

- Four challenges

1. A disciple must avoid putting stumbling blocks in front of others

- A 'stumbling block' is a cause of sin

- Better to end our life prematurely than lead another person into sin

2. A disciple must practise unlimited forgiveness

- Disciples have a responsibility to admonish each other lovingly and skilfully

- We are forbidden to hold a grudge

- A forgiving attitude

- Continuing to forgive

3. A disciple must seek increase of faith

Jesus is still travelling towards Jerusalem. Along the way He gives instruction to the crowd and to the disciples. Luke 17:1– 10 contains four challenges to the disciples.

1. **A disciple must avoid putting stumbling blocks in front of others**^{□1}. 'Stumbling blocks must come' or (more literally translated) 'It is impossible for stumbling blocks not to come'.

A 'stumbling block' is a cause of sin. It is not simply something that causes surprise. Sometimes a Christian might say to another Christian, 'You have made me stumble' – when all that he means is that he is surprised at what the other person did. In some parts of the world over-conservative people like to claim that they have been 'made to stumble'. But being 'made to stumble' is being led into **sin**. We must not criticise other Christians, just because they are different from ourselves. Causing someone to stumble is to cause someone to sin.

Jesus' concern is that we ourselves should not become a 'stumbling block' to another disciple. God gets angry if we lead another person into sin. Better to be drowned and end our life prematurely than face the anger of God in which some of our reward in heaven is lost because our lives have had an impact for the worse. '*Take heed to yourselves,*' says Jesus^{□1}.

2. **A disciple must practise unlimited forgiveness**^{□1}. These verses are linked with the previous ones. We seek to help each other not to sin, but when someone in the fellowship does sin, what then? Jesus says: '*If your brother sins, rebuke him*'^{□2}. Disciples have a responsibility to admonish each other. Of course, we have to be sure it really is sin that we are dealing with. But if we see a brother or sister in the Lord clearly sinning, we are urged to go to him and as lovingly as possible rebuke him. It takes great humility and loving skill! What we tend to do is get bitter about another person's sin or complain to our friends or visit the pastor with our complaint. Jesus says: go and see the person concerned!

Then: '*if he repents, forgive him*'^{□1}. We are forbidden to continue in hostility. We are forbidden to hold a grudge.

We might ask: what if the person does not repent? Matthew 18:16–17 tells us more. But there still has to be a forgiving **attitude** in us, even when it might not be possible to assure the other person that he or she is forgiven – because he or she shows no signs of repentance. But even towards 'a Gentile or a tax collector'^{□1} our attitude still has to be one of forgiveness.

If a brother or sister has a problem with one particular sin, the forgiving might have to go on for a long time^{□1}.

3. **A disciple must seek increase of faith**^{□1}. The disciples ask that their faith might be increased^{□2}. What exactly, I wonder, did they expect Jesus to do? Were they wanting a miraculous increase of faith to take place in their hearts by the decree of Jesus?

□1 17:1-3a

□1 17:3a

□1 17:3b-4

□2 17:3b

□1 17:3c

□1 Matthew 18:17

□1 17:4

□1 17:5-6

□2 17:5

• Not quantity but quality

• Faith is not something we work up

• Faith is hearing God's word and trusting Him

• Faith grows

4. Disciples must regard themselves as duty-bound to serve God

• Our greatest blessings come when we stay as His 'unworthy servants'

Jesus does not seem to say much about how to increase faith. He simply describes the very great value and power of faith¹. It is not **quantity** of faith that concerns Him. What matters is whether faith is real. Even small faith will perform mighty works if it is real and would give the disciple great confidence².

What then is 'faith'? It is not some inward virtue in us. It is not something that we have to 'work up'. It is not trying to persuade ourselves of something, or pretending that we be certain of something.

Faith is believing God. It is trusting God's word to us in Scripture. It is trusting God's word to us through the Holy Spirit. It is trusting in God's character, His mercy, His power. But faith is not faith in itself. It is not faith in faith. The great thing about faith is that it looks to God. Faith is seeing God's greatness, hearing His voice, knowing His truthfulness and reliability.

Jesus does not seem to say much about increasing faith. His way of answering the disciples' request is simply to describe to them the great power of faith. Then they will want to believe more and more of the promises of God. And their faith will grow, as God honours the faith that they have.



4. **Disciples must regard themselves as duty-bound to serve God**¹. The disciples must be careful not to get so proud of themselves that they start thinking they are superior creatures, and that God owes them something. We are God's slaves; God is not our slave! Slaves do not usually get invited to dine with the master. Rather the master relaxes while the slaves do the work! When they have finished, they do not get very much praise or special gratitude. They are expected to work! The slave must say, '*We are unworthy slaves; we have only done what we ought to have done*'². Disciples are the same. We are duty-bound to serve God and His kingdom. We were rescued from the ugly bondage of sin and have become the willing happy slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must not start getting proud of ourselves and think that God is duty-bound towards us. We are not 'entitled' to special favour from God. At best we are people who are being shown mercy. We can be confident in God's love. We can be sure of our acceptance with God. But still at our best we have no right to complain, no right to demand an easy life. We are duty-bound to serve God in any way He requests. Our greatest blessings come when we stay as His 'unworthy servants'.

17:6

17:6

17:7-10

17:10

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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