Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

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May 1

Increased faith, Luke 17:1-10

It seems the pastor's small son was told by his mother that he should wash his hands because there were germs living in all that dirt. He refused and complained: "Germs and Jesus! Germs and Jesus! That's all I ever hear around this house and I've never seen either one." As followers of Christ, we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. We are to count on Christ and faithfully serve him, even when we may feel unrewarded for our efforts. We are servants of the Master; we are no longer our own. Gaining a proper humble perspective of who we are and whose we are can help us to increase our faith in God.

Commentary Lesson

The parable of the worthless servant is probably no one's favorite, yet it drives us to reexamine our assumptions about our relationship to God. The general theme is the responsibility of the disciple towards others, warning them of the sinfulness of leading weaker ones astray. The difficulty is that while the parable makes a significant point about discipleship and humility before God, it casts God in the unappealing role of a slave driver. Even making allowances for the context of the image during the first century, most of us would probably choose a different metaphor. Our assumption is that if we do what we are commanded, we deserve some reward.

The reality is that God doesn't owe us anything for living good Christian lives. That is the expectation for us, followers of Christ. The humble and challenging truth is that Christ has exceedingly high expectations for his followers - "Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) We can't earn the free gift of grace, but once we accept that we are to live a life of faith that honors God. God's favor and blessing are matters of grace - they can't be earned. So, when we assume that we can deal with God on the basis of what God owes us, we have made a basic mistake. Living under the guise that we can achieve God's grace through our own noble efforts is a corruption of God's free gift of grace which we can never earn or deserve.

The ten verses in this passage address three difficulties for disciples. (1) Do not be a hindrance to the discipleship of others. (2) Rebuke those who sin, and forgive all who ask your forgiveness. (3) When you have done all this, do not assume that you have done more than your duty. Faithfulness, forgiveness and humility are required of those who strive to be obedient to Jesus. This passage teaches us that we can never put God in our debt. Such lack of humility, however, is the most dangerous temptation. It prevents us from experiencing the depth's of God's love for us. It may also lead us to develop just the kind of self-righteousness
and false spiritual superiority that will become an obstacle to the weaker ones. Spiritual health requires both an awareness of our sinfulness and God's unlimited love for us. When we have done our best, we have done only our duty.

"Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
   That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
   Demands my soul, my life, my all.
William Barclay states, "It may be possible to satisfy the claim of law; but every lover knows that nothing can satisfy the claims of love."

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