

*1 And He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should 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 should 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 And 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 "But 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 until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will 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.'"*

The common denominator that links these 10 verses to the discussion and parable about false teachers and hell is the contrast between the disciples and apostles of Jesus, and the leaders of the false religion of Israel, the Pharisees and their scribes.

Jesus exposes the identifying traits that false religion and false teachers have in common. Love of money. Pride and self righteousness. Shaming others. Mocking true believers. Undermining the truths of the book. Sexual immorality.

And then Jesus gives them a parable that is a warning about hell. The rich man and Lazarus. A shocking surprise in the next life. Eternal conscious agony and torment for the proud unbelieving false religionists. And indeed for all who ignore God in this life.

And that brings us to this little section where Jesus uses the fresh reality in the disciples and apostles minds of the pharisee's and Jesus uses that contrast to say, this is how they live, and in contrast, just the opposite of them, this is how you are to live.

These verses are a list of positives in direct contrast to the pharisee's negatives. He uses them as an object lesson. They do this, and the result is hell. You, on the other hand, need to do this.

We'll look at those briefly, but first I want to visit the foundation on which all of this teaching rests, and having that, the rest will be profoundly simple.

We've just passed the marker of Thanksgiving. But the secular world is asking the obvious question; we have built into us this notion that giving thanks is somehow humble and noble. Most humans are wired that way. Most don't ever take the time to question that.

Thankfulness. Well we're thankful for our homes, and our shelter and our freedoms, and the plenty of the feast. We have much to be thankful for. So very much. But if you are an atheist and a secularist and you engage your brain and say, that's all well and good, but who is it exactly that I'm thanking by taking a day off to feast and be thankful?

To our secular atheistic culture, Thanksgiving is not more than a day to engorge on turkey and mashed potatoes and gravy and pies, and we follow up the food orgy and resulting comatose condition by getting up at 4:00 AM to go stand in line at the black friday sales.

We're thankful that we've got more wealth than anybody else on earth, but we've got no one to actually thank. Bear with me for a little bit now and think about these things;

William Ernest Henley in his poem; *Invictus* boldly states the obvious, unembarassed and out loud.

*Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.*

If there is a god, and if there is some deep need to be thankful, Henley thanks whoever that is for what? For him. If there is a god out there the only thing worthy of thanking whoever that is, is because of me. If there is a god he is deserving of thanks for making the unconquerable me.

Listen to Romans 1:21

*21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Paul, in Romans chapter one delineates man's spiral down into the lostness and sin of the fall. Fallen man's root problem is that he does not honor God, as God, and he does not give thanks to God. Everything else craters downward from that root problem. No honor, no thanks.

Paul says men are guilty because they know there is a God and they refuse to give Him honor. Every living soul will stand before the creator and be judged because they are guilty of ignoring God by cause of the creation itself. Science has made men more guilty. The complexities of tiny things and huge things demand a wise Creator.

It is a conscious and wicked choice to set the obvious aside in order to pursue wickedness. That one thing begins the spiral down into hell. *21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Let's look at the flip side. The positive as opposed to the negative; Psalms 100 is the polar opposite to what Paul defines in Romans.

*1 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.*

*2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.*

*3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.*

*5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.*

This is the exact positive of what Paul states in Romans 1:21

Worship God vs. 1

Serve God vs. 2

Acknowledge that He IS God. Honor Him vs. 3

Thank God. 2 times! vs. 4

Why? vs. 5 He is good. He is merciful forever. He has revealed truths that have endured. We still have His book, 3500 years later. All generations.

The root sin is always pride. Pride cancels everything else out. Pride displaces God. Everything Jesus is going to teach His disciples in direct contrast to the pharisee's in these verses, has pride as it's root sin.

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

Actually, in the greek, we have a double negative here. Jesus says it's impossible for the stumbling blocks to not come. Why? Impossible for them to not come.

2 reasons why it's impossible that stumbling blocks not come. Satan is the ruler of this world. He's in the stumbling block business. He is in an ages long battle with God to cause men to dis-honor and not acknowledge God.

Satan's business is to interrupt and cancel out any and all glory that God's creation might give back to Him. That's his deal.

And the 2nd reason is because we are Adam's race. We're born into this sinful place, and in our natural, spiritually dead state, we are willing complicit. We're happily duped into joining with satan in his battle with God. Unless God intervene's and quickens us from the dead and transfer's us into His kingdom, our default is to blindly and dumbly work in partnership with Satan to bring stumbling blocks. That's just the default in this world.

Jesus is responding to men who were openly mocking Him, publicly. Public shaming. Why? What happens when these men shame Jesus? These men who are the chief religious spiritual leaders of that nation.

Ever notice, you parents, that your children copy what you do. It's very cute. Until you realize . . . ummm . . . that wasn't me at my best. Maybe it was me at my worst. Gesturing some guy that thought he really ought to be where I was at on the freeway as he nearly runs me into a ditch. And you notice your kids are copying that.

It's human nature. We want to emulate the people who we look up to. What then is the entire purpose and point of the religious leaders openly mocking Jesus in public. Pretty simple stuff. It's like something we see on facebook every day. Someone says something idiotic, and all the lesser idiots have to push the "like" button. ding ding ding ding ding . . . all the likes. In other words, I agree and stand with you on . . . whatever it was.

How many dumbells, Jesus was kind and called them 'little ones' in the next verse. How many of the folks saw their religious leaders who are their examples, mocking Jesus, and pushed the like button on that day. That's a stumbling block. Some pharisee mock's Jesus, openly, and all the little pharisee wannabe's quit listening to Jesus and get behind their models.

Little ones doesn't have to only mean children. Little ones are those who look up to someone else in a leading role.

How many people, that day, chose to be in hell with the pharisee's instead of choosing life, because they stupidly followed those peers who mocked. Those pharisee's were on their way to hell, and they caused a whole bunch of little one's to join them on their path. That's a stumbling block!

And Jesus has some shocking words for people who stumble other people and cause them to go away from God and towards hell. You *don't* want to be that person! Shocking! Woe to that person!

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 should cause one of these little ones to stumble.*

If someone is hanging in the balance between heaven and hell, and you're the guy who tips them into hell . . . WOE! Better to tie a boulder around your neck and take the long cold plunge, than to do that. But in this world, that goes on every day, all day long.

That's why James warns us; *My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.* Jas. 3:1

This problem of causing someone else to stumble is just magnified a thousand times if you're a teacher of this book. My neck is on the chopping block. I had enough sense not to want this job. Nor did I ask for this job. But I told God if He opened the door, I would go through. He did, and here I am, in greater peril, if I get it wrong and cause folks to stumble.

Jesus points to the mockers and He tells His disciples and apostles, be careful. Those guys who mocked and caused others to stumble away from God and into hell are under the fierce judgement of God. Be careful not to ever do that.

The pharisee's are not only going to hell, they're working hard to get an army of people to join them in the march to that place. Woe! We need to be the opposite of the people who stand in that condemnation. We need to be Psalms

100 people who help others to want to join us in praise and worship and thankfulness to our God.

The effect on people around us who work with us and who are our friends should be a pulling towards heaven, a positive force towards the glory of knowing and worshipping God, and not away from Him.

*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."*

The pharisees complaint about Jesus was what? He welcomes sinners. He eats with sinners. Remember in chapter 15; vs 1,2 *Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

Jesus accepts sinners. The pharisees reject sinners. They do not forgive. In fact the very essence of their false religious system was to shun sinners. They are removed, separated, better in their false self righteousness. No forgiveness is their mantra. Contempt for sinners is their hallmark.

Now we're supposed to have a deep contempt for sin, but not for sinners. That is the difference between proud pharisees who cause people to stumble and humble christians who forgive each other and help each other NOT to stumble.

Remember that song; Some of you don't have the advantage of age so you might not remember. 1969, The Hollies. *He aint heavy, he's my brother. His welfare is my concern, no burden is he, we'll get there.*

Jesus is presenting the opposite of the proud pharisees who reject sinners and leave them like the men who crossed over to the other side of the road and left the broken bleeding man after the robbers had beat him. Remember, in the story of The good Samaritan. First a priest comes along, and then a levite,

both men high up in the religious ladder of Israel. They offered no help. In fact when they saw the broken man, they crossed over to the other side of the road to pass by. A religion that shuns the broken.

3 *“Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.*

This is a huge problem for us in our culture. *If your brother sins, rebuke him* The very idea that someone would rebuke someone else because of sin is shocking to our current culture. That would be the greatest sin of all. To invade someone else's sovereignty and tell them that they are sinning. What a horrifying thought.

In fact the very idea that someone says that what someone else is doing is sin is actually driving a wedge in our culture that is becoming a war. And we're losing. Even though we have failed to actually carry out Jesus command here, just the fact that we're thinking in our heads that what someone is doing is a sin. That there are standards defined in a book. And we believe that certain actions are always sin, because this book says so. This means war!

So we haven't obeyed Jesus, and we're being charged with the crime of obeying Jesus command here, even though we're guilty of dis-obeying, rather blatantly, this command of Jesus to call out sin. To rebuke sin.

In our culture, there is no greater sin, no greater foul, than to inform some other sovereign person that what he is doing is against God's laws. No greater sin than to actually define, sin, let alone rebuke someone engaged in it.

And that has filtered down into the church. We consider it a foul if someone points out that what we're doing is sin. Brother to brother. We avoid those confrontations, to our blame. Jesus said; *If your brother sins, rebuke him*

Now then, there is a balance, and perhaps our overreaction on the one side is because of previous imbalances on the other side. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:8, simply, *love covers a multitude of sins.*

Most sins among our brothers, we do not rebuke. There would be a line outside my house of people who need to rebuke me. No. I offend you. Love compels you to forgive me. You offend me, love compels me to forgive you. No marriage could survive without the love that covers and forgives offences. We don't rebuke each other over the small stuff.

Can you imagine a marriage where you have to go through the rebuke, repent process over every little offense. We'd kill each other. Most sin in a fellowship of believers is just forgiven and covered by love.

But there are dangerous sins. Sins that imperil my brother. Sins that imperil me! And in that situation, love demands that I intervene for my brother's well being. And love demands that you intervene for my well being. Jesus commands us to do that right here, in Luke's gospel. And Jesus defines how we do that in Matthew's gospel. Let's turn to Matthew chapter 18 just very quickly to define this idea of confronting sin in our fellowship.

*Matt. 18: 15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.*

This is the most loving thing the church can do. That entire procedure, and yes, it's a procedure, is not about shunning someone, it's all about restoring someone in danger to a place of safety. That's the very definition of love. We rebuke our children for chasing a ball out into the street right in front of a car that has to slam on his brakes. Of course!

That logic is exactly the same in this fellowship. If someone is in danger, we should be running to that person's aid. Love compels us to rebuke dangerous sin. We don't just let our brothers and sisters jump in front of a train. Or do we?

4 *“And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”*

I'm sitting here trying to imagine some sin that some brother could commit that offended and harmed me, and that he could then repent of over and over, and I'm not coming up with anything.

Because at some point this thing gets out of balance. You offend me seven times and you say, sorry, seven times and that just makes it OK. At what point did we cross over a line where you are simply just taking advantage of me wrongly. And the repenence is just lip service.

About 100 years ago when we had the little sears catalog store we had a guy who was building something, he must have been screwing on metal sheeting, and he bought a little Craftsman driver set that had a 5/16th hex head driver and he kept bring those things back for the warranty, all stripped out.

And we had to order a complete new set of them to get the one ruined one. And we asked our Rep, how many times do we have to do that because, Sears is taking a beating because of this guy's abuse. And I remember very well, she said, I don't care if you have to get a 55 gallon drum full of those things, you will keep replacing them. Funny how you remember stuff. Jeff probably remembers that too.

The very idea that Jesus puts forward here has to involve some abuse. Same sin, over and over and the guy repents, over and over and I have to keep getting the same forgiveness out of that 55 gallon drum, over and over? Come on.

I can only think of one person who does that. That person is me. Seven times would be a good day for me. Usually it's more. And I have to say that same silent prayer, over and over, Father, I'm sorry. Sorry for the offense. Sorry I'm such a block head. Sorry I'm not further along in this pathway so that the same sin wouldn't bubble out of the inner sinful self, again.

Where did those evil words I just heard myself say come from? Where did those evil thoughts come from. Over and over. For a lifetime. I've been at this for 50 years. Inside me is no good thing. I have to keep asking forgiveness, over and over and over.

Please don't mis-understand. Positionally, I am sinless. I'm in Christ, and He is in me. He took all of my sin, past, present, and still future for as long as this sinful body and soul are in this world, He took all of it to the cross. Once for all. Forgiven. He took my sin. He gave me His righteousness as my own. That's my position. Positional truth, practical truth. My position is defined by this book and by faith I believe it. But practically, in this flesh, it doesn't look like the position.

It's a marriage. He is my spouse. All that is His, is mine. All that is mine, is His. Guess who got the better deal. Right. But like any marriage, any ongoing relationship, I continually have to ask to be pardoned for my offenses. Seven times, only seven times, that would be a great day. A really good day.

And here, Jesus tells His disciples and apostles, if God is going to keep forgiving you, for the same stupid sin, over and over, every day, day in and day out for a lifetime, then it's a very little thing for you to be expected to do the same thing for your brothers. Even if they're abusive about it.

The pharisee's were listening in and thinking, this guy is just bizarrely nuts. You don't forgive them seven times. You knock their block off. You get your pound of flesh.

Did you know that of all the lawyers in the earth, 3 out of 4 of them live in the United States. We don't forgive. Our society, like theirs, says it's weak to forgive. This cosmos, this world system laughs at forgiveness. That's for fools. You draw a cartoon of Mohammed, and you lose 13 pounds of ugly flesh. Some broadsword removes your head from your shoulders. That's how we roll.

But in the Kingdom of God, in the sphere where God rules and reigns instead of Satan, that isn't so. God forgives us over, and over and over, again and again, and He says, that's how you are to live with your brothers.

For the curious among you, have you ever wondered if God didn't design things in this world for the sole purpose to give us a mini picture of ourselves and our relationship to Him.

Like, sheep, in order to show us how stupid and helpless we are. Or puppies, to show us what unconditional love and forgiveness looks like. With repeat offenders. I'm sorry I peed on the carpet. Again. Or marriage, to show us what a pain in the neck we are to live with. True of both partners in any marriage I ever saw. But with Him it's just me that's the pain. He is ever faithful, ever forgiving. Always perfect.

We had a lovely thanksgiving at our house. What a privilege and a blessing to actually know the giver of all good things and to understand that we do indeed not only have much to be thankful for, we know the giver, and our thanks isn't just an unidentifiable unconnected concept. Our thanksgiving is directed at the one who gives, faithfully, over and over, for eternity. How blessed we are.

Listen to Psalms 107:1-3,8,9

*1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

*2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary,*

*3 And gathered from the lands,  
From the east and from the west,  
From the north and from the south.*

*8 Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness,*

*And for His wonders to the sons of men!*

*9 For He has satisfied the thirsty soul,  
And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.*

Now, go home and enjoy some of those left-overs, and give thanks to the Lord. Care for each other. Keep each other from stumbling. Forgive one another. Come back next week.