

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
FFFF. Adopting God's View Of Forgiveness
(Luke 17:1-6)

I. Introduction

- A. After Jesus had denounced the Pharisees' view of equating the love of money with loving God, He gave "a word of caution to the disciples . . . that they . . . not despise the Pharisees themselves." (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 341) Though they were to hate sin, they must love the sinner.
- B. Luke 17:1-6 records this insightful instruction, and we view it for our insight, application and edification:

II. Adopting God's View Of Forgiveness, Luke 17:1-6.

- A. After sharply critiquing the Pharisees' errant view of equating the love of money with a love for God, Jesus knew His disciples could become so opposed to the Pharisees' errors that they might become intolerably unkind toward such sinful people who might otherwise eventually come to Christ and gain victory over their sin. Such intolerable unkindness could offend sinners so that they might decide not to repent!
- B. Accordingly, Christ noted that it was impossible for offenses not to arise, but that those who offended would be severely judged by the Lord, Luke 17:1. It would be better for such an offender to have a millstone hung around his neck and be cast into the sea to drown and his body never be recovered for burial than that he should offend a little person who though sinful was still inclined to repent and believe in Christ, Luke 17:2.
- C. For this reason, Jesus' disciples were to take heed to their own behavior that they not needlessly treat ungodly people in an offensive manner so as to hinder their coming to trust in Christ, Luke 17:3a.
- D. To achieve such gracious behavior, Jesus taught His disciples to respond to sinners as follows, Luke 17:3-4:
 - 1. If a fellow Hebrew trespassed against Jesus' disciple, the disciple was to rebuke him, Luke 17:3b. [Note how different this view is from today's idea that one is obligated to forgive anyone who sins against him even if the wrongdoer remains unrepentant! To uphold God's justice, we cannot forgive a party if he has not repented! It is not sin not to forgive an unrepentant person, for God Himself sends people to eternal condemnation because they refuse to repent and believe in Christ, cf. Revelation 20:11-15!]
 - 2. However, if one's fellow Hebrew repented of his wrong, Christ's disciple was to forgive him, Luke 17:3c!
 - 3. Jesus added that if one's fellow Hebrew wronged him seven times in a day, and seven times in a day the wrongdoer turned and truly repented, Christ's disciple was not to hold a grudge against the wrongdoer, but to forgive him with no attitude of malice, Luke 17:4!
 - 4. In this way, Christ's disciple would not hinder even very weak sinful people from coming to Christ!
- E. The disciples responded to this teaching by asking that the Lord increase their faith to where they could accept this teaching, for "what Christ taught them was contrary to anything they had heard about the law of offense and the law of forgiveness from the Pharisees," Ibid., p. 342; Luke 17:5.
- F. Jesus responded by informing His disciples that "it was not the amount of faith they had but rather the One in whom the faith was placed that would produce the desired result," Ibid.; Luke 17:6. He said that if they had an amount of faith that was as tiny as a grain of mustard seed, they might say to the nearby sycamine tree, "Be though plucked up by the root and be thou planted in the sea, and it should obey you," Luke 17:6 KJV. A sycamine tree was a "tree of the mulberry family whose roots were regarded as being particularly strong, making it virtually impossible to uproot," Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Luke 17:6.
- G. This teaching directly contradicts today's Pelagian-Arminian belief that only with a strong enough human faith in Christ can one be saved and that one's salvation is thus sustained only if his human faith in Christ remains strong! Jesus never implied that one's faith needed to be great or strong for him to be saved or to stay saved, but simply that one's faith, though it be as weak and tiny as a grain of mustard seed, was to be placed in God! After all, it was God **alone** Who did great things in response even to a tiny amount of real faith!

Lesson: *Though Christ taught His disciples not to tolerate sin, they were not to be intolerant of sinners who might consider repenting and believing in Christ lest they offend such sinners and keep them from Christ. Thus, the disciples were to critique sin, but once a sinner repented, they were to forgive him and forgive him as often as he truly repented! For the faith to adopt this gracious attitude, the disciples were to rely on God and not themselves.*

Application: *(1) May we not tolerate sin but likewise not be intolerant of sinners lest we become a stumbling block to their coming to Christ. (2) We must thus critique sin but forgive sinners who repent as often as they truly repent. (3) May we trust God for the faith to be this gracious to sinners, for only God can make us this gracious.*