Forgiveness, Faith, and the Lordship of Jesus

- A Contextual Reading of Luke 17:1-10

Kwon, Yon Gyong
(Soongsil University)

1. Context and Redactional Considerations

The present text, Luke 17:1-10, does not usually receive as much attention of commentators as it deserves.1) There are, however, strong reasons to believe that it commends itself as a very interesting, indeed highly significant, collection of sayings of Jesus, where the nature of Christian life, characterized by unconditional forgiveness (vv.3-4), is explicated in terms of eschatology (vv.1-2), the nature of faith (vv. 5-6), and the disciples’ relationship with the Lord whom they follow (vv. 7-10). It may not be possible to say that the whole passage is distinctively Lucan, since much of what we

1) Bibliographies on most commentaries easily show the relative lack of interest in our passage.
have in our text also occurs in Mark and Matthew. But a change in context can generate a fresh shade of meaning out of the same tradition, or at least, a new way of applying it to the life of its hearers. Bringing this out will be the main focus of the present study. What is offered here is a contextual reading of Luke 17:1-10 as a whole, a text usually taken to be a collection of three disparate and mutually unrelated sayings, with a view to find the logic which runs through the whole passage.

As it now stands, the passage (17:1-10) comes as part of a larger sayings section which commences at 15:1, “Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him,” and continues until the last phase of the Travel Narrative (19:27). In this extensive collection Luke introduces such significant themes as repentance/restoration of the lost, repeated three times in the form of memorable parables (ch.15), accountability of the disciples and the need of faithfulness (16:1-14), single-minded service to God over against the love of money, addressed chiefly to the Pharisees (16:15-18), and the importance of compassion (16:19-31). The passage under study is also placed right before the explicitly eschatological sayings concerning the Kingdom of God which is also addressed to the Pharisees (17:20-21), and the coming day of the Son of Man, now addressed to the disciples (17:22-37).

Concerning vv. 1-3a, though Mark also contains part of the section (“millstone” saying, Mk 9:42), the somewhat unusual coming of the οὐκάνοντος (Mt) or οὐκάνοντος (Luke) which Matthew and