετανοήση : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Subj (Potent) - 3 - S - μετανοέω - he repents, may repent

ἄφες 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Imper (Com) - 2 - S - ἀφίημι - (you) forgive

αὐτῷ. : Pers Pron - Dat (Dir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - him

17:4

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

ἐὰν : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory adverbial 3rd class protasis - if

ἑπτάκις : Adverb - seven

τῆς ἡμέρας : 1st - Gen (Ref/Time) - F - S - ἡμέρα, ἡ - in regard to a day (= seven times); during a day
ἀμαρτήση ἀμάρτη : 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Subjunc(Potential) - 3 - S - ἀμαρτάνω - he may, might sin, commit a sin

εἰς σὲ : Pers Pron - Acc (Disadv) - S - σύ - against you

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

ἑπτὰκις : Adverb - seven

ἐπιστρέψῃ 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Subj (Potent) - 3 - S - ἐπιστρέφω - he may turn to

πρὸς σὲ : Pers Pron - Acc (Ref) - S - σύ - to you

λέγων, : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Modal) - Nom - M - S - λέγω - saying

Μετανοῶ, : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ind -1 - S - μετανοέω - I repent

ἀφήσεις : Fut (Pred/Imper) - Act - Ind - 2 - S - ἀφίημι - you shall forgive

αὐτῷ : Pers Pron - Dat (Dir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - him

17:5

Καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two sentences - and

εἶπαν : 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - P - λέγω - they said

οἱ ἀπόστολοι : 2nd - Nom (Subj) - M - P - ἀπόστολος, ὁ - the apostles

τῷ κυρίῳ, : 2nd - Dat (Indir Obj) - M - S - κύριος, ὁ - to the Lord

Πρόσθετε : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Imper (Request) - 2 - S - προστίθημι - increase

ἡμῖν : Pers Pron - Dat (Poss/Indir Obj) - P - ἐγώ - our/ to us

πίστιν. : 3rd - Acc (Dir Obj) - F - S - πίστις, -εως, ἡ - our faith

17:6

εἶπεν : 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - λέγω - he said

δὲ : Postpositive coordinate conjunction introducing a contrastive statement - but, and

ὁ κύριος, : 2nd - Nom (Subj) - M - S - κύριος, ὁ - the Lord

Εἰ : Subjordinate conjunction introducing a second (mixed) class conditional protasis - if

ἔχετε : Pres (Desc/Gnom) - Act - Ind (Potent) - 2 - P - ἔχω - you possess

πίστιν : 3rd - Acc (Dir Obj) - F - S - πίστις, -εως, ἡ - faith

ὡς κόκκον : 2nd - Acc (Comp) - M - S - - like, as a seed

σινάπεως, : 3rd - Gen (Desc/Identity) - N - S - σίναπι, -εως, τό - of the mustard plant

ἐλέγετε ἂν : Imperf (Desc) - Act - Ind (Potential) - 2 - P - λέγω - you could have said / say

τῇ συκαμίνῳ : 2nd - Dat (Indir Obj) - F - S - συκάμινος, ἡ - to this mulberry tree

[ταύτῃ], : Dem Pron - Dat - F - S - οὗτος, αὕτη, τοῦτο - to this

Ἐκρίζῳθητι : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Imper (Com) - 2 - S - ἐκρίζω - be uprooted

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

φυτεύῳθητι : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Imper (Com) - 2 - S - φυτεύω - be planted

ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ : 1st - Loc (Place) - F - S - θάλασσα, ἡ - in the sea

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

ὕπήκουσεν ἂν : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Indic (Poten) - 3 - S - - it would have obeyed / obey

ὑμῖν. : Pers Pron - Dat (Dir Obj) - P - σύ - you

17:7

Τίς : Interrog Pron - Nom (Subj) - M - S - τίς, τί - who

δὲ : Postpositive coordinate conjunction introducing a contrastive statement - but, and

ἐξ ὑμῶν : Pers Pron - Abl (Partitive) - P - σύ - among you / from your group

δοῦλον : 2nd - Acc (Dir Obj) - M - S - δοῦλος, ὁ - a slave

ἔχων : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Modal/Temporal) - Nom - M - S - ἔχω - while having, possessing, owning

ἀροτριῶντα : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Pred / Adv: Temp) - Acc - M - S - ἀροτριάω - who plows/ while plowing

ἢ : Disjunctive coordinate conjunction - or

ποιμαίνοντα, : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Pred / Adv: Temp) - Acc - M - S - ποιμαίνω - who shepherds, while shepherding

ὃς : Rel Pron - Nom (Subj) - M - S - ὃς, ἡ, ὅ - who (introduces relative substantival appositional clause, going back to τίς, it can be understood as a predicate nominative clause with an implicit ἐστίν between them.)

εἰσελθόντι 2 Aor (Cont) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Pred) - Dat - M - S - εἰσέρχομαι - who has come in

ἐκ τοῦ ἀγροῦ : 2nd - Abl (Sep) - M - S - ἀγρος, ὁ - from the field

ἔρει : Fut (Delib) - Act - Ind (Interrog) - 3 - S - λέγω - who will say

αὐτῷ, : Pers Pron - Dat (Indir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - to him

Εὐθέως : Adv of time - quickly, immediately

παρελθών : 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - M - S - παρέρχομαι - having come alongside of, near

ἀνάπεσε, : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Imper (Com) - 2 - S - ἀναπίπτω - recline, sit down

17:8

ἀλλ' : Coordinate conjunction introducing strongly contrasting statement - but, instead

οὐχί ἔρει : Fut (Delib) - Act - Ind (Interrog) - 3 - S - λέγω - will he not say

αὐτῷ, : Pers Pron - Dat (Indir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - to him

Ἐτοίμασον : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Imper (Com) - 2 - S - ἐτοιμάζω - prepare

τί : Indef Pron - Acc (Dir Obj) - N - S - τις, τι - something (to eat)

δειπνήσω : Fut (Pred/Imp) - Act - Ind - 1 - S - δειπνέω - I will dine, eat supper [or the verb can be *parsed as 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Subjun (Potent) - 1 - S - δειπνέω - I would eat]

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

περιζώσάμενος : Pres (Desc) - Mid (Reflex) - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - M - S - περιζώνυμι - having gotten yourself dressed (to serve as a waiter)

διακόνει : Pres (Desc) - Act - Imp (Com) - 3 - S - διακονέω - (you) serve

μοι : Pers Pron - Dat (Dir Obj) - S - ἐγώ - me

ἕως : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory adverbial temporal clause - until (the point in time which)

φάγω : 1 Aor (Const/Culm) - Act - Subjunc (Potent) - 1 - S - ἐσθίω - I will eat, have finished eating

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

πίω, : 1 Aor (Const/Culm) - Act - Subjunc (Potent) - 1 - S - πίνω - I will drink, have finished drinking

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

μετὰ ταῦτα : Dem Pron - Gen (Time) - N - P - οὗτος, αὕτη, τοῦτο - after these things, (after this, afterwards)

φάγεσαι : Fut (Pred) - Dep - Ind - 2 - S - ἐσθίω - you will eat

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two independent clauses - and

πίεσαι : Fut (Pred) - Dep - Ind - 2 - S - πίνω - you will drink

σύ, : Pers Pron - Nom (Subj) - S - σύ - you

17:9

μὴ ἔχει : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ind (Interrog) - 3 - S - ἔχω - he does not have (does he?) [μὴ with indicative in interrogative sentence expects positive answer]

χάριν : 3rd - Acc (Dir Obj) - F - S - χάρις, -ιτος, ἡ - praise

τῷ δούλῳ : 2nd - Dat (Indir Obj) - M - S - δούλος, ὁ - for/ to the slave

ὅτι : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory adverbial causal dependent clause - because

ἐποίησεν : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - ποιέω - he did

τὰ διαταχθέντα; : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Ptc (Adj: Subst) - Acc (Dir Obj) - N - P - διατάσσω - the things which were commanded (=what he was told to do)

17:10

οὕτως : Adverb of manner - so, thus

καὶ : Here use as an ascensive correlative adverb - also

ὕμεῖς, : Pers Pron - Nom (Subj) - P - σύ - you

ὅταν : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory adverbial indefinite temporal dependent clause - whenever

ποιήσητε : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Subjun (Potent) - 2 - P - ποιέω - you may do

πάντα : Adj (Pred) - Acc - N - P - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - all things, all

τὰ διαταχθέντα : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Ptc (Adj: Subst) - Acc (Dir Obj) - N - P - διατάσσω - the things which were commanded (=what you were told to do)

ὕμῖν, : Pers Pron - Dat (Indir Obj) - P - σύ - (to) you

λέγετε : Pres (Desc) - Act - Imper (Com) - 2 - P - λέγω - say

ὅτι : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory substantival object clause - that

Δοῦλοι : 2nd - Nom (Pred) - M - P - δοῦλος, ὁ - slaves, servants

ἀχρεῖοί : Adj (Attrib) - Nom - M - P - ἀχρεῖος, -ον - worthless, useless

ἐσμεν, : Pres (Desc) - Ind - 1 - P - εἰμί - we are

ὃ : Rel Pron - Acc (Dir Obj) - N - S - ὃς, ἡ, ὅ - introducing a relative substantival object dependent clause - what

ὀφείλομεν : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ind - 1 - P - ὀφείλω - we ought to

ποιήσαι : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Infin (S: Obj) - ποιέω - to do

πεποιήκαμεν. : Perf (Inten/Consum) - Act - Ind - 1 - P - ποιέω - we did / have done

Greek NT Diagram

17:1 δὲ
1 **Εἶπεν**
 πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ,

α *Ἄνένδεκτόν ἐστιν τοῦ τὰ σκάνδαλα μὴ ἔλθειν,*
 β *πλὴν*
 γ *οὐαὶ δι' οὗ ἔρχεται·*
 17:2 *λυσιτελεῖ αὐτῷ*
 εἰ λίθος μυλικὸς περικεῖται
 καὶ
 ἔρριπται
εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν
 ἢ ἵνα σκανδαλίση τῶν μικρῶν τούτων ἓνα.
 καὶ
 ἐπιτίμησον αὐτῷ,
 καὶ
 ἐὰν μετανοήσῃ
ἄφες αὐτῷ
 καὶ
 ἐὰν ἐπιτάκις τῆς ἡμέρας ἀμαρτήσῃ
 εἰς σέ
 καὶ
 ἐπιτάκις ἐπιστρέψῃ
 πρὸς σέ
 λέγων,
 Μετανοῶ,
ἄφήσεις αὐτῷ.

17:3 *προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς.*
 17:4 *ἐὰν ἀμαρτήσῃ ὁ ἀδελφός σου*
 ε *ἐπιτίμησον αὐτῷ,*
 καὶ
 ἐὰν μετανοήσῃ
 ζ *ἄφες αὐτῷ*
 καὶ
 ἐὰν ἐπιτάκις τῆς ἡμέρας ἀμαρτήσῃ
 εἰς σέ
 καὶ
 ἐπιτάκις ἐπιστρέψῃ
 πρὸς σέ
 λέγων,
 Μετανοῶ,
 η *ἄφήσεις αὐτῷ.*

17:5 **2** **Καὶ εἶπαν οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῷ κυρίῳ,**
 θ *Πρόσθετες ἡμῖν πίστιν.*

17:6 δὲ
3 εἶπεν ὁ κύριος,
 τ *Εἰ ἔχετε πίστιν*
 ὡς κόκκον σινάπεως,
ἐλέγετε ἂν τῇ συκαμίνῳ [ταύτῃ],
 κ *Ἐκριζώθητι*
 καὶ
 φυτεύθητι
ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ·
 καὶ
 κ *ὑπήκουσεν ἂν ὑμῖν.*

17:7 δὲ

λ

Τίς (έστί)

ἐξ ὑμῶν
δοῦλον ἔχων
ἀροτριῶντα
ἢ
ποιμαίνοντα,

εἰσελθόντι
ἐκ τοῦ ἀγροῦ

ὡς... ἐρεῖ αὐτῷ,

Εὐθέως
παρελθὼν
ἀνάπεσε,

17:8

ἀλλ

μ

οὐχὶ ἐρεῖ αὐτῷ,

Ἐτοίμασον τί
δειπνήσω
καὶ
περιζωσάμενος
διακόνει μοι
ἕως φάγω καὶ πῖω,
καὶ
μετὰ ταῦτα
φάγεσαι
καὶ
πίεσαι σύ;

ν

17:9

μὴ ἔχει χάριν τῷ δούλῳ

ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὰ διαταχθέντα;

17:10

οὕτως
καὶ

ὅταν ποιήσητε πάντα τὰ διαταχθέντα ὑμῖν,

ξ

ὕμεις... λέγετε

ὁ ὀφείλομεν ποιῆσαι

ὅτι Δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί ἐσμεν,

πεποιήκαμεν.

Alternative understanding with substantival object ὅτι clause, rather than causal understanding as above:

ὅτι Δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί ἐσμεν,
ὁ ὀφείλομεν ποιῆσαι

πεποιήκαμεν.

Translations:

Causal: because we are worthless slaves we have done what we ought to do.

Substantival: We are worthless slaves; what we ought to do we have done.

Exegetical Outline:

- I. (1-η) Jesus spoke serious words about sinful behavior.
 - A. (1) Jesus spoke to his disciples
 - B. (α-η) Jesus' words demand that we not ignore sin in the community of believers.
 - 1. (α-δ) Jesus said that offenses are inevitable but warned about being a source of them.
 - a) (α) Jesus asserted the certainty of offenses taking place
 - b) (β-γ) Jesus issued a stern warning about being a source of offenses
 - i) (β) Jesus warned about the one through whom offenses come
 - ii) (γ) Jesus declared that death would be better than being a channel of offenses
 - c) (δ) Jesus admonished us to be careful about these matters.
 - 2. (ε-η) Jesus demanded that we deal seriously with sin
 - a) (ε-ζ) Jesus taught us to deal with sinning brother in both rebuke and forgiveness
 - i) (ε) Jesus admonished us to rebuke a sinning brother.
 - ii) (ζ) Jesus admonished us to forgive a repenting brother
 - b) (η) Jesus demanded that our willingness to forgive be unlimited.
- II. (2-ξ) The apostle's request for a strengthened faith received a surprising answer from Jesus.
 - A. (2-θ) The apostles' request to Jesus was for a strengthened faith.
 - 1. (2) The apostles spoke to Jesus
 - 2. (θ) Their request was for a deeper faith
 - B. (3-ξ) Jesus' reply to the apostles both encouraged and warned
 - 1. (3) Jesus answered his apostles
 - 2. (ι-ξ) Jesus affirmed the power of faith but warned about expecting praise for doing the expected.
 - a) (ι-κ) Jesus set forth an amazing claim about the power of faith.
 - i) (ι) Jesus assumes their faith is strong enough to command a mulberry tree.
 - ii) (κ) Jesus declared that a mustard seed faith could produce the uprooting of a mulberry tree.
 - b) (λ-ξ) Jesus used a typical custom of his day to remind us to do our duty to God.
 - i) (λ-μ) Jesus described a typical situation about a slave's responsibility in the household
 - a) (λ) Jesus asked a question about how a slave would be treated
 - b) (μ) Jesus reflected on common practice about the slave preparing a meal for his master before being able to eat himself.
 - ii) (ν-ξ) Jesus applied his illustration about the slave.
 - a) (ν) Jesus concluded that the slave who both worked in the field and prepared the evening meal didn't deserve praise for doing extra duties.
 - b) (ξ) Jesus reminded us as God's servants to not expect praise for just doing our expected duty.

Parallels to Luke 17:1-10

Luke 17:1-3a Greek NT

17:1 Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ, Ἄνενδεκτόν ἐστιν τοῦ τὰ σκάνδαλα μὴ ἔλθειν, πλὴν οὐαὶ δι' οὗ ἔρχεται· 17:2 λυσιτελεῖ αὐτῷ εἰ λίθος μυλικὸς περίκειται περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔρριπται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν ἢ ἵνα σκανδαλίση τῶν μικρῶν τούτων ἓνα. 17:3 προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς.

NRSV

1 Jesus said to his disciples, "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! 2 It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 Be on your guard!

Matt. 18:6-7 Greek NT

<18:6> Ὅς δ' ἂν σκανδαλίση ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ, συμφέρει αὐτῷ ἵνα κρεμασθῇ μύλος ὄνικος περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ καταποντισθῇ ἐν τῷ πελάγει τῆς θαλάσσης. <18:7> οὐαὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἀπὸ τῶν σκανδάλων· ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἔλθειν τὰ σκάνδαλα, πλὴν οὐαὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ δι' οὗ τὸ σκάνδαλον ἔρχεται.

NRSV

6 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"

Mk. 9:42 Greek NT

<9:42> Καὶ ὃς ἂν σκανδαλίση ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων [εἰς ἐμέ], καλόν ἐστιν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον εἰ περίκειται μύλος ὄνικος περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ βέβληται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν.

NRSV

42 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

Luke 17:3b-4 Greek NT

ἐὰν ἄμαρτη ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἐπιτίμησον αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐὰν μετανοήσῃ ἄφες αὐτῷ. 17:4 καὶ ἐὰν ἐπτάκις τῆς ἡμέρας ἄμαρτήσῃ εἰς σέ καὶ ἐπτάκις ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς σέ λέγων, Μετανοῶ, ἀφήσεις αὐτῷ

NRSV

If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. 4 And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent," you must forgive."

Matt. 18:15 Greek NT

Ἐὰν δὲ ἄμαρτήσῃ [εἰς σέ] ὁ ἀδελφός σου, ὑπάγε ἔλεγξον αὐτὸν μεταξὺ σοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ μόνοι. ἐὰν σου ἀκούσῃ, ἐκέρδησας τὸν ἀδελφόν σου·

NRSV

"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.

Matt. 18:21-22 Greek NT

18:21 Τότε προσελθὼν ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Κύριε, ποσάκις ἄμαρτήσῃ εἰς ἐμέ ὁ ἀδελφός μου καὶ ἀφήσω αὐτῷ; ἕως ἐπτάκις; 18:22 λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Οὐ λέγω σοι ἕως ἐπτάκις ἀλλὰ ἕως ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά.

NRSV

21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

Luke 17:5-6
Greek NT

17:5 Καὶ εἶπαν οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῷ κυρίῳ, Πρόσθες ἡμῖν πίστιν. 17:6 εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος, Εἰ ἔχετε πίστιν ὡς κόκκον σινάπεως, ἐλέγετε ἂν τῇ συκαμίνῳ [τάυτῃ], Ἐκριζώθητι καὶ φυτεύθητι ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ· καὶ ὑπήκουσεν ἂν ὑμῖν.

NRSV

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

Matt. 17:19-20
Greek NT

<17:19> Τότε προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ τῷ Ἰησοῦ κατ' ἰδίαν εἶπον, Διὰ τί ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἠδυνήθημεν ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτό; <17:20> ὁ δὲ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Διὰ τὴν ὀλιγοπιστίαν ὑμῶν· ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν ἔχητε πίστιν ὡς κόκκον σινάπεως, ἐρεῖτε τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ, Μετάβα ἔνθεν ἐκεῖ, καὶ μεταβήσεται· καὶ οὐδὲν ἀδυνατήσει ὑμῖν.

NRSV

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

Mk. 9:28-29
Greek NT

<9:28> καὶ εἰσελθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰσοῖκον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ κατ' ἰδίαν ἐπηρώτων αὐτόν, Ὅτι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἠδυνήθημεν ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτό; <9:29> καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελεθεῖν εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ.

NRSV

28 When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."